

EARLY HISTORY OF PUTNAM COUNTY
SOME PROMINENT PIONEER CITIZENS OF PUTNAM COUNTY

By Ernest H. Boyd
(Burton-Quarles & Related Families)

In the early history of Putnam County, one of the most prominent families of the county was the Burton family. Four of the leading and most successful early merchants of the county were closely related Burtons. In this series of articles about prominent pioneer citizens of Putnam County, reference will be made to each of these four prominent early citizens of Putnam County. This article relates to Stephen Decatur Burton.

Stephen Decatur Burton was born October 8, 1813, at White Plains, this county, before the establishment of Putnam County, White Plains, at the time of his birth, was in White County. He was a son of Charles Burton and wife Elizabeth Jane Quarles Burton. His mother was a daughter of Major William Quarles, the founder of White Plains, to which location he emigrated from Virginian in 1809.

Two of the daughters of Major William Quarles and wife married brothers, William Burton and Charles Burton, in Virginia, before Major William Quarles and his wife and their family emigrated to White Plains. William Burton and Charles Burton and their wives accompanied Major William Quarles and wife from Virginia to White Plains.

Charles Burton was left a widower at the age of 32, and he turned the rearing of his two motherless babies, Frances Ann, age three, and Stephen Decatur, only a year old, over to their maternal grand-mother Quarles.

Sallie Quarles Huntsman, also a daughter of Major William Quarles, was the wife of Adam Huntsman, a noted lawyer and Congressman, and she having died when their daughter, Ann Huntsman, was a small child, Adam Huntsman also turned over the rearing of his little daughter to her maternal grand-mother Quarles, for whom the child was named. The grandmother showered a wealth of affection upon these three motherless grandchildren entrusted to her. She provided for their every need and afforded them the best advantages. Frances Ann Burton died in her young lady hood.

This brief reference will afford an insight into the family background and early environment of Stephen Decatur Burton, who was one of the most successful pioneer merchants and business men of Putnam County.

He was born at White Plains, on October 8, 1813, where he died on March 17, 1892, at the age of 78. He married Miss Mary Davis Goodbar, of Overton County, on July 19, 1835. Her death occurred on November 21, 1895.

He was well educated for his day and was a man of culture and refinement. He was a constant reader and student of World events. He was a quiet, reserved, dignified gentleman. He inherited a large landed estate and numerous slaves and other personal property from his grandfather and grandmother Quarles, and he also inherited considerable property from his father, but he was a natural born financier and business man and he not only took care of his inheritance but, from his young manhood, he was successful in business and constantly added to and increased his wealth.

A few years before the Civil War, the old Major Quarles residence, in which he was reared and lived, was destroyed by fire, and a short distance from its site he erected the large two-story colonial residence, still standing, in which he lived during the remainder of his life. In design, it is very much like the old Major Quarles residence. This old building, in a good state of preservation is now the home of Mrs. Charles Huddleston, whose late husband was a great-grandson of Major William Quarles. In fact, the present good sized farm, while not containing by any means all of the land that Major William Quarles and later his grandson Stephen Decatur Burton owned, has been owned by Major William Quarles or some of his descendants since 1809, not many farms remain in the ownership of the same family for 145 years, as this one has.

From his store, near his residence, on the Walton Road, and from other stores owned by him or in which he owned an interest, and from raising and selling and dealing in cotton, and in trading in slaves, and from many other business activities, he accumulated a fortune and became one of the wealthy men in this section of the State. For many years, he and his double first cousin Charles F. Burton, of the Western part of Putnam County, were the two largest tax payers in Putnam County

Using slave labor in its cultivation, he, each year for many years, raised several hundred acres of cotton.

Just prior to the outbreak of the Civil War, when he was dealing in cotton on a large scale, he had about 125,000.00 worth of cotton stored in ware houses in Chattanooga, and during the Civil War the warehouses containing his cotton were burned and he sustained a total loss of that large amount of cotton.

He sustained the largest loss of any Putnam Countian on account of the emancipation of the slaves. When the negro slaves were freed, he owned about one hundred slaves, valued at about Fifty Thousand Dollars.

He was of a tranquil, philosophical temperament and he did not permit his heavy Civil War time losses to harrow him.

After he built his large and beautiful residence, he planned for beauty and plenty in his surrounding large landed estate. With the inborn and inherited sentiments of his English ancestors, he planned and developed his large plantation, and did not allow the cultivated field to encroach on his home residence, but surrounded it with a large green meadow of several acres. His diversions were reading and hunting, deer hunting was his favorite sport. Adjoining his meadow in the woodland on one side, was his large deer lot, where deer were kept for hunting. For many years prior to the Civil War and up until about 1875, he maintained this extensive deer pound on his plantation. This wild park, ten acres or more in area, was enclosed by an unusually high and strong rail fence of the "stake and rider" type, and, on the outside of this fence, artificial mounds were constructed of logs and earth, so that wild deer might walk up and jump into the enclosure to join the tame deer, which they often did. But with the opening up of many new farms in the White Plains section, wild deer became scarce, so that new recruits for the deer pound became few and far between, and the old "deer park" became a "new ground" and later an orchard.

It is said that at the close of the Civil War, Stephen Decatur Burton's negro slaves left him reluctantly, and a number of them remained on his plantation, for he was a good slave master. Knowingly, he never separated slave families; in buying slaves, he either bought the whole family or none.

He was an ardent believer in education. He had a school house built on his plantation and he employed thoroughly qualified teachers to teach his own, as well as the neighboring children, whom he invited to share in its advantages. Among the teachers he employed at his school was Philander D. Sims, who afterwards became one of the leading physicians of Chattanooga and served as Mayor of that city. He was a son of Martin Sims, a prominent pioneer citizen of this county. Another teacher in this school was a Miss Sewell, a sister of the noted pioneer Church of Christ ministers, Jesse L. Sewell and Elisha G. Sewell.

Mr. Burton sent his daughters to the noted old Cumberland Female College in McMinnville.

Mr. Burton was the maternal grandfather of the late Dr. Walter Stephen McClain of Cookeville, and of Mrs. James N. Cox, of Cookeville.

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