

State - Aug. 28, 1938

# "Valencia" Carries On Traditions of Old South

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**Descendants Live in Home Built by Edward Gendron Palmer, First Low-Country Planter to Come to Fairfield in 1824—Gay and Good Times of Long Ago. A Beau Brummel's Parisian Clothes Taken by Yankees—China Breakfast Set and Ball Dress Survive 100 Years—Ridgeway 107 Feet Higher Than Flag Pole of Central Union Bank Building**

BY FITZ HUGH McMASTER.

This is to be a story of "Valencia,"—not in Spain, but in Fairfield county, South Carolina, not far from Ridgeway.

It is quite the fashion now to write of the Old South as the land of myths and make-believe and pretense.

Col. John W. Thomason, Jr., of Texas and Washington, D. C., in writing "The Old South Myth," says in the dim future men will whisper, "Once down there to the south and west, there was a fabulous country, where all the men were valiant and all the women lovely, and the people went singing at their toil. They had stately buildings with tall white columns, and their ornaments were ivory and gold. On them the sun shone through the day and the moon was bright in the night time, and the birds made music!"

Colonel Thomason destroys some of the myths, shows some of the realities, and does say, "The pre-war society of the South was in sober fact the most graceful, the most cultivated, and the most attractive way of living this hemisphere has seen."

Can Dream About "Valencia." There is no myth about "Valencia." It was one of the realities of "The Old South."

After hearing about it, and seeing it, there comes to mind a couplet:

"One dearest sight I have not seen—  
It almost seems a wrong;  
A dream I had when life was new,  
Alas our dreams, they come not true;  
I thought to see fair Carcassone!"

Now I can dream about "Valencia" before the war! It was no myth. It was a reality.

The records of 1860 show that 15 planters in the Southern states owned 500 slaves or more. Eight of these lived in South Carolina. A much greater number owned between 300 and 500, but of these 72 lived in South Carolina and the next ranking state was Louisiana with 20.

The master of "Valencia" was one of the 72 in South Carolina, who owned between 300 and 500, and a few miles away at "Peay's Folly" lived one of the eight in South Carolina who owned over 500.

"The scent of the roses" is still around "Valencia." The widow of Edward Gendron Palmer, 3rd, whose grandfather built "Valencia" in 1834, is the mistress of the mansion, and while numerous family divisions and other causes have greatly reduced the holdings, still some 400 acres and more of the original 6,000 appertain to the ante-Confederate war home, and many of the original furnishings are to be found therein.

### At Bloomingdale.

Early in 1824, Edward Gendron Palmer, 1st, of St. James parish, Santee, Charleston district, having married Caroline, the daughter of Dr. James Davis of Columbia, was induced by his father-in-law to move from the low-country to Fairfield county. His account book, now extant, shows that in that first year he bought several tracts of land, aggregating 1,742 acres, at an average price of \$8.77 an acre, near "New Lands" as Ridgeway was then called. His first holdings became known as the "Bloomingdale" plantation, on Dutchman's creek. The situation proving unhealthy, one child dying while there, he bought other lands nearer what is now Ridgeway, and in 1834, on a high hill built a home there.

James Davis, 2nd, brother of Mrs. Palmer, had just returned from extensive travels in Europe. The view which he saw from his sister's new home reminded him so much of a view he had from his hotel window in Valencia, Spain, that he suggested to his brother-in-law, Edward Gendron Palmer, that he name the home "Valencia," also fitting because it was so high and healthful. Its height is not generally appreciated. The United States surveys show that the bench mark at the railroad station in Ridgeway, is 107 feet higher than the top of the flag staff on the Central Union bank building, the highest material point in Columbia. The government surveys give Columbia an altitude above sea level of 332 feet, Winnsboro 545, and Ridgeway 626 feet.

The location of "Valencia" is so high, Liberty Hill, Great Falls, and

other places 20 miles or more away may be seen. Every time a new street light is erected in Liberty Hill, it is noted at "Valencia."

Another evidence is that the well from which water is now drawn by an electric pump, originally by bucket and chain, is 139 feet deep, and "believe it or not," 124 feet of it is through limestone rock. It took seven years of intermittent blastings with black gunpowder to get through to water. And, strange to relate, the water for many years had strong limestone taste until the earthquake of 1886, when the water became clear with little taste.

The home is not one of the mystical "stately buildings with tall white columns." It is a two-story frame building, with large halls through the center, five rooms on the first floor and four on the second. At least two of the rooms, maybe others, are 22 feet by 22 1-2 feet, with 11-foot ceilings.

The mantels are high, hand-carved wooden ones, and beneath them are deep, wide fireplaces where hickory

and oak logs once crackled, and made beds of hot, red coals, doubtless before which many a man and a maid saw the future of their dream-lives.

### Tasselled Cords.

In the drawing room are yet the red and gold cornices above the windows, from which hung Brussels lace curtains with over draperies of rich, damask, held back by tasselled cords attached to brass rosettes.

