

CHAPTER IV

THE BATTLE ARMS AND CREST

by

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Present interest in the Battle Arms and Crest dates, at least in the North Carolina branch of the family, from about the year 1890. At that time, when Mr. William S. Battle moved from his old Tarboro residence called The Barracks to Lone Pine in the country some five miles away, his son Octavius found among the family papers a curious old seal of the sort that in old times was used for making impressions on wax in sealing letters and signing documents. This seal was engraved with a shield and crest but had no name or motto. Neither Mr. William S. Battle, nor anybody else, knew anything whatever about its history or about the significance of its design. There could be no doubt, however, that it had belonged to his father, James S. Battle, of Cool Spring, who died in 1854 at the age of sixty-eight.

The seal is in the form of an ellipse about three-fourths by one-half of an inch in size, but being finely cut makes a clear impression. The accompanying drawing is a careful enlargement. It shows a shield surmounted by a crest. As usual in heraldry, colors are indicated by dots and hatching. The shield is purple with a gold border scalloped on the inner edge. In the center is a gold griffin with outspread wings, rearing as if about to fly to the beholder's left. The crest consists of a crown with vertical rays out of which rises a man's arm bent at the elbow, holding towards the beholder's left a complicated form of cross. It will be noticed that the man's arm is a right arm; that the arms of the cross are themselves crosses and do not end in knobs; that the foot of the cross is pointed; and that there are no balls on the rays of the crown. Some of the dies and book-plates supposed to be copied from the seal are incorrect in one or more of these respects. Of the colors of the crest we can not be sure except that the crown is gold. In our drawing the cross is shown red but this is not clear on the seal.

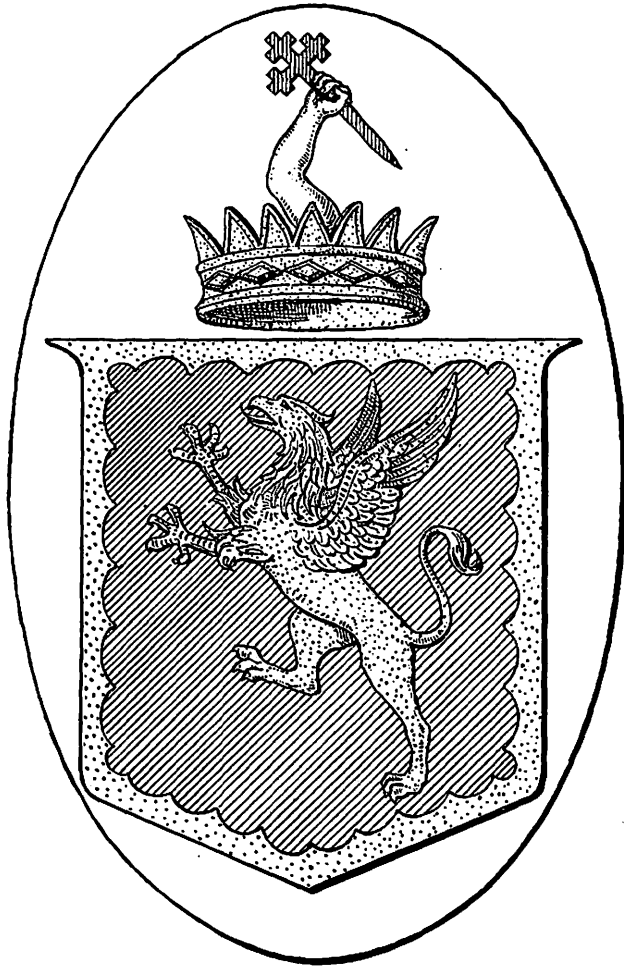
The seal on discovery was given to the only daughter of the house, Elizabeth Dancy Battle; on her death it passed to her brother Octavius, its discoverer; since he died, it has been in the possession of his family.

In the investigation of the seal Miss Battle naturally had recourse to the great English books of heraldic arms, Burke's General Armory² and Fairbairn's Book of Crests³. She found (1) that Burke gave arms for the following names resembling Battle: Batell; Baterell; Batley (Yorkshire); Batley, Battley, Battaley or Batte-

