

A History of the Ambler Family

James Ambler

1755-1849

James Ambler is said to have come to this area from Jamestown, Virginia. One source says that he was originally from Scotland, but I have not been able to confirm either statement. He was said to have attended William and Mary College, but again, this cannot be confirmed. His name did not appear in the Provisional List, which lists graduates from William and Mary from the beginning of the school. However, there is a mention that he married Susan Hagood of Edgefield, so at some point he moved to the Edgefield area of South Carolina. All four of his children were born there.

In 1825 they moved to the Pickens District. Their home was built near Hagood Mill and they kept an open house for visitors. The house is in disrepair, but still stands behind a thick stand of pine trees not far from the intersection of Midway Road and Highway 178.

James and Susan had four children: Charlotte in 1806, Adeline in 1808, Ann in 1810, and James Hagood in 1815. Charlotte married John Burdine; Adeline married Benjamin Hagood; Ann married Elihu Griffin; and James H. married Zealy Ann Cox. They may have had another child sometime between 1825-1830 because a male child between the years of 1-5 was listed as living in the house on the 1830 US Census. The child is not listed in the 1840 Census, so must have died before then.

James and Susan lived together in Pickens County until her death in December 1845. At that time he was unable to care for himself and moved in with his son, James H. He died on June 26, 1849 and is interred in the Hagood family cemetery.

James Hagood Ambler

1815-1905

James Hagood Ambler was the youngest of the Ambler children and the only son. He was born in old Fort Cambridge, now Ninety-Six, on March 11, 1815. He was 10 years old when his father moved the family to the Pickens County area. At that time it was the Old Pendleton District.

In 1846 he married Zealy Ann Cox of Greenville. Interestingly, this was the year after his mother died. They were the parents of twelve children: Belton O'Neal, Emily Long (Emma,) James Lawrence Orr, Beauregard, Robert Lee, Susan Hagood (Sunie,) Adeline, William Hagood, Anita, Angus Marcellus, Carlos Thadius, and Pierce Butler.

When they married they bought land and moved farther up the road toward Pumpkintown in the current Midway community. The house is listed in the *Pickens Sentinel* in 1886 as a boarding house and was a regular stopping place

for people who were traveling to Table Rock and Caesar's Head. This house still stands next to Midway Baptist Church and has been cared for over the years by several families. It is in remarkably good condition considering its age thanks to its current owner, Haskell Cox, aged 92. (He has lived there for 68 years.) The property still holds the original house, the gear building (where all the gear for the horses and carriages was stored), and a crib (for storing grains).

There are also a small guesthouse and some barns, which have been built in more recent years. Some of the rafters and windows in the house were pegged—built without nails. The original ceilings were high and hand planed. The floor joists, complete with axe markings, can still be seen under the floor. The foundation is constructed from bricks that were made on the property.

In the yard near the gear building is a rock inscribed with the date 1878 (or 1879—it's hard to tell.) This rock is cut to look like a step and was used as a step when someone wanted to mount a horse.

Underneath the house is the root cellar. It contains a handmade bar that was used by the Amblers to hang meat for curing. At the far end of the cellar is the vault. Major Ambler is rumored to have kept his money there. It is a small room made of brick with a small, sturdy wooden door. The inside has an arched brick ceiling.

There is a court case recorded three years after his marriage on March 16, 1849 concerning a dispute that arose between James H. and his sisters. The complainant in the case was none other than Benjamin Hagood his brother-in-law. Apparently the suit was over two slaves belonging to his father, James Ambler, Sr. The court examined the deed from "James Amble, Sr." to James Ambler dated March 5, 1849 in which he gave his son "all his stock, cattle, hoggs, household goods and farm tools." This seems to have settled things.

There is more evidence that James Ambler was a slaveholder. In the 1850 Slave Census he is listed as having 15 slaves. By the 1860 Census he had 21 slaves and four slave houses. His house had a separate kitchen and a rock-paved back courtyard between it and the house. The slaves purportedly cooked in the separate kitchen and then brought the meals to the house. There is a graveyard on the former property, now owned by Mr. Lewis Brown, with stone-marked graves. It is supposedly a slave graveyard.

J. H. Ambler served in the Confederate army in the Third SC State Troops from June 1862 to January 1863. Later he served in the First Regiment SC State Troops from August 1863 to February 1864. Although he was known as "Major Ambler," I could not find any evidence that he rose above the rank of Private. I must assume that the title was an honorary one. I have not been able to ascertain what this regiment did during the war either. Many records of the Confederacy were destroyed after the South lost the war.

Ambler served as a Manager of Elections in 1841 and 1843 and as Commissioner of Roads from 1853 to 1863. He represented this district (the old

Pendleton District) in the state legislature before it was divided into Pickens and Oconee County in 1868. (This is the year that the southern states reentered the union.) He served three consecutive terms: 1854, 1856, and 1858. He was apparently not in the legislature when South Carolina decided to secede from the Union in 1860 because his name is not found on the articles of secession.

He is listed as a prominent citizen of Pickens and served on the committee to locate a place for the county seat in 1868. This is the committee that located the county courthouse and Main Street where they are today. There is a memorial stone on the Pickens County Courthouse lawn on which the names of the Committee members are inscribed. The pictures and names of the committee members were published in the *Pickens Sentinel*. This is the source of the only known photograph of James Hagood Ambler.

There was an Ambler post office established near Hagood's Mill in 1883. In 1886 Ambler was appointed Postmaster at the Ambler Post Office that was established in his home. It was discontinued a year later.

Several of J. H. Ambler's children were schoolteachers at Ambler school. In 1885 Miss Sunie Ambler taught in District #5 and her brother, James L., taught in District #6. Willie H. Ambler taught at Ambler school in 1887. He would later (1890) become the postmaster in Gaffney, SC. Beauregard may also have taught school.

The next record is Ambler's will dated March 17, 1905.

I, James Hagood Ambler of Pickens County, being of sound and disposing mind and memory, I direct my executors hereinafter named to collect all moneys and debts do me, and pay my funeral expenses and just debts. I have given each of my children sums of money or a horse instead of money having given to my daughters Emily L. Gilreath and Susan Dicken the sum of \$125 each during the winter of 1904 to make them equal with my daughter Adaline Barrett who has received a tract of land of more value. I give to my wife Zealy Ann Ambler all the balance of my personal property of every nature. I give to my son, James L. Ambler all my undivided one-half interest in a tract of land near the field rock in Cleveland Township, Greenville County containing 180 acres. I appoint my son Robert L. Ambler executor. Dated this 7th of February 1905.

He died the next month on March 4, 1905 and was buried at the Hagood family cemetery. A large stone marks his grave and that of his wife, Zealy. Several of his children are also buried there, including those who died in infancy.