On the floors in winter were carpets, with pile so high as to make the tread feel as if double thicknesses of velvet were beneath. In the summer Chinese matting replaced the carpets, and gave a freshness and cool sensation entirely lost to modern floor covering.

Some of the mahogany furniture of colonial design still remains. One piece is a small table purchased by Col. William C. Preston in Washington, which had been a table in Thomas Jefferson's study. On this table rests a bust of Colonel Preston, the workmanship of Powers or a contemporary. Amazing to relate when this bust came back from the North, where it had been sent for a minor repair, it was painted black, and so remains today.

Over a mantel formerly hung the portrait of Mrs. W. C. Preston, the sister of Mrs. Palmer and daughter of Dr. James Davis. On the walls were rare pictures and prints. Of those which remain are profiles of Napoleon I, and of Josephine and of sisters of Napoleon. These were brought from Paris by Edward Gendron Palmer, 2nd, who lived there for several years before the Confederate war, and who was presented at the court of Napoleon III.

In the flower garden, near the mansion, was the library, one large room on the first floor, and two bedrooms on the second for overflow company.

To the rear of the dwelling was the kitchen, dairy, smokehouse and servants' quarters. At some distance away were the "quarters" for the field hands and their families.

### Dr. James Davis Dies.

It was in the master's room on the first floor that Dr. James Davis, father of Mrs. Palmer, and the first superintendent of what is now the State hospital in Columbia, died. Dr. James Davis had a summer home on "Quinine Hill," which he named, now the home of James H. Hammond of Columbia.

It was in the library that Dr. John Ramsay Davis Palmer, second son of Mr. and Mrs. Edward Gendron Palmer, 1st, lived with his bride, who was the daughter of Congressman John Addison Woodward, while his father was having built for them their home on "Cedar Tree" plantation, several miles away on the road to Winnsboro.

An incident of the marriage of Ed-

ward Gendron Palmer and Miss Carolina Davis, in 1824, was that at the wedding breakfast a set of china was used which had been brought from China by a sea captain, a friend of Mrs. James Davis, the mother of the bride. This set was bequeathed by Mrs. Davis to her namesake, Mrs. Katherine Ross Davis Gaillard (widow of Col. D. D. Gaillard) and about 100 years later, in 1924 about, was used at the wedding breakfast of her son, St. Pierre DuBose Gaillard and Miss Monica Blodgett, in Washington, D. C.

Another pleasing reminder of the happy days is found in the fact that the dress worn by Mrs. Palmer when she accompanied her sister, Mrs. Louise Penelope Davis (W. C.) Preston to the ball given General Lafayette in Columbia in 1825, was worn by Mrs. Kate Davis (Col. D. D.) Gaillard at the opening of the Ponce deLeon hotel, St. Augustine, Fla., in 1890, and again at the ball given in honor of President and Mrs. Coolidge at the Mayflower hotel in Washington, D. C.

From Edward Gendron Palmer, 1st, "Valencia" passed to his oldest son, Edward Gendron Palmer, 2nd, who was an invalid and never married. By some quip of good fortune, before the Confederate war he took his slaves to Florida and there sold them. Securely investing his fortune he went to Paris to live. Upon the breaking out of the war he returned home and was permitted to pass through the army lines.

### Gay Apparel.

He brought back with him from Paris a full wardrobe of gay apparel, which pleased his fastidious tastes, but which were lost to Sherman's soldiers in 1865.

To save his watch his father threw it into a cotton patch and there it remained for a number of years to be turned up one day by a Negro plowing. It is now the property of N. W. Palmer of Ridgeway.

It may be asid of this fastidious Beau Brummel, who once practiced law in Winnsboro and edited the newspaper there for a short time, that when his Parisian wardrobe was appropriated by the Yankees he was not too proud to wear a suit made by his sister, Mrs. (Col.) Henry C. Davis, grandmother of Prof. H. C. Davis of the University of South Carolina. She spun the wool and wove the cloth and made the suit.

It would make a newspaper story too long to tell the many interesting details of life at "Valencia" before the Confederate war. Enough has been written to show that it was a true type of the best ante-Confederate war life.

And right happy it is that the traditions are maintained as far as they may be in accord with present day life. As stated it is now owned and occupied by the widow of Edward Gendron Palmer, 3rd, who with several of her children maintain the home.

It is not amiss to mention that somewhat in line of later progress a herd of Devon cattle had been bred there for the last 46 years. From it have been sold breeding animals in every Southern state from Virginia to Louisiana. Only recently ten animals were sold to the agriculture department of Florida. Fine horses are still bred and despite untoward agricultural conditions a delightful Southern home is still maintained.

Edward Gendron Palmer, 4th, lives in his own home not far away and plants his own lands near the lands which his great-grandfather planted 100 years ago.

The Palmer family which recently held a reunion at Springfield plantation, near Eutawville, Berkeley county, is of the same stock as the Palmer family of "Valencia," but no immediate connection.

"I have seen fair Carcassone!"