



Historical Article

OLD PHILADELPHIA FAMILIES - CHAPMAN

By Fran Willing Leach-LXXVII

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[Taken from: Chapman, Sigismunda Mary Francis, **A History of Chapman and Alexander Families.** (Richmond, VA: The Dietz Printing Company, 1946 pg 284-291]

The Chapman family is an ancient and distinguished one. According to tradition, handed down from sire to son, there was a close relationship between the early Chapmans and Sir Walter Raleigh-or Rawleigh, to employ an earlier spelling of the famous courtier's name. Thus, in "The Antiquities of Tralee," in the **Kerry Magazine**, Volume 1, page 129, of the year 1854, we find the paragraph:

Sir Edward Denny (founder of the family of Denny, of Tralee Castle, County Kerry, Ireland) was one of the English officers instrumental in crushing the rebellion of the Earl of Desmond, in the reign of Queen Elizabeth. He was a favorite of the Queen and was connected either by blood or marriage with very influential people, among whom were the following: Burleigh, the Prime Minister, was his near connection by the marriage of the Earl's daughter, Lady Ann Cecil, with his namesake and nephew, Edward Lord Denny, -Sir Francis Walsingham, the able Secretary of State to Elizabeth, was his cousin-german on the father's side, as were also maternally Walter Rawleigh and John and William Chapman, the original grantees of large Kerry estates now possessed by the Earl of Cork and families deriving under him. all of these young kinsmen took service together in the Desmond Wars, under the leadership of Arthur Lord Grey, of Wilton, Lord Deputy of Ireland, whose sister was married to Edward Denny's eldest brother Henry.

Several bearers of the surname were among the early Virginia pioneers, Francis Chapman came in the **Star**, in 1608. Two years later in 1610, arrived Thomas Chapman, in the **Tryall** while in 1617 arrived his wife, Ann, and two children. The **Jonathan** in 1619, brought Nicholas Chapman, aged 31 years. In 1621 Phillip Chapman, aged 23 years, was one of the arrivals, in the **Flying Hart**. Among the emigrants in 1635 was Henry Chapman, aged 19, in the **Primrose** and John Chapman, aged 24, in the **Expedition**. Half a century later, in 1685, for his participation in the Monmouth Rebellion, Matthew Chapman was transported.

It was probably Thomas Chapman, who came over in the **Tryall** in 1610, who was the ancestor of the family whose history is now to be presented. From an old manuscript pedigree, we quote the following.

The parent stock of the Chapman family flourished through several generations in Leicestershire, England, from whence emigrated to Ireland two brothers, John and William, under the auspices of their cousin-german, Sir Walter Raleigh. The elder brother died without issue. The family was established there by William, who left an only son, Benjamin, a captain in the army, whose second son, Thomas, came over to America with the first colonists. The elder brother, John, had been created a baronet, but, dying without issue, was succeeded by his brother, William, who had also previously received the honor of knighthood.

Writing over half a century ago, a local authority, Dr. S. W. Butler, said, in a biography of Dr. Nathaniel Chapman, flounder of the Philadelphia Chapman:

His family was of an old and respectable English stock, his paternal ancestor, who came to Virginia with the first colony, having been a captain of cavalry in the British army and the youngest son of a cousin-german of Sir Walter Raleigh.

From the emigrant ancestor was descended Jonathan Chapman, who, in the first half of the eighteenth century, was buried at "Summer Hill" the estate of his son and daughter-in-law, Nathaniel Chapman and Constaitia Pearson, his wife. Just where Jonathan Chapman himself had lived does not seem entirely clear. However, on this point Doctor Butler says:

The family settled on the River Pomonkey, some twenty miles from Richmond: but the branch from which the subject of our memoir is descended migrated about a century and a half ago to Maryland, and fixed itself on an estate on the banks of the Potomac, nearly opposite Mount Vernon.

Exactly when Jonathan Chapman died we do not know, but we do know that this event occurred prior to 1749, and that he was buried, as previously indicated, on the plantation, "Summer Hill," the home of his son, Nathaniel Chapman.

Of his wife, Jane Taylor, we have no knowledge. For some reason which has not come down to us, she was living in Philadelphia in the year last mentioned, 1749, she then being a widow. She may have been a native of the Quaker City, or a member of the well-known Virginia family of Taylors.

She was the mother of two sons - there may have been other children-Nathaniel and Taylor. Concerning the latter we possess no detailed information. He was living as late as December 4, 1743, as he is mentioned in the will of Thomas (a tear appears in the paper here) Pearson of that date.

Nathaniel Chapman (torn) other son, upon reaching man's estate, settled (torn) Charles County, Maryland where not many miles (torn) "Summer Hill" he established (paper folded here - all of this indistinct) an extensive plantation upon which he resided during the remainder of his life. The climate was delightful, the soil fruitful, the landscape pleasing to the eye, and the entire environment one which was conducive to material prosperity and domestic tranquility. As his father had done before him, the son engaged in the culture of tobacco, and acquired a considerable fortune for that period. Besides his estate in Charles County, he also owned extensive tracts of land in Stafford, Prince William, Fauquier and Fairfax counties, Virginia.

A FRIEND OF WASHINGTON

The ownership of these several plantations caused their proprietor to travel much through the two colonies, and he became closely associated, both in business and in a social way, with many of the leading characters identified with the colonial history of both Virginia and Maryland. Among his intimates was Augustine Washington, of Westmoreland and Lancaster counties, Va., who was also the owner of several plantations in that province, among others the tract on the Potomac, in Fairfax County-not far from the Maryland estates of the Chapmans-which was devised, conditionally, to his son, Lawrence Washington, and, in default of lawful heirs by him begotten, then to a younger son, George Washington, the distinguished American commander-in-chief and Admiral Vernon, under whom he had served in 1740 as a captain in one of the expeditions against Carthage.

Augustine Washington died April 11, 1743, and in his will, proved May 6, 1743, he names his friend, Nathaniel Chapman, as one of the executors of that instrument, the others being Robert Jackson, Anthony Strother, James Thompson and Daniel McCarty, all "well-known planters," according to a biographer of the Washingtons.

Lawrence Washington, eldest son of the adult sons of Augustine Washington, who was born in 1718, upon his death in 1752, also named as one of the executors of his will, besides Lord Fairfax, the testator's half-brother, the future President of the United States, and others, his "Esteemed Friend, Nathaniel Chapman, in this concluding clause:

Lastly I constitute and appoint the Honorable William Fairfax and George Fairfax Esqrs my said Brothers Augustine and George Washington and my Esteemed Friends Mr. Nathaniel Chapman and Major John Carlyle Executors of this my last will and testament.

The intimate connection between the Washingtons and the Chapmans is also evidenced by the fact that one of the sons of Augustine Washington married a daughter of Nathaniel Chapman, as will hereafter appear.

The death of Nathaniel Chapman occurred in the year 1760 or 1762, the event taking place when he was away from home, while upon a journey on horseback, that being, it is perhaps needless to say, almost the only method of locomotion especially where lengthy journeys were involved, at that period. While traveling between Washington and Baltimore he became suddenly ill, and he died and buried in that locality, near some iron works which had been established there. His widow, in her will, directed that his remains should be removed to "Summer Hill" her ancestral homestead, and provided the means for that purpose, but it is believed that her directions were never complied with. The exact place of sepulture is not now known.

He evidently died intestate, as no mention of his will has thus far been discovered. The records of Fairfax County, however, contain several references to his estate. ON page 323 of book B we find the "inventory of the goods and chattels of Mr. Nathaniel Chapman Gent. late of Charles County, Maryland," which were in the county of Prince William. By order of court, dated November 19, 1760 these goods etc. of "Mr. Nathaniel Chapman deceased" were appraised at £669 16s. 6d. Included in the chattels were eleven negro slaves.

The present writer also has before him a memorandum indicating that this appraisal was made march 16, 1762. Which date is correct he is unable to say.

