

## GENERAL THOMAS OVERTON

Claude H. Moore, Turkey, N. C.

The Overton family has been traced back to Robert Overton, who was born in Holderness, Yorkshire, England, about 1609. He was the son of John Overton. Robert Overton was one of Cromwell's generals in the Parliamentary wars. In 1650, he accompanied Cromwell to Scotland and was made Governor of Edinburgh. It was of Robert Overton that the great poet, John Milton, was speaking when he wrote:

"Bound to me these many years past in a friendship of more than brotherly closeness and affection, both by the similarity of our tastes and the sweetness of your manners."

Robert Overton's son, William, was born in England in 1638 and came, in 1669, to New Kent County, Virginia, where he was granted 4600 acres of land. He married Mary Elizabeth Waters of Saint Sepulcher's Parish, London. William Overton's son, Captain James Overton, married Elizabeth Garland, and had a son, James, who married Mary Waller and lived in Louisa County, Virginia.

James Overton's son, General Thomas Overton, was born on August 15, 1753. Thomas Overton served throughout the Revolution; second lieutenant, Ninth Virginia Regiment, August 14, 1776, first lieutenant, 1778; transferred to First Virginia on March 14, 1778; lieutenant adjutant, Fourth Continental Dragons, July 1, 1779; and was made Captain on April 24, 1781.

Thomas Overton moved to Moore County, North Carolina, in 1787, and was made Colonel of Cavalry for the district of Fayette by the General Assembly. He represented Moore County in the N. C. State Senate during the years from 1787 to 1790. The *Colonial Records* show that he was granted a large tract of land in Moore County.

In 1787, Thomas Overton was married to Sarah Woodson of Louisa County, Virginia, who is said to have been a great friend of Martha Washington. They had the following children:

1. Jane Overton, married James Moore, the son of James Moore and Ann (Thomson) Moore, and lived at "Vineyard Hill" plantation near Clinton, North Carolina. They had the following children: Thomas (Governor of Louisiana, 1860-1864); Maria, Jane, Walter, Sarah, Henry, Anne, John, James, Hardy, and Harriet.

2. Maria Overton, married Captain Isaac Butler of North Carolina and lived in Rutherford County, Tennessee.

3. Walter Hampden Overton, was born in Moore County, N. C., in 1778.\* He entered the army in 1808 as lieutenant in the Seventh Infantry and was promoted to higher ranks until the War of 1812. At the Battle of New Orleans, he commanded the forts Jackson and St. Phillip. He was made Major-General by the Louisiana Legislature for his gallant conduct in this battle. In 1815, General Walter Overton retired from the army and engaged in planting in Rapides Parish near Alexandria, Louisiana. In 1828, he was elected as a Democrat to the Twenty-first Congress. General Overton married Harriet F. Winter of Louisiana and had several children (names of descendants unknown to writer).

### Second Wife a Sister of Governor Holmes of Clinton.

After the death of Sarah Woodson Overton, Thomas Overton was married (1795) to Penelope Holmes, the daughter of Gabriel and Mary Carson Holmes of Clinton, Sampson County, North Carolina and a sister of Governor Gabriel Holmes. They had the following children:

1. John Holmes Overton, was born in Fayetteville, N. C., on March 28, 1797. He moved to Opelousas, Louisiana and in 1828 was married to Emily M. King. They had one son, Thomas, who married Laura Waddill and had two children: John Holmes Overton, who is now a United States Senator from Louisiana, and Winston Overton who was an Associate Justice of the Louisiana State Supreme Court until his death in 1934. John H. Overton, Sr., died in New York City on March 25, 1883.

2. Patrick Henry Overton, was born in North Carolina in 1801. He married Rebecca Phillips of Tennessee and moved to Louisiana where he died in 1866.

3. Harriet B. Overton, was born in Tennessee in 1803. She married Robert C. Hynson in 1828 and moved to Louisiana. They had several children but their names are unknown.

4. William S. Overton died at the United States Military Academy at West Point, N. Y.

5. James G. Overton, died without marry-

## AN INTERESTING REVIEW OF THE MINUTES OF SPRING HILL TEMPERANCE SOCIETY 1855-1872

By ARNOLD A. MCKOY.

"This which you now behold is sparkling water, a beverage prescribed by God himself to nourish and invigorate his creatures and to beautify his footstool. As you thus see its countless drops unite and blend into one, so may we blend together in one unruffled stream whose purity shall wash away the stains of Black Intemperance. As one stain would suffice to discolor the whole element of purity, so would one unworthy member disgrace our whole society . . ."

### Spring Hill a Breeding Ground of Real Men.

The foregoing is a part of the ritual of the Richmond Temperance and Literary Society founded at Spring Hill on September 25, 1855. Spring Hill and the Riverton community, situated about five miles above Laurinburg in Scotland county, has long had a cultural and spiritual background. Here it was that John Charles McNeill, the finest poetic genius yet born within the State's borders, saw dawn, grew to stature, met the sunset. Archibald Johnson, militant editor, and his preacher-brother Livingston Johnson; the Shaws, the Livingstons, the McMillans and others—ministers, lawyers, farmers, good citizens all—grew up in the shadow of old Richmond Academy and the Spring Hill Baptist church. "Father" Monroe was pastor at Spring Hill for more than fifty years; and many are the legends that have grown about his memory. They like to tell, for instance, of the time the community was suffering from a terrible drought. At Sunday worship members of his flock importuned him to offer up a prayer for rain. Of course the man of God obliged. Before Father Monroe had concluded his one-hour sermon, however, so many bridges and roads had been washed away that most of the congregation did not get back home until the middle of the following week. Ever after, though the most pious were a little backward in asking their good man for prayers, nobody doubted at all how he rated with celestial forces. But I digress. Back to our Society.

