

Museum Around the Corner

The Georgetown County Historical Society Museum

Dirleton Wedding ©

On January 25, 1872 the wedding of Jane McCrady Sparkman and Benjamin Huger Ward took place at Dirleton Plantation. The bride was the daughter of James Ritchie Sparkman M.D. and Mary Elizabeth (Heriot) Sparkman. This memoir was written by a younger sister of the bride.

“The following picture compared most gorgeously with the grandest sunset ever created, as I remember. Dirleton, the dear old home of my Father, one of the finest gentlemen of antebellum days, and the beloved physician of that entire section of the country was ablaze with joy and happiness of the occasion of which I write, for my sister, the first and lovely daughter of the home was to be married.

Such preparations for the wedding were being made in the most elaborate and beautiful style as our old home was large, a sixteen room house, and that meant a lot of work for all hands. The children, too, had to be amused on the outside, while the gay attendants of the wedding could decorate the old home. I was one of the younger ones, and am only writing from impressions made upon me then and which have been indelible.

Our large rooms were thrown open by large folding or shove doors and the wedding party all in what we called the drawing room, the ceremony was performed by our uncle, Alexander Glennie, an English man and rector for the Georgetown Church – Prince George Winyah. To warm up the Dirleton house for this occasion was no little job for it was January and very cold. There was a carpet of snow all over the place, an unusual occurrence for our Lowcountry, and that with the bright sparkling winter stars made an everlasting impression upon one and all.

As the wedding party was ready, the huge folding doors were shoved back showing two half circles of people on each side of the doors. The musician, Mr. Dower of Charleston, with the rolling back of the doors, struck the chords of the Wedding March by Mendelssohn.

My sister, as well as I can remember, was dressed in a long train of white tarelton and satin, full skirt, with body of basque effect pointed front and back over silk lining or petticoat. This was considered the thing for a wedding in those days. I can still remember a great deal about that beautiful wedding. The long veil going to the end of the train, with orange blossoms around my sister's head, and parts of her veil caught up by individual sprays of the orange blossoms, was a wonderful picture and long to be remembered. The waist of the wedding gown was a tight short bodice, or basque, and was made low neck and short drop sleeves, which was considered very pretty and stylish in those days. The bridesmaids were, I think dressed alike in organdy or tarleton with satin trimmings – also the same low neck and short sleeves. The groomsmen were in swallowtail coats and patent leather pumps and white small ties.

When the ceremony was over and congratulations were in order, the young people with both rooms thrown open, danced to their heart's content. A wonderful thing was done when my Father enclosed our long back piazza using yards of homespun, thereby making a fifty foot in length supper room (18 feet wide). This was lighted by large Japanese lanterns at intervals, and with large hanging lamps over, and candles on the table, a lovely supper was arranged.

The table was covered with a white cloth, and the southern smilax was extended in a border all around the table edge, and sprays of holly full of berries were pinned every here and there around the sides of the table. The entire house was decorated with cedar, smilax and holly.

The table literally groaned under the weight of good things from large dishes of "mutton with capers sauce", (the Virginia red ham which speaks for itself) and English ducks. About 16 roasted and in dishes of 4 to a dish, large dishes of Pilaw rice, and some plain rice and two home raised turkeys all carved and ready to be served. Large dishes of celery and pickles made by my Mother, vegetables raised on our place. Large wedding fruit cakes, 4 on stands made for them about one foot tall, small pound cakes, salads, nuts, wine jellies (real wine), fruit and candy. Can anyone think of anything more gorgeous?

We were 12 in family, Mother, Father, and 10 of us – our guests staying in our house numbered 20, to say nothing of the number who came from near and far for the wedding. Several of our Waccamaw friends had to spend the night as it was too cold for them to back home by open row boats!

Mrs. Louis Hasel (sister-in-law of the bridegroom who was Mr. B. Huger Ward, son of the noted Ward family of Hampstead, Charleston, SC and owner of Prospect Hill Plantation on Waccamaw) was one of the ladies who remained at Dirleton for the night, also Mr. and Mrs. Henry Tucker. Mrs. Hasel slept in a large upholstered Martha Washington chair by the fire, as all of our beds and rooms were filled to their utmost capacity.

People in those days enjoyed life to its fullest. I can't recall all of the bridal party but these are a few of the names, Miss Clara Ford of Plantersville, Miss Ponie Sparkman, my cousin, Miss Jane Shackelford of Charleston, Miss Minnie McCrady of Charleston, and daughter of my Father's best friend, Mr. Edward McCrady – who was called the watch dog of St. Phillip's Church to the day of his death. I think Miss Bessie Allston and Miss Lella Johnston of Arundel Plantation, also Miss Katie Hazzard and Bet LaBruce were bridesmaids. The groomsmen were my brother, Edward Sparkman, Mr. John McKay, friend of my brother, Mr. Julius Pringle, Mr. William Sparkman, Mr. Ralph Iazard and some relatives and friends from Charleston of my brother-in-law. A Mr. Gibson and a Mr. Lesesne however I am not sure for there has never been kept any record of the occasion much to my regret. I am only writing what I can recall but I can say this, that I could never do justice to what did take place. – I can't remember any more.