At the March term of court, 1762, three of the above-mentioned slaves, Cato, Betty and Judy by name, were set apart as the dower of the widow, Constantia Chapman.

On page 325, of book B, of the Fairfax County records, is found another inventory of goods and chattels belonging to Nathaniel Chapman, in Fauquier County. Among other items enumerated are nine negro slaves.

The principal estate of the decedent, however, was in Charles County, on the Pomonkey, Maryland, where, in Deed Book E, page 118, we find recorded an instrument dated September 3, 1762, making a division of the slaves on that plantation. Those awarded to the widow numbered "18 1/4 negroes" worth £723: included in this number being three at Mill Quarter and the same number at Pignut Quarter, these being the names of other properties owned by Mr. Chapman. The remaining slaves, 22 3/4, were divided among the surviving sons, three in number, and sons-in-laws, likewise three in number.

Nathaniel Chapman's wife was Constantia-sometimes called "Constant" also "Constance" Pearson, daughter and heiress of Simon Pearson, a wealthy landed proprietor of Stafford and Fairfax Counties, Va., wonder of Pearson's Island, etc. Simon Pearson's wife was Hannah Alexander, of the Alexander family hereafter mentioned.

Mrs. Chapman, upon the decease of her father, came into possession of a large estate, including the extensive plantation known as "Summer Hill" in Fairfax-now Alexandria County, located at the mouth of Four Mile Creek, a tributary of the Potomac River. It was only a short distance from Mount Vernon, Alexandria, and the site of the future national capital.

Mrs. Chapman died early in the year 1791. She seems to have left two wills, one of which, executed September 18, 1774, was presented for probate February 21, 1791, by her youngest son, George Chapman. The full provisions of this will are not before the present writer. However, she bequeaths fifteen guineas to a grandson, John Weens, to be laid out in plate. She also makes mention of the (torn) Pignut Quarter plantation in Fauquier County, V.

The other will seems not to have been presented for probate until April 17, 1798. The occasion for the delay does not appear. It may be that it was not discovered until several years after her decease.

Some of the clauses of this document possess elements of interest. Besides they convey important information bearing upon the family history. For instance she says, the "remains of Mr. Chapman my husband's father, are buried in the "square of the garden" on the Summer Hill estate. This is the sole source of our information upon this subject.

She also mentions the fact that her husband was buried in Baltimore County, Maryland, and directs that his remains be removed to "Summer Hill."

To her youngest son, George Chapman, she gave the following plate, Viz.: Shagreen tea chest with silver canisters, sugar dish and teaspoons, a silver teapot and stand and a silver cream pot.

She directs her executors to build a vault at Summer Hill 12x10 feet, of a proper height above the earth, "in the square of the garden opposite the graves on the old Plantation at Four Mile Creek in Fairfax County, Virginia, where I formally lived."

Because of the fact that the elder of her surviving sons, Pearson Chapman, had, under the law of primogeniture, then in operation, come into possession of the bulk of his father's estate, she makes her youngest son, George Chapman, her residuary legatee, and the executor of her will; whereby family strife and litigation were engendered, which lasted for three-quarters of a century.

Nathaniel and Constantia (nee Pearson) Chapman were the parents of six children, three sons and three daughters, as follows: Elizabeth, Amelia, Nathaniel, Louisa, Pearson, and George.

Of the daughters, only meager information has come into the possession of the writer. The eldest, Elizabeth Chapman, who was born Jun 13, 1733, became the wife of John Hunter, of a prominent family whose forebears had been located in Scotland for centuries. Amelia Chapman the second daughter, was born July 14, 1735. She married William Locke Weems, who was a brother of Mason Locke Weems, the brilliant but somewhat eccentric historian, author of the popular but not altogether reliable **Life of George Washington**, from which work alone we obtain the hatchet and cherry tree anecdote. Louisa Chapman, the youngest of the three daughters, who was born June 29, 1743, became the third wife (he was married five times) of Colonel Samuel Washington, son of Augustine and Mary (nee Ball) Washington, and next younger brother of General George Washington, first President of the United States. He was born in Stafford County, Va., November 16, 1734, and died at Harewood, Berkeley County, in 1781. Mrs. Washington, nee Chapman, was buried in the Washington vault, in Westmoreland County, Va. There was no issue by his marriage though Colonel Washington had children by his second and fourth wives, Mildred Thornton and Anne Steptoe.

Of the three sons of Nathaniel and Constantia (nee Pearson) Chapman, the eldest, Nathaniel Chapman, was born in Charles County, Maryland, December 15, 1740. In 1752, when only 11 years of age, he came to the Quaker City, where he was entered as a student at the Academy of Philadelphia, in Fourth Street. Three years later, May 25, 1755, he was enrolled as a member of the second class in the college of Philadelphia, now known as the University of Pennsylvania. He completed the entire course of four years at this institution, graduating in 1759.

Having secured an unusually thorough education for that period, he seems to have acquired a propensity for a life of leisure, his associates in Philadelphia embraced young men who were members of the leading families of the Quaker City. Young Chapman was weaned away from the attractions of plantation life, and eventually he established himself in the city on the Delaware, where he had resided for so many years while at school and college.

Here he continued to affiliate himself with the same set with which he had been identified as a student. In 1762 we find him a member of the select band constituting the membership of the Mount Regale Fishing Company, an organization kindred in scope and purpose to the celebrated "Colony in Schuylkill" and "Fort St. David's."

The members were to take turns as caterers at their notable outdoor functions. From the records of the organization we learn that, on July 12, 1762, Nathaniel Chapman performed this duty, at which the menu embraced, "1 round of beef, 1 quarter lamb, 6 chickens, 1 ham, 2 tongues, beans, cucumbers, salad, cream cheese, 1 loaf sugar, 8 quarts wine, 1/2 gallon of spirits, 50 lemons and two cherry pies."

We are unaware of the date of death of Nathaniel Chapman, second of the name. He seems, however, to have died prior to July 23, 1766, according to a recital in a deed of that date, hereafter referred to. While the exact time is unknown, the circumstances attendant upon his death have come down to us. He was drowned while sailing across New York Bay from New York City to Staten Island. He was never married.

The second of the sons of Nathaniel and Constantia (nee Pearson) Chapman was Pearson Chapman, who was born June 24, 1745, and died in 1784. By the death of his elder brother, Nathaniel Chapman, and by the operation of the law of primogeniture, he came into possession of the bulk of his father's estate. He married his first cousin, Susannah Alexander, and had by her three sons, Nathaniel, John and George, of whom the first two died unmarried.

The youngest of the three sons, George Chapman, lived and died at Thorofare, Gap, his plantation in Prince William County, Va., formerly the estate of his grandfather, the elder Nathaniel Chapman. His death occurred in the year 1829. He had married Susan Pearson Alexander, of Preston, near Alexandria, Va., she being a daughter of Charles and Frances (nee Brown) Alexander. She survived her husband over a quarter of a century, dying in 1856, at "Oakville" near Alexandria.

To them were born twelve children, six sons and six daughters, as follows: Pearson, Charles, Nathaniel, George, John, Alexander, Matilda, Frances, Susannah, Louisa, Helen and Georgeanna. Which of these reached maturity and married the present writer is unable to state, except in the case of one son, probably the eldest, Pearson Chapman, who, like his father and grandfather, married a member of the Alexander family, named Sigismunda Mary Alexander of "Effingham," Prince William County, who died in Alexandria, Jun 8, 1870. Her husband, Pearson Chapman, was born in 1803, and died in May, 1877. The Alexanders, it may be pertinent to state, belonged to one of the most ancient of the families of the "Old Dominion." The founder was John Alexander, who came to America in 1660 and settled first in Stafford County. He obtained a deed to an extensive tract of land in Virginia, extending from Georgetown to Hunting Creek, and embracing the present site of the city of Alexandria, the latter name being derived from the original patentee. The mother of Mrs. Nathaniel Chapman-Constantia Pearson-was, as already indicated, Hannah Alexander, of this same family.

No attempt will be made to present a detailed record of the line of Pearson Chapman, first of the name, son of the first Nathaniel Chapman, as none of its representatives has ever been identified in any way with the Quaker City.

Following the death of Constantia Chapman widow of Nathaniel Chapman, in the closing years of the 18th century, her grandson, George Chapman, son of Pearson Chapman, and her only surviving son, George Chapman, became parties to what proved to be a long-drawn-out series of suits at law, the nephew having entered into a contest against his uncle for certain property devised by the mother to her youngest and favorite son. This litigation was not concluded until the centennial year, 1876 having extended over three-quarters of a century, and involving three generations of the Chapman family.

Meanwhile, as may be imagined, the relations between the "Thorofare Gap" Chapmans and the Chapmans of "Summer Hill" and of Philadelphia were never cordial, nor even intimate.

The youngest of the three sons of Nathaniel and Constantia (nee Pearson) Chapman was George Chapman, who was born July 17, 1749. To him, by deed dated July 23, 1766, executed by his elder brother, Pearson, was conveyed a tract of land in Fairfax County, on Four Mile Creek. This was the "Summer Hill" plantation, or a contiguous estate. The consideration mentioned in the document was "ten shillings" and "natural love."

The deed sets forth that "said land was in the possession of Nathaniel Chapman, of Charles County, "Md., "who dying without making any disposition thereof, the same descended to Nathaniel Chapman, his son & heir, who also died without making any disposition thereof," whereupon it descended to Pearson Chapman, the grantor, "as brother and heir" of the second Nathaniel Chapman.

A LONG LITIGATION

The property conveyed, all that "messuage, tenement, tract or parcel of land" on Four Mile Creek, embracing "houses, outhouses, orchards, gardens & meadows and all the rents & services," etc.

This conveyance, by Pearson Chapman to George Chapman, his brother, did not give a "fee simple" title but a "tail male" title only, the fee being reserved.

On the same day, July 23, 1766, for the sum of "ten shillings" and "natural love," Pearson Chapman conveyed to George Chapman two lots in Alexandria, which, in like manner, the former had inherited immediately from his deceased brother, Nathaniel Chapman and which the latter, in turn, had inherited from his father, the elder Nathaniel Chapman.

Eleven years later, by indenture dated August 3, 1777, Constantia Chapman, widow of Nathaniel Chapman, conveyed to her son, George Chapman, in fee simple, a tract or parcel of land containing 432 acres, in the county of Fairfax, on the west side of the long branch of Four Mile Run. Whether or not this was the same property which the elder son, Pearson Chapman, had previously conveyed to George Chapman, or a contiguous estate, is not entirely clear. The deed recited that the tract had originally been "granted by patent from Robert Carter, Esqr., Agent of the Right Honorable Thomas Lord Fairfax, proprietor of the Northern Neck of Virginia," to James Robinson, dated January 20, 1724, and that Robinson had conveyed it by deed to Simon Pearson, who, by will, had devised the same to his daughter, Constantia Chapman.

Shortly after the above indenture, Mrs. Chapman also, by deed of gift, September, 1777 conveyed to her son, George Chapman, eight negro slaves, "being part of my late Husband's Maryland slaves"; also one negro purchased by her, named Pender; also, one negress, Sue, "who was annexed to a certain tract of land" devised to her by her father, Simon Pearson' furthermore, Sue's five children.

By will, moreover, Mrs. Chapman made her youngest son, George Chapman, her residuary legatee, as has already been shown, said instrument reciting that her other son, Pearson Chapman, had already come into possession of the greater part of his father's estate.

The operation of the law of primogeniture, in behalf of the elder son, had evidently been displeasing to the mother, who had endeavored, both during her life and by her will, to establish what she considered a more equitable equation. How far her conclusion was a just one it is impossible at this distance, after the lapse of more than...

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