### The Society's Minute Book.

The minutes book of the Society is still preserved. The following facts and impressions are gathered from the yellowed old record. It cost 25 cents to join the Society; all proceedings were secret; and no unworthy name could be offered for membership. Everybody upon joining took the following pledge: "I will neither make (underscored heavily), buy, sell, nor use as a beverage

### General Overton Moves to Tennessee.

About 1801, General Thomas Overton moved to Davidson County, Tennessee. He became a great friend of Andrew Jackson and was Jackson's second in the famous Dickinson duel of 1805. Thomas Overton died in 1825 and was buried a few miles west of Nashville, near the "Hermitage."

Another prominent member of the Overton family was Thomas Overton's younger brother, John Overton, who was born in Louisa County, Virginia, in 1766. John Overton studied law and moved to Nashville, Tennessee, in 1789. He was elected to the Superior Court in 1804, and served until 1809. In 1811, he was elected to Tennessee Supreme Court and served until 1816. In 1794, John Overton and General Andrew Jackson purchased the land on which the city of Memphis now stands.

"Judge Overton was mentally and morally a sound and strong man. All his qualities appear to have been substantial rather than brilliant. He was liberal in temperament, and while earnest in advancing his fortune, was a progressive and public-spirited citizen. Probably no man of his time contributed more to the material growth of the State. He is with propriety accorded a high place in the history of Tennessee, and his descendants may justly be proud of the good and honorable name that he has left them." Overton died on April 12, 1833.

"One of the largest and strongest families in Tennessee is descended from John Overton. It is connected with the leading families in all parts of the state, and is especially strong at Nashville, Memphis, and Knoxville."

\*Editorial Note: An error here. His parents came to Moore County in 1887. The next date 1808 would be too early for the third child of a marriage of 1887 to enter the army. However, the error may be in the year of the marriage and the arrival, which is indicated by the unlikelihood that a Virginian would be chosen a North Carolina senator the very year of his coming to this state.

age any intoxicating drink whatever; and I will regard this obligation binding as I regard my honor sacred." Breaking the pledge cost \$5 for the first offense; expulsion came with the second descent from the water wagon. Alas, the records show that many good members backslid from time to time! Exercises consisted of debates on current questions; a musical or reading number; sometimes an oration or declamation; an open forum, or a public address by a visiting big shot. Women were as active as men in all meetings. Let us now see from the old minutes book what was on the minds of these simple seekers after truth.

### Society Opposed the South's Going to War.

By 1860 war was in the air. Should the South Go To War? was debated. No, was the decision of the judges. (Suppose the doings of the Society had not been secret and some of the professionally patriotic organizations like the Legion, D. A. R., and such had learned of the decision: there would have been war locally, anyway). One year later, however, the same question was argued. Even when the decision was put to the house there was no reversal—there came back again a thunderous No! Other matters which were dialectically disposed of at these weekly afternoon meetings were such questions as these: If You Do Not Like a Person Is It Prudent To Let Him Know It? Yes. Should One Make a Will? Yes. Is a College Graduate a Better Citizen? Emphatically decided in the negative. Should Women Be Educated Like Men? Fifty-fifty on this question. Once decided negatively, but the women—or the feminine question, at any rate—had the last word because in debating the issue a few years later the affirmative won. As it always does too, war brought its tragic and terrific problems. Should Bushwhacking Be Resorted To By Southern Forces? Should a Confederate Officer Known To Touch a Drop of Liquor Be Deprived of His Command? Should Our Property Be Destroyed Ruthlessly to Prevent Capture by the Enemy? And so on. One can sense instinctively from the old minutes book that things are not so well with the little band who have joined together to be temperate in habits and cultural in aim.

### Society Hall Ravaged by Yankees.

Then on April 26, 1865, comes this entry: "After a considerable interval caused by an unwelcome visit from Sherman's thieves, the Society meets again. And, of course, when God's own house is outraged by the Yankee brutes temples of morality and science will not be respected. We find ornaments of our little temple shattered and ruined. Our book-shelves are empty (underscored), the graves strewn with fragments of valuable volumes, the speeches and productions of members who are sleeping in their silent graves trampled and torn in the mire like pearls before swine. Ye illiterate beasts! Ye children of vice! Ye have not demoralized us!"

Oh, but they had. Despair began to settle over the Society. Economic matters are debated while Demon Rum is quite forgotten. During reconstruction, members spend their time with such questions as a Southern protective tariff, the need of agricultural clubs, the most useful profession (teaching came first, printing second, blacksmithing third, farming fourth, moulding fifth, and tailoring a poor sixth), repudiation of war debts, and other dull, necessary problems of living. Only once does the old-time fierceness and logic display return. This was in the meeting, so we are informed, that "Greek met Greek in solid phalanx of argument" over the question: Resolved, that there was more to admire than to condemn in the career of Oliver Cromwell. A verra, verra deeficul' question for some Scots to decide, if you ask me for an opinion. The secretary wrote that the "debate lasted until dark" and was finally decided in the negative by the President with "a good deal of reluctance."

### A Fit Motto for These Days.

In 1871 the records end abruptly. Somebody read the popular poem, "Southrons, Yield Not To Despair" clipped from a Southern paper. Written in large capitals in the minutes book is the pass-word now at all meetings: BE CHEERFUL! That's all. Passing through another similar Gethsemane in 1935, Southrons and Northrons could do worse than adopt the same old pass-word writing it bravely in the same bold chirography: BE CHEERFUL!

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