

PAPERS OF THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF DELAWARE.

XL.

SAMUEL WHITE AND HIS FATHER
JUDGE THOMAS WHITE.

AN ALMOST FORGOTTEN SENATOR; AND HIS
FATHER WHO WAS A FOLLOWER OF
ASBURY IN THE EARLY DAYS
OF METHODISM.

BY

HENRY C. CONRAD,

LIBRARIAN OF THE SOCIETY.

Read before the Historical Society of Delaware, Sept. 21, 1903.

THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF DELAWARE.

WILMINGTON,

1903.

THE JOHN M. ROGERS PRESS, WILMINGTON, DEL.

SAMUEL WHITE.

The wheels of time move swiftly and surely. Men come and go and are forgotten. But few of the many make such an impression as to leave behind them a record that is remembered.

Just one hundred and two years ago, Samuel White was appointed United States Senator by Governor Richard Bassett, to succeed Dr. Henry Latimer, who had resigned the office; and after the lapse of a century it is with difficulty that enough information can be gotten together to make a respectable biography of this man who held the exalted position of United States Senator from Delaware.

Investigation establishes the fact that Samuel White was a son of Thomas White, and that he was born in 1770, on the farm of his father in Mispillion Hundred, Kent County, Delaware, a few miles from the village of Whiteleysburg. The father, Thomas White, was known as Judge White, having from 1777 until 1792 served as one of the Justices of the Court of Common Pleas and Orphans' Court of Kent County; during the last two years of that time as Chief Justice. This Court existed under the first constitution of the State, adopted in 1776, but was abolished by the constitution of 1792. Judge White, at the time of his death, was Register of Wills for Kent County. He was one of the large land owners in Kent County and an influential citizen.