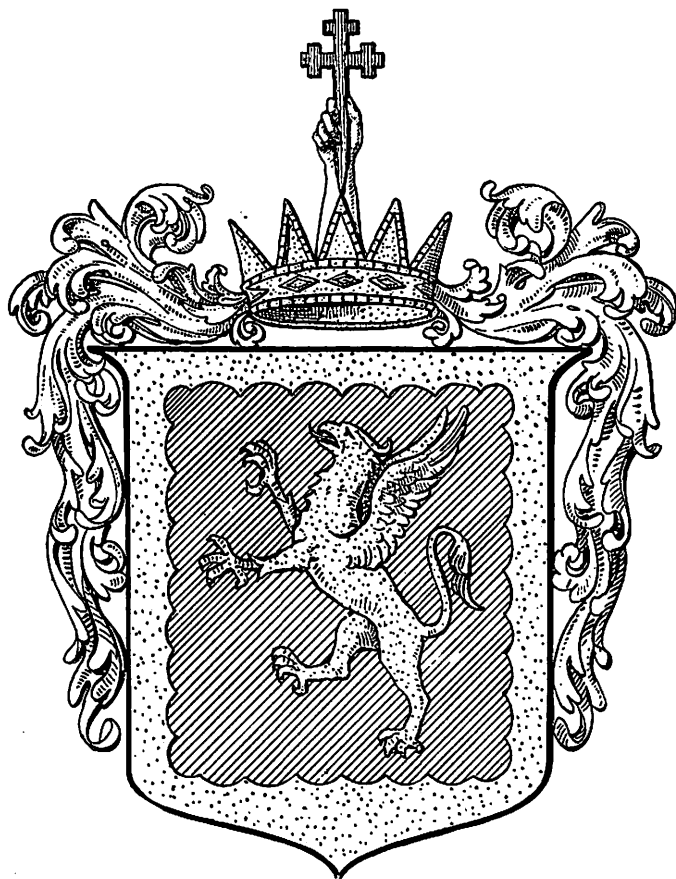
¹See Table 59.

²Burke, John, and Burke, John Bernard. *Encyclopaedia of Heraldry and General Armory of England, Scotland, and Ireland*, comprising a registry of all armorial bearings from the earliest to the present time, including the late grants by the College of Arms. [No illustrations] 1st edition, apparently 1842; 2nd edition, apparently 1844; 3rd edition, with a supplement, apparently 1851: London, Henry G. Bohn, York Street, Covent Garden.

³Fairbairn's *Book of Crests of the Families of Great Britain and Ireland*, being a fourth edition revised and enlarged in two volumes [Vol. I, Text; Vol. II, Ills.]: T. C. and E. C. Jack, London W. C., 34 Henrietta Street, and Edinburgh, 1905. (1st edition in 1859; revised edition 1892).



Mr. James S. Battle's Seal
(enlarged)



The Battle Arms and Crest
as blazoned by Burke and Fairbairn
for the Battayll or Bataille family

ley; Battayll or Battaille; Battell; Battell (another family); Batvil; (2) that of these Batell, Battayll or Battaille, Battell (both families), and Batvil had arms showing a rearing griffin though the colors differed; (3) that Burke's blazon of the arms and crest of the Battayll or Battaille family corresponded to the arms and crest of the seal; (4) that Fairbairn gave the same crest as Burke for the Battayll or Battaille family. Battle being obviously a simpler way of spelling Battayll and Battaille as pronounced in England and the Battles having come to Virginia as early as 1653 from the land of the Battayll or Battaille family it seemed a fair inference that the arms and crest of Mr. James S. Battle's seal which were those of the Battayll or Battaille family were also those of the Battle family.

That the family spelled its name variously in England is shown by the forms Batell, Battell, Batvil, given by Burke as belonging to families bearing essentially the same arms as the Battayll or Battaille family. That the American family originally pronounced its name Battle is shown by the fact that the earliest wearers of the name in the seventeenth century in Virginia spelled it now Batell, now Battell, now Battle. South of Virginia the name became regularly Battle. In Virginia and elsewhere Battailles and Batailles and Batailes are still found. In the North-east the name Battell and Battelle are known. All these forms of the name, now accented on the last syllable, were probably formerly pronounced Battle like Lid-dell, Riddell, and Waddell that used to be Liddle, Riddle, and Waddle, but followed the spelling into Lid-dell, Rid-dell, and Wad-dell.

If objection be made that no official right has been shown for bearing these arms and crest, reply may be made (1) that, while direct connection between the American Battle family and the English family of Battayll or Battaille has not been proved or so far as we know even investigated, Mr. James S. Battle who lived a hundred years ago may very well have known more about it than we do; (2) that Mr. James S. Battle, while a man of substance and education, was so simple in his tastes and practical in his interests that he is not likely to have possessed so useless and uncommon an article as a heraldic seal unless by inheritance or by strong reason for its purchase; (3) that as stated by both Burke and Fairbairn the use of arms and crest is not confined even in England to those officially authorized; (4) that in America we have no recognized authority to determine heraldic rights and consequently there can not be any official right whatever and no right of any kind except that of reason and good taste.

With arms naturally go mottoes. The James S. Battle seal bears none. On the statement of Culleton's Heraldic Office, 92 Piccadilly, London, in a letter dated July 24, 1903, that "*Justum et tenacem* (Just and tenacious) has been used with this coat of arms and crest by some families", Dr. H. B. Battle favored that. Others, apparently without authority, advocated *Ex bello pax* (Out of war peace). No motto, however, is given for any form of the Battle name either by Burke or Fairbairn. In fