

presented to the Rochester Historical Society by Geo. H. Rochester, grandson of P. Nathaniel Rochester Dec. 12, 1890

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A BRIEF SKETCH

OF THE LIFE OF

NATHANIEL ROCHESTER,

Written by Himself for the Information of His Children.

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W. H. C. C. C. C.

I was born in Westmoreland County, Virginia, on the 21st of February, 1752. John Rochester, my father, was born at the same place, and died in 1756. Nicholas Rochester, his father, was born in England, and died on the farm where I was born, leaving two sons, John and William.

My mother's name was Hester Thrift, daughter of William Thrift, of Richmond County, adjoining Westmoreland. About 1757, she married a second husband, Thomas Critcher, who removed with his family to Granville County, North Carolina, about 1763.

I had but one full brother, John, who was six years older than I. He returned to Westmoreland County, Virginia, in 1766, married Ann Jordan and settled on the paternal estate, which he inherited as heir-at-law to my father's real estate, father dying intestate.

I had three full sisters, Ann, Phillis and Hester. The first married Benjamin Raglan and removed to the State of Georgia. The second married Samuel Moore and remained in Granville, North Carolina, and the third married Reuben Pyles, and removed to Ninety-Six, Abbeville County, South Carolina. Soon after the death of my brother, his oldest son removed to Danville, in Kentucky, and took all his brothers and sisters with him.

My step-father, Thos. Critcher, died in Granville County, North Carolina, in 1778, leaving three sons, Thomas, James and John, and two daughters, who married two brothers, Elijah and Charles Mitchell. My mother died in 1784, after raising ten children and losing five when they were young.

In the autumn of 1768, when 16 years of age, I was employed by a Scotch merchant named James Monroe, at Hillsborough, Orange County, North Carolina, about forty miles

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from home. I agreed to serve with him two years at £5 per annum, but at the end of six months he raised my salary to £20 per annum; this continued for two years, after which my salary was raised to £60 per annum, until 1773, when I went into partnership with my employer, and Col. John Hamilton, who was consul for the British government in the Middle States, after the close of the Revolutionary War. In the year 1775 this partnership was dissolved by the commencement of the war.

My first office was Clerk of the Vestry, in 1770. In 1775 I was appointed a member of the Committee of Safety for Orange County, whose business was to promote the revolutionary spirit among the people, to procure arms and ammunition, make collections for the people of Boston, whose harbour was blocked up by the British fleet, and to prevent the sale and use of East India teas. In August of the same year, 1775, I attended as a member of the first Provincial Convention in North Carolina. This convention ordered the raising of four regiments of Continental troops, organized the minute men and militia systems, and directed an election for another convention to meet in May, 1776, for the purpose of forming and adopting a constitution and form of government and measures of defence. At this first convention I was appointed a Major of Militia, Paymaster to the minute men and militia, and a Justice of the Peace.

In February, 1776, the commander of the British forces in New York sent General Alexander McDonald to Cumberland County, in North Carolina, the inhabitants of which county were mostly Highland Scotch, who had fled from Scotland for their adherence to the Pretender to the Crown of England in 1745; and so secret were his proceedings that before it was known in other parts of the province he had raised 1,000 men and formed them into a regiment and had them ready to march for Wilmington, at the mouth of Cape Fear River (about 100 miles), where transports from New York were to meet them. As soon as information of these movements reached Hillsborough, a distance of about 80 miles, the minute men and militia of Orange and Granville Counties collected and marched down to Cross Creek (now Fayetteville), the seat of justice of Cumberland County, where it was understood McDonald and his regiment of tories were embodied. I went with the minute men and militia in my official capacities as Major and Paymaster, and on our arrival at Cross Creek we heard that McDonald and his regiment had set out a few

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days before for Wilmington to embark for New York. I was then dispatched by Col. Thackston, our commanding officer, at 8 o'clock at night, with two companies of infantry and one company of cavalry in pursuit of the enemy; but on our arrival about daybreak at Devo's Ferry, about 20 miles from Cross Creek, or headquarters, we met about 500 men with General McDonald on their retreat, they having been met and defeated at Moore's Creek Bridge by Col. Caswell, commander of a regiment of minute men. Col. Caswell was afterwards appointed the first Governor of the State. We took the 500 prisoners. Being, however, in a sparsely settled country, where provisions could not be obtained, I was obliged to discharge all but about 50, who were appointed officers by McDonald, after swearing those discharged that they would not again take arms against the United Colonies; notwithstanding which they did afterwards join Lord Cornwallis when he marched through North Carolina, in the year 1782.

I then returned to headquarters with my command and the fifty prisoners, where I found Col. Alex. Martin, of the Salisbury Minute Men, had arrived with about two thousand minute men and militia. He took the chief command.

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Marshall, in his life of Washington, mentions that Martin took these prisoners. They were sent under a guard as prisoners of war to Frederick Town, in Maryland, where they remained until exchanged. In disarming the prisoners at Devo's ferry, the Scotch gave up their dirks with much reluctance, they having, as they said, been handed down from father to son for many generations.

In May following, 1776, when I was 24 years of age, I attended the convention at Halifax, N. C., as a member, when a constitution or form of government was adopted. Six more regiments of Continental troops were ordered to be raised, and their officers appointed, among whom I was appointed Commissary General of military stores and clothing, with the rank and pay of a Colonel, for the North Carolina line, which consisted of ten regiments.

This convention organized a government by appointing a governor and other State officers, and directed an election in November following for members of a State legislature.

On the adjournment of the convention I set out for Wilmington, N. C., where the four regiments first raised were stationed, in order to attend to the duties of my office, and took with me Abishia Thomas as a deputy, who was allowed the pay of a subaltern officer, and who has since been a clerk

in one of the departments of the General Government. After riding to most of the seaport towns in Carolina and Virginia to procure military stores and clothing for the Army, I was taken sick at Wilmington, and unable to transact business for a considerable time. My physician and friends advised me to retire from the service, on account of my condition and the unhealthiness of that part of the country. I therefore resigned a week or two before the election for members of the legislature, but did not return to Hillsborough until some weeks after the election. On my return there I found that I had been elected a Member of the Assembly, which I attended in the winter of 1777, with Nathaniel Macon, who had, a little before the election, returned home from Princeton College, and was elected to the same Assembly. He has since been a member of Congress for about thirty years without intermission. During this session I was appointed Lieutenant Colonel of Militia, and in the spring following, Clerk of the Court of Orange County, which office had been held many years by Gen'l F. Nash, who was killed at the battle of German Town. I held the clerk's office about two years, and until the fees of office did not pay for the stationery used, owing to the depreciation of the paper currency.

This year, 1777, I was appointed a Commissioner to establish and superintend a manufactory of arms at Hillsborough, and went to Pennsylvania with several wagons for bar iron for the factory. When I resigned the clerk's office I was appointed one of a board of three Auditors of Public Accounts for the State, and a Colonel of Militia.

In 1778 I engaged in business with Col. Thos. Hart (Henry Clay's father-in-law,) and James Brown, our present minister to France. Col. Hart resided two miles west of Hillsborough, where he had a considerable estate in land, mills and other manufacturing establishments. His residence was about on the line between the Whig and Tory settlements; the Tories committed many depredations on his property, he being a very influential and active Whig. There were frequent instances of the Whigs and Tories not only committing depredations on each other in North and South Carolina, but murdering people along their borders. Gen. Gates, who in 1779 commanded the Southern army, advised Col. Hart to remove with his family to Berkley county, Virginia, where the family of the General resided, and as Col. Hart's property and his life was endangered by remaining where he was, he took the advice of the General and in the

autumn of 1780 removed not to Berkley but to Hagers Town in Maryland, being in an adjoining county though a different State. Col. Hart prevailed upon me to accompany him, proposing and promising to go into mercantile business in Philadelphia. Soon after we arrived at Hagers Town he furnished the capital promised, and I proceeded to Philadelphia by way of Baltimore (then a small place,) in February, 1781, and took lodging at the "Canastoga Wagon," a first rate tavern at that time. I was in no hurry to engage in business until I could consult several persons to whom I had letters, and before I had determined on a plan of business I was taken down with the small-pox in Baltimore; I was confined nine weeks. On discovering what my complaint was I asked Dr. Burke, a Member of Congress, then sitting in Philadelphia, an old friend and acquaintance from North Carolina, to write Col. Hart informing him of my situation. I presume his information was that probably I would not survive the attack, for on the receipt of Dr. Burke's letter Col. Hart purchased a large landed estate, four miles from Hagers Town, of Col. Sam'l Hughes to the amount of ten thousand pounds specie, and drew an order on me in favor of Hughes for all the capital he furnished to me, which was, I think, about £4,000. (I had of my own about £1,000.) He wrote me at the same time that in case I should recover to return to Hagers Town, and some other business should be given me. This draft was presented to me by Col. Hughes' agent after I was considered out of danger, and thwarted all my plans of business in Philadelphia.

I therefore returned to Hagers Town in April, taking Col. Hart's daughter home. She had been sent a year or two before to a boarding school, to the care of the celebrated Robert Morris. She was afterwards Mrs. Pindell.

Soon after my return to Hagers Town I went to North Carolina to settle some business for Col. Hart, returned to Maryland in the autumn and settled on a farm, where I continued until the latter part of 1783, having in the meantime taken another journey to North Carolina on business for Col. Hart.

In November, 1783 (the war being ended and peace declared), I went into business with Col. Hart at Hagers Town, he residing on his farm purchased from Col. Hughes, the business being conducted by me. The next year, 1784, we rented Stull's large merchant mill, and went largely into the purchase of wheat and manufacture of flour. We also established nail and rope factories and did a large business until

1792, when we dissolved partnership and each did business separately. In May, 1785, whilst concerned in business with Col. Hart, Col. Elie Williams and I went to Kentucky to look after some lands we held there and a large tract of 5,000 acres held by Col. Hart. We took with us goods to the amount of about £1,100 for the purpose of paying our expenses with the profit. He returned home in July and I in August, having made a net profit of (£1,000) one thousand pounds.

In the summer of 1786, I was very ill, and a consultation of five physicians decided my case to be very desperate, but after being confined many months I gradually recovered.

I was married in 1788, being then 36 years of age. In 1790 I went to the State legislature as a member, and was so much disgusted with the intrigue and management among the members, that I afterwards uniformly refused to go again during my residence in Maryland. About the year 1791 I was appointed Postmaster at Hagers Town, and held the office until the year 1797, when I was appointed one of the three Judges of the Washington County Court. I was obliged to resign as Postmaster before I could act as Judge. The office I resigned I procured for my nephew, Robert Rochester, then one of my clerks. I was not educated for the law, and not having sufficient knowledge of court rules, I could not conscientiously hold my position as Judge; I therefore resigned in 1798, having held the office about one year.

I discontinued my mercantile business in Hagers Town, and sent Robert Rochester to Bairdstown, in Kentucky, with my stock of goods, when I was again appointed Postmaster, which office I held until 1804. That year I was elected Sheriff of the county, and resigned the office of Postmaster. (Robert Rochester being about 18 years of age only, was soon drawn into dissipated habits at Bairdstown, which induced me to discontinue the business at that place). I had some years before established a business in Lexington, Ky., in connection with Cornelius Beatty, a brother-in-law of mine, where we did a good business until he was made a Colonel of Militia and joined Gen'l Anthony Wayne on an expedition against the Indians. His military life unfitted him for business; I therefore went to Kentucky in 1800 and dissolved the concern, and again in 1802 to finally settle my Kentucky business. Before I returned from Kentucky, in 1800, I visited West Tennessee, where I held 640 acres of land, to which I intended to remove with my family, but finding the country at that time very sickly and newly settled with rough inhabitants, I sold the land.

Col. Thos. Hart removed to Kentucky in 1794, and settled in Lexington. I continued the nail and rope-making and milling business after dissolving with Col. Hart, the first two until I removed from Maryland. I held the Sheriff's office three years—until 1807. At the expiration of my term of office I was appointed the first President of the Hagers Town Bank, with a salary of \$1,000 per annum. I held this position until 1810, when I removed to the State of New York. In 1808, I was elected an Elector of President and Vice-President of the United States, when Mr. Madison was first elected President and George Clinton Vice-President. After my return from Kentucky, in September, 1800, Major Carroll, Col. Fitzhugh, Col. Hilton and I visited the Genesee country in Western New York. Carroll and Fitzhugh purchased 12,000 acres of land, where they now reside. I purchased 400 acres adjoining their land; also, 155 acres at Dansville, upon which I built a paper mill in 1810. In 1802 Carroll, Fitzhugh and myself again visited the Genesee country to look after our interests. We then bought the 100-acre lot which is now included in the village of Rochester, at seventeen dollars and fifty cents (\$17.50) per acre, and I purchased about 200 acres adjoining my 400-acre lot.

In May, 1810, having settled up my mercantile, manufacturing and sheriff's business, I removed to Dansville, Steuben County, State of New York, where I resided five years, erected a large paper mill and made many other improvements, increasing my landed estate there to 700 acres or more, which I sold in the winter of 1814 for \$24,000, and purchased for \$12,728 a farm of 445 acres in Bloomfield, Ontario County, the land being well improved. I resided here three years, say from April, 1815, to April, 1818, when I rented my farm and removed to Rochester. Whilst residing in Bloomfield I was appointed a Director in the Utica Branch Bank at Canandaigua, and resigned in 1823. In 1816 I was appointed an Elector of President and Vice-President of the United States, when Mr. Monroe was elected President and Daniel D. Tompkins Vice-President. In the winter of 1817 I went to Albany as an agent for the petitioners for a new county, but did not succeed. In the winter of 1821 I again went on the same business, and succeeded in getting through a law creating the County of Monroe, and in the spring of the same year I was appointed Clerk of the new county, and was elected Member of Assembly for the same county. I spent about four months in Albany in the winter and spring of 1822 as a Legis-

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lator. In the spring of 1824 a law was passed granting a charter for the Bank of Rochester. I was appointed one of the Commissioners for taking subscriptions and apportioning the capital stock, and in June of the same year was unanimously elected President of the Bank, which office, with that of Director, I resigned in December following, having taken an agency in the bank, very much against my inclination, on the solicitation of a number of citizens, but with an express avowal on my part that I would resign as soon as the bank should be organized and in successful operation, which was the case when I resigned, and when my advanced age and bodily infirmities required that I should retire from business, being then within about two months of entering the seventy-fourth year of my age.

NATHANIEL ROCHESTER.

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