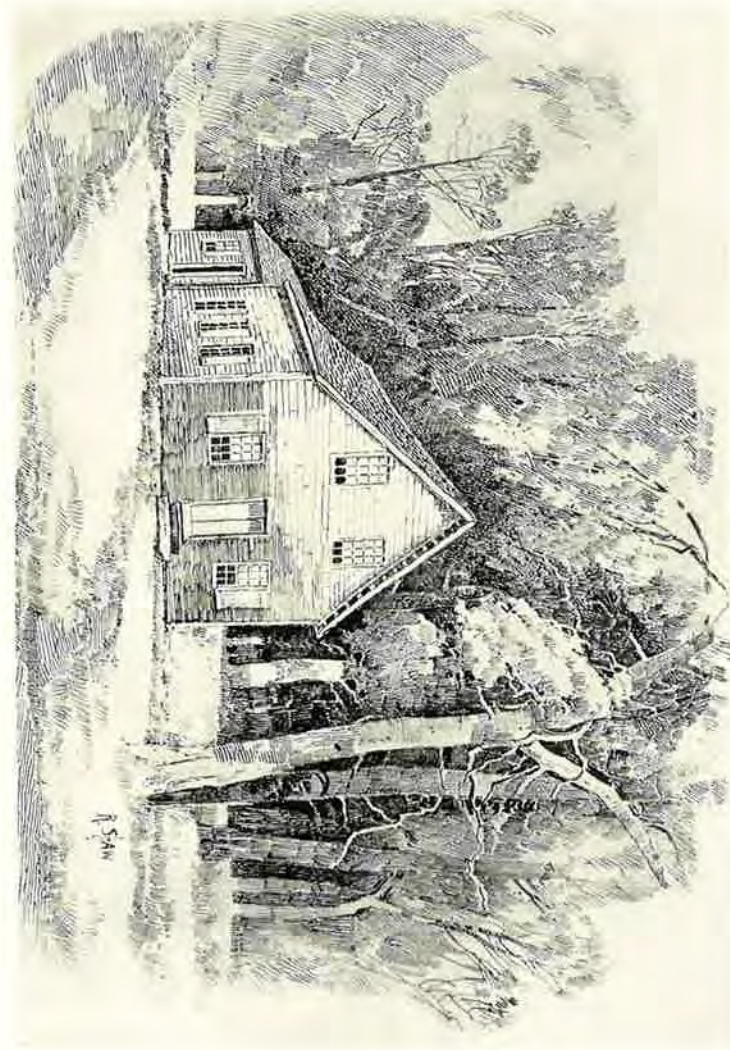


*Fac simile of the Signature
of Thomas White.*

In 1777 when Francis Asbury made his advent into Delaware as the pioneer preacher of Methodism, Judge White and his brother Dr. Edward White became much interested in him and in the cause which he represented, and in time, both became converts, and afterwards warm adherents of his faith. Asbury spent much time at the home of the two White brothers, but he became particularly attached to Thomas White, and in his journal speaks of him as his "dearest friend in America," and says that Judge White's home was the only home that he ever had. Asbury never married, and being in the Methodist itinerancy from his early days, had no permanent place of abode. Most of the Methodist preachers were English-born, and one of their tenets was a refusal to bear arms. Denounced by other sects as "noisy, pestilential fellows" and suspected by the authorities of enmity to the patriotic cause, the Methodists fell into great disfavor during the Revolution. Judge White, because of his adherence to the Methodist cause and his close friendship for Asbury, was suspected, of being at least lukewarm towards the independence of the colonies and so strong did the sentiment become against him that in the autumn of 1777 he was arrested and imprisoned as a Tory. After being separated from his family some weeks, which was a source of great concern and distress to them, he was exonerated and discharged.

This was while Asbury was sheltered and cared for on the White plantation. On the death of Asbury in 1816, Rev. Ezekiel Cooper, one of the earliest Methodist preachers from the peninsula, preached a funeral discourse on Asbury in St. George's Church in Philadelphia in the course of which, referring to this period, he said, "Asbury found an asylum,

WHITE'S MEETING HOUSE.
A. D. 1779.



as his castle of safety in the house and with the hospitable family of his fast and firm friend, Thomas White, Esq., one of the Judges of the Court in Kent County, Delaware. He was a pious man and his wife one of the holiest of women; they were great friends to the cause of religion and to preachers generally. From this place of retreat and protection, as in a castle of repose and safety, he could correspond with his suffering brethern, who were scattered abroad in different parts. He could also, occasionally travel about, visiting the societies and sometimes preaching to the people. In some of their movements they had to be very cautious and circumspect, for they were watched as the hawk watches the partridge on the mountain, and as the wolves watch the sheep of the pasture and the lambs of the flock." The fact that subsequently Judge White was honored with important public station would indicate that he continued in favor with the populace as well as with those in authority. One of the earliest Methodist Churches on the peninsula was "White's Chapel," named for the Judge, and situated near Judge White's residence. A church bearing the same name still stands a few miles from the old site. The original White's Chapel falling in disuse, went to decay, but years afterwards, the frame work that remained, was removed a mile or more westward, across the State line into Maryland, and there it was used as part of the super-structure of what was called Lee's Chapel, and for many years was regularly used for Methodist services. In course of time it was supplanted by Shepherd's Chapel and the building, still in a good state of preservation, is used as a barn or storehouse on the Carter farm, adjoining the old location of Lee's Chapel.

It was at Judge White's house that the first conference of the Methodist preachers was held on April 28th, 1779, and it was here that the important and significant step was taken of appointing Francis Asbury, the general assistant or superintendent in America, with the right of determining questions in conference after due consideration. From this time Asbury became the recognized centre of Methodism in America, and in Judge White's house was born the idea of Episcopal Supervision.

Judge White died at his plantation in 1795, in the sixty-fifth year of his age. Asbury in speaking of the death of Judge White, makes this entry in his journal: "This news was attended with an awful shock to me. I have met with nothing like it in the death of any friend on the continent. I have lived days, weeks, and months in his house. He was a friend to the poor and oppressed; he had been a professed churchman, and united to the Methodist connection about seventeen or eighteen years. His house and heart were always open; and he was a faithful friend to liberty in spirit and practice; he was a wise, indulgent husband, a tender father, and an affectionate friend."

Judge White devised his home place, called "Belisle" to his son Samuel White. This son seems to have had the advantage of a good education. He studied law presumably with Richard Bassett, and was admitted to the bar at Dover in March 1793. Soon after his admission he seems to have deserted his native county, and as far as is known never occupied the farm which his father devised to him. The farm he sold in 1806 to John Orrell, and with this his connection with Kent County ceased. He took up his residence in Wilmington, where he resided during all the time he was

in public life. He was a Federalist in politics, but held no office until appointed United States Senator on February 28th, 1801, by Governor Bassett.

