

Museum Around the Corner

The Georgetown County Historical Society Museum

Dr. Bowman ©

William Baldwin of McClellanville has cast a light on a figure not often mentioned in Georgetown history, Dr. John Bowman, owner of Peachtree Plantation and Ravenel, both on the South Santee River. In an article found in the archives of the Historical Society, the source or date not given, Mr. Baldwin relates the following story.

“I’ve been a student of South Carolina history for a long time now, and one character who always fascinated me was Dr. John Bowman, a Scotsman, who arrived after the Revolution. Dr. Bowman impressed me as a colorful character, to say the least, and he played an important part in our local and regional history. Shortly after arriving in South Carolina, he married Sabina Lynch, whose brother, Thomas, had signed the Declaration of Independence. He inherited Thomas Lynch’s plantation, Peachtree, on the Santee River. He hired Jonathan Lucas to build the first rice mill, an invention that brought on a technological revolution and the “Golden Age of Rice Planting”.

Dr. Bowman was involved in a lot of things, but what fascinated me most was his ability to pick fights. Twenty years ago now I came across a footnote in George Rogers’ book, *The History of Georgetown County*. Bowman had fought a duel with his brother-in-law, fellow Santee River planter, James Hamilton, Jr. That intrigued me.”

Baldwin tried for years to find the story of the duel, but found only references stating that it was “an exciting duel”, but no details were given. Finally, at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, he hit paydirt. He found on microfilm the story by S. Prioleau Hamilton.

‘Present at dinner one spring afternoon were General Moultrie, Dr. Bowman, the husband of Sabina Lynch, and Major Hamilton, the host. At the dinner party they drank a good deal of Old Madeira. Dr. Bowman became pretty boisterous and even insulting. He did not like Hamilton at all, and that soldier had a great contempt for him as an overbearing bully of a man. Matters progressed at a disagreeable rate until Bowman (illegible) put a most outrageous insult on his host – in short, he asserted that Hamilton had been too intimate with a respectable married woman of the North and charged him with being the father on one or more of her children. This was the signal for war.

“Hamilton said, “Dr. Bowman you are a guest here. Therefore, I can make the only reply for such a vile slander – a knock down. I have my pistols at hand, sir, and your insult can only be washed out in blood.”

‘Stop this! Stop this!’, cried the General. ‘Remember the relationship existing between you.’

‘Damn our relationship. Give me the pistols,’ said Dr. Bowman. ‘You must second or we will fight without one.’

So the party hurried down to the ferry (on the North Santee River) where there was a level place. The ground was measured off, the pistols loaded – and everything made ready.

The General gave the word and at the first fire, Major Hamilton received a ball below the knee of his right leg, which shattered the bone badly. Bowman rode off home quite (illegible) disturbed. A surgeon

was sent for by the General from Georgetown. Dr. Myers of that place arrived with his instruments, amputated the leg, it taking over three-quarters of an hour do it in.

The major lay there several days in pain (illegible) all in and suffered greatly. His danger was gangrene. A litter was improvised and he started for Charleston on the shoulders of six of his stalwart Negroes.

It was warm weather and the cavalcade progressed slowly. A violent summer shower came up with torrents of rain. The litter being set down in the road, Hamilton tore off every bandage from the stump and stuck it out of the side in a deluge of rain. The bath brought instant relief, the first instance perhaps of cold water dressing for a gunshot wounds then known.

The affair being between members of the same family the matter was hushed and a story invented that Hamilton got his leg crushed by falling off his wharf on the river.

Another illustration of the eccentricities of Dr. Bowman is that he is thought to have buried his daughter standing up. According to Poet-laureate Archibald Rutledge, Bowman couldn't bear to part with her, and a giant pine tree grew from the dead girl's heart.