

Finley Holmes - the first Finley in America

In reference to Finley Holmes (b. 1802 and the son of the first Finley) in the biography of Charles Clifton Cowan [husband to Allison Goodwin Treadwell who was the daughter of DeKalb and Marcia (Holmes) Treadwell]: he was the "grandson of Lord Charles Holmes of Ireland",¹ i.e., according to this reference, the father of the first Finley Holmes in America was Lord Charles Holmes of Ireland. Another reference says his father was James Holmes (letter to James E. Holmes, MD from Mrs. F. H. Fant [Ila Myrtice Stephens Fant] in 1973). —» Note: In the three generations of children following the first Finley (b. 1767), there are nine instances of Holmes children with the name of "James", none with the name of "Charles."

Finley Holmes was born in Ireland (reportedly in County Down in the Ulster province of Northern Ireland²) in 1767. He was about 18 years old when he arrived in America in 1785 (21 years by another account).³ The Revolutionary War had ended late in 1783 and the port at Charleston was open and thriving. Finley sailed from Ireland into the Charleston harbor with his cousin William Holmes.⁴ At that time a newly developed area in the middle portion of South Carolina was growing. It would become the grid pattern of streets of Columbia, SC. Sometime upon his landing in South Carolina, Finley purchased two adjacent lots in Columbia on Blossom Street and one lot on Devine Street. All were all located between Assembly Street and Richardson Street (now Main Street), and several (i.e., 8) whole blocks in the southwest part of the new city [shown on the First Map of the City of Columbia, S.C. - 1786 ⁵]. Each block consisted of eight lots. This land was part of a sale that was conducted in Charleston on September 26-27 in 1786 and continued in Columbia on November 10, 1786.⁵

About 1785, Finley met and soon married a local girl named Jenny (Jane) Downes [Downs] whose father was a Major Downs [Downes] in the American army. Her maternal grandfather, Lieutenant Guerry (or Guary), had served with the British regular army under King George III. Jenny was attending a boarding school in Columbia, South Carolina when they met. It was said that she had "money as well as beauty."⁴ Finley and Jenny made their home in Columbia and had a house there. James Holmes, their first born (in 1794), was followed by five more children: William Holmes (born 1797), Mary Catherine Holmes (born 1800), Finley Holmes Jr. (born 1802), Robert Holmes (born 1806), and William Thomas Holmes (born 1810). William, the second born, probably died young, and the name, William, was given to the last child, William Thomas Holmes.²

For the next few years there is little information on what Finley was doing, but in 1807 Finley made the arrangements, without charge, to help ship a parcel of cotton from Columbia to Charleston for two other persons (John Gray and Samuel M'Clannahan). The cotton was given to a shipping agent, but there was a problem caused by the 1807 general embargo against Great Britain and France and the cotton was not shipped until much later, and then only shipped to Boston. The cotton arrive "much damaged and could not be sold." The cotton owners were suing Finley for the loss. In an appeal Finley was found to be not at fault since he delivered it in good shape to the Broad River wharf in Columbia, i.e., he had completed his part of the contract.⁶

In the 1810 Federal Census of Fairfield District (later Fairfield County) SC, "Holmes Finlay" is shown with a household of six males, three females and four slaves.⁷ That year according to a deed, Finley bought plantation land in Fairfield District from Wade Hampton in the amount of \$2000. The parcel was about 406 acres. It was on the Broad River and consisted of land originally granted to Nicholas Vanzanth (Vanzant) and

Cornelius Alder. It was located at and just north of the Terrible Creek in Fairfield County about 25 miles north of Columbia.⁸ Again in 1811 Finley bought another 59½ acres of land from John Morris on the Broad River in Fairfield County for \$1200 (this land was originally granted to Nicholas Vanzanth and was in the vicinity of his other holdings).⁹

Finley Holmes died on June 4th, 1815 and is buried on the plantation in Fairfield County on a hillside overlooking the Broad River just north of the Terrible Creek.¹⁰ Jenny (Jane) Holmes (his wife) and James Holmes (his eldest son) applied for Letters of Administration of the estate to be heard before court of James S. Guignard (Clerk of the Court of Common Pleas and Ordinary of the Richland District) in Columbia on the 17th day of June 1815.⁸

With the estate settled, Jenny (Jane) Holmes along with her eldest son, James now about 22 years of age, and the four younger children (the youngest about 6 years of age) moved to Georgia. Land records show that James purchased land in central Georgia in 1818 - some in the name of his brother, Finley (Jr.), who was a minor.¹¹

Finley Sr. must have brought a good amount of money with him from Ireland since he was able to purchase such a quantity of land in Columbia. His profession in the early years is not known. As for owning a plantation, there is no record of his acquiring farm land in the District of Fairfield until 1810 or later.¹² After his death, an inventory valued at about \$16,000 was recorded in Richland County, South Carolina in August 1815.⁸

References

- ¹ Moore, J. T., & Foster, A. P. (1963/1923). *Tennessee: The volunteer state 1769-1923* (Vol. 4). Nashville: S. J. Clarke. p. 242 [CHARLES CLIFTON COWAN].
- ² Anderson, G. J. (1909). *Genealogy In part, of the Anderson — Owen — Beall Families*. Richmond, VA: Whittet & Shepperson, Printers. pp. 56-63.
- ³ *Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Southern Arkansas*. (1890). Biography of Nathaniel Holmes. Nashville: Goodspeed Publishing.
- ⁴ Beasley, I. (1973). *As I remember them* —. (Memoirs of the Holmes family - printed for family distribution).
- ⁵ First map of the city of Columbia, S.C. (1931 /1786). Tomlinson Engineering Co., Columbia, S.C. (publisher). Identifier schmscl065. From the University of South Carolina Digital Collections. <https://digital.tcl.sc.edu/digital/collection/sclmaps/id/41/rec/1> or search South Carolina Digital Library for *First map of the city of Columbia, S.C.*
- ⁶ *Reports of cases argued and determined in The Supreme Court of South Carolina* [John Gray and M'Clannahan v. Doctor Samuel Todd - February, 1813]. (1917). Book 21 , Vol 4. St. Paul, MN: West Publishing. p. 397. (May be found in The Library of The University Of California Los Angeles, School Of Law).
- ⁷ 1810 United States Federal Census [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2010. for Richland County, SC.
- ⁸ Probate Court, Richland County, South Carolina. The Estate of Finley Holmes, Box 16, Package No. 383.
- ⁹ Land Transactions Fairfield County, SC, Fairfield County, South Carolina, Finley Holmes Estate Sale - 1816 - Fairfield County, SC Book Y. p. 144.

¹⁰ *Find A Grave, database and images www.findagrave.com*: accessed 3 March 2022), memorial page for Finley Holmes (1767–1815), Find A Grave Memorial #75125429, citing Holmes Plantation Cemetery, Fairfield County, South Carolina, USA; Maintained by holmes (contributor 47583071).

¹¹ *Georgia Property Tax Digests - 1818*, Pulaski County, GA.

¹² Land Transactions Fairfield County, SC, Fairfield County, South Carolina - 1810 - Book T. p. 184.

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