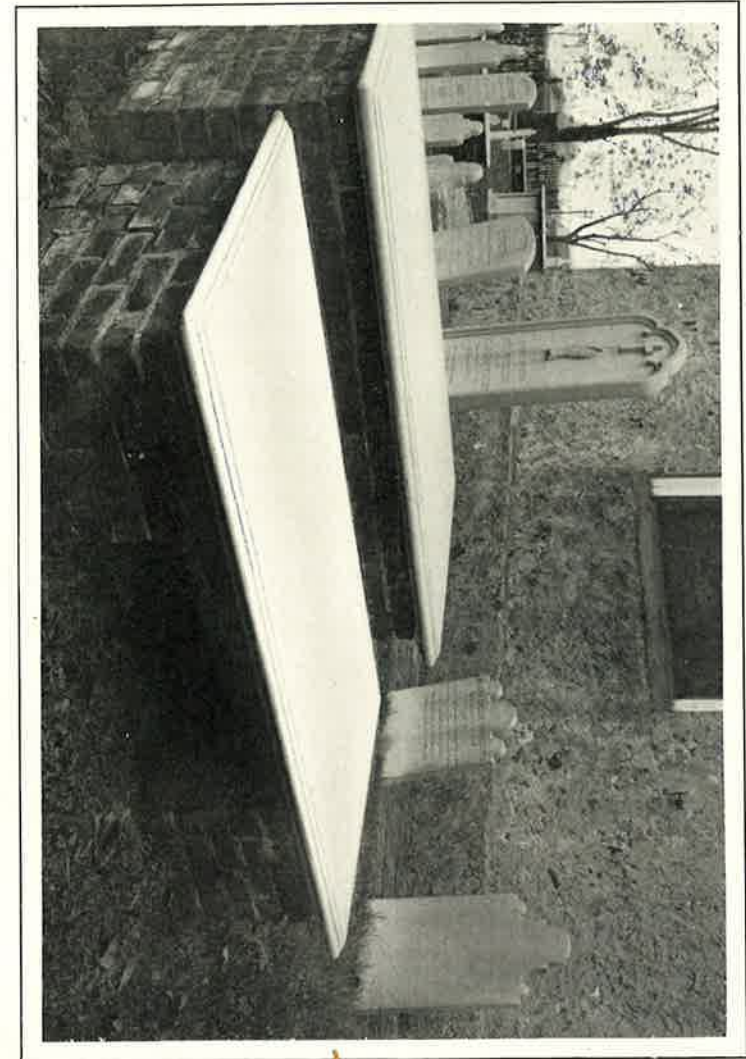
Richard Bassett, like Judge White was a communicant in the Church of England. The story is told that Bassett had been engaged in the trial of a case at Denton, Maryland, and was driving from Denton to his home in Dover, and stopped at Judge White's for supper, Mrs. White was entertaining Asbury and some of his companions, and sought to keep them out of sight of the distinguished lawyer. Forced to introduce them, Asbury made such an impression upon Bassett that it led to the conversion of the latter, who became an enthusiastic Methodist, and so continued during his life. At Bassett's death in 1815, at his home on Bohemia Manor, a funeral discourse commemorative of him and of his distinguished father-in-law James A. Bayard, the elder, was preached by Rev. Ezekiel Cooper, who at that time ranked as the most eloquent and forcible preacher of his day. Twenty years and more after Richard Bassett had broken bread under Thomas White's roof and been introduced to Francis Asbury, he remembered his good friend of early days and appointed his son Samuel White to the vacancy in the United States Senate. On January 11th, 1803, at the regular session of the General Assembly, Samuel White was elected for the full term of Senator beginning March 4th, 1803. He was placed in nomination by Outerbridge Horsey, a representative from Sussex County, and was elected over George Read Junr, (a son of the signer of the Declaration) by a vote of 20 to 9. He served the full term, and on January 11th, 1809, was re-elected for a second term. At this election he was placed

in nomination by Henry M. Ridgely, a representative from Kent County, and received 17 votes to 10 votes cast for Andrew Gray, the grandfather of our present Judge George Gray, who was a manufacturer in Mill Creek Hundred. At the time of his election he had barely reached the constitutional age of a senator, and was one of the youngest members ever elected to that body. It is a remarkable fact that both of the men who placed Samuel White in nomination for Senator afterwards became members of that body. Outerbridge Horsey was elected as the successor of Senator White on the latter's death in 1809, and Henry M. Ridgely was elected United States Senator in 1827.

Samuel White had as his colleague in the Senate, for one year, William Hill Wells, of Sussex County, and afterwards James A. Bayard, the elder. The proceedings of the Senate show that Samuel White was not a silent member. Soon after his admission he made a vigorous speech in opposition to the Louisiana Purchase, and placed himself decidedly against the doctrine of expansion. Nothing in the way of records remain to indicate how active or prominent he became as a lawyer. The first reported cases of Delaware decisions begin twenty years and more after his death.

While still a member of the United States Senate he died on the fourth day of November, 1809, at Wilmington. His remains were interred at the Old Swedes' graveyard, this city, where a plain slab covering his grave contains the following inscription:

BENEATH THIS STONE
ARE DEPOSITED THE REMAINS OF
SAMUEL WHITE, ESQ.,
A NATIVE OF THE STATE OF DELAWARE
WHO DIED NOVEMBER 4th, 1809.
AGE 39 YEARS.



THE TOMB OF SAMUEL WHITE.

The following obituary appeared in the "American Daily Advertiser" of November 8th, 1809, published by Zachariah Poulson in Philadelphia:—

"With painful regret we announce the death of Samuel White, Esq., he died at his lodgings in Wilmington, on Saturday morning last (November 4th, 1809). Mr. White has for several years past represented the State of Delaware in the Senate of the United States where his talents were known to be respectable, and his integrity unblemished. In the circle of his acquaintances, which were very extensive, his loss will be severely felt, and deeply regretted, and his virtues in private life will be long cherished in grateful remembrance. His probity of conduct, urbanity of manner and manly deportment justly entitled him to the rank of a worthy citizen and an accomplished gentlemen."

At the opening of the General Assembly in January 1810, in the message of Governor George Truitt the following reference was made to the death of Senator White:—

"In the death of Mr. White, late a Senator from this State in Congress, we have to deplore the loss of a very amiable man, a good citizen and a faithful representative; and although the vacancy occasioned by his death occurred in the recess of the legislature, yet wishing to leave you a free and unbiassed choice, not fettered with an incumbent, whom it might be unpleasant to overlook in the selection, I have not taken upon myself the exercise of the discretionary power vested in me by the constitution of the United States, of appointing a person to succeed him. This subject will claim your early attention."

Samuel White never married. His father Judge White, at the time of his death left to survive him a widow named Margaret, who was the daughter of David Nutter, of North West Fork Hundred, Sussex County, the one son Samuel, and three daughters, named respectively: Margaret Nutter Polk, Sarah Cook and Anna White. As far as ascertained the latter never married; Margaret Nutter, the oldest daughter, married Daniel Polk, of Sussex County.

Daniel Polk was the son of Robert Polk, Jr., and his grand parents were Robert and Magdalen Polk of Sussex County. Daniel Polk was a member from Sussex County, of the Constitutional Convention which formulated the Constitution of the State of Delaware of 1792.

Daniel Polk was an enterprising money-getting man. He accumulated a large property but died insolvent. After his marriage with Miss White they first lived in Sussex County, and later in Kent County, presumably on part of the White land. Daniel Polk died March 29th, 1796, and his wife on September 3d of the same year. Ten children were born of the marriage of whom eight survived their father and mother, all being minors, at the time of their parents death. Elizabeth Polk, the oldest daughter married December 6th, 1795, Doctor James Lawson Clayton, a son of Governor Joshua Clayton. Doctor Clayton made his home all his life on Bohemia Manor, just across the line in Cecil County, Maryland, and eight children were born of the marriage. There are several descendants of this line still living. The Clayton house is still standing. Both Doctor Clayton and his wife were buried in the cemetery at Bethel M. E. Church.

John Polk, the second child of Daniel Polk entered the

U. S. Navy as a mid-shipman in 1799 and was lost in the wreck of the "Insurgent." He was unmarried.

Peggy, or Margaret, the third child of Daniel Polk with her twin sister Sarah, was born September 26th, 1780, Sarah died when a year old. Peggy Polk married Doctor George Logan of South Carolina, whom she met while attending school in Philadelphia, Doctor Logan at the time being a student of medicine at the University of Pennsylvania. They were married at Doctor Clayton's, and Miss Polk was the ward of Hon. Cæsar A. Rodney, who had been a very close political friend of her father's. Doctor George Logan and his wife lived in South Carolina, Mrs. Logan died in 1826, at the age of forty-six years, leaving six sons to survive her. There are grand children still living, Mrs. Logan was the beauty of the family.

Daniel Polk, Jr., the fifth child of Daniel Polk entered the U. S. Navy as Mid-shipman in 1799, both he and his brother John being appointed to the Navy by President John Adams on the recommendation of Cæsar A. Rodney. Daniel Jr., resigned from the Navy in 1804, and married in 1812 his cousin Eleanor Polk, daughter of Trusten Laws Polk. They emigrated to Louisville, Kentucky and afterward located in Shelby County in the same State. They had twelve children, who were the progenitors of many descendants. Eleanor Polk, wife of Daniel, Jr., died before her husband and he afterwards married a lady from Kentucky named Hite, by whom there were no children. Daniel, Jr., died in Kentucky June 14th, 1838. Several descendants of this line are living.

Thomas White Polk, the sixth child of Daniel Polk was born in 1784 but lived only ten years. Another son Robert,



PEGGY POLK, NIECE OF SENATOR WHITE.
WHO MARRIED DR. GEORGE LOGAN.

born two years later lived to be nine years old, and the tenth and last child named Maria, died in infancy.

Anna Polk, the eight child of Daniel Polk born in 1788 married William Gibson Tilghman of Talbot County, Maryland in 1809. There were nine Tilghman children, five of whom grew to maturity and married, and are nearly if not all represented by descendants at the present time.

Samuel White Polk, the ninth child of Daniel Polk, born in 1790, was educated by his uncle, the Senator, and married Margaret F. Fletcher, daughter of Governor Fletcher of Louisiana. His life after marriage was spent in New Orleans, where several of his descendants are still living. He is said to have been a man who was scrupulously neat in his attire and who lived a life of ease.

The only descendants of Judge Thomas White came through his daughter Margaret Nutter, who married Daniel Polk as traced above.

Judge White's daughter Sarah, married Doctor Robert Cook the only son of John Cook, Governor of Delaware in 1783. Doctor Cook during his married life with Sarah White lived in or near Smyrna, and practiced his profession there. No children were born of the marriage, and Sarah Cook died early, and afterwards Doctor Cook married Nancy Rogers, the widow of Governor Daniel Rogers of Milford, and after his marriage to her he lived in the large mansion house in South Milford now owned and occupied by Joseph E. Holland.

Samuel White served as guardian for nearly all of the orphaned children of his sister Margaret Nutter Polk. They inherited some means from their mother and this was invested



FAC SIMILE OF MONOGRAM
ON THE
FAMILY SILVER
OF
THOMAS AND MARGARET WHITE.

and looked after by their uncle who also interested himself in their education and establishment in life.

The portrait of Samuel White, which appears in this publication is a copy from a portrait drawn by St. Memim and presumably was made about the year 1808. In it he appears in uniform. On September 21st, 1807, he was appointed Adjutant General of the Militia of the State by Governor Nathaniel Mitchell. In 1803 he was commissioned by the Governor, under an Act of the General Assembly, to obtain copies from Pennsylvania of the early land grants made by the proprietaries, of real estate located in Delaware, but which had been improperly recorded elsewhere. He served for several years as one of the State directors of the Farmers Bank, and was a Presidential Elector in 1800.

Judge White by his will which was probated at Dover, March 7th, 1795, provided for the liberation of all his slaves using the following language therein: "I think it wrong and oppressive and not doing as I would be willing to be done by, to keep negroes in bondage or perpetual slavery. I therefore, hereby manumit and set free those that are or have been in bondage to me." He then mentions the names of twenty-one slaves. Samuel White, the son, seemed imbued with the same idea, as the records at Dover disclose four separate deeds of manumission from Samuel White to slaves owned by him, between 1799 and 1804.

These fragments of history that remain after the lapse of a century, justify the conclusion that both father and son were true sons of Delaware; and that in their day and generation they merited the recognition and honors that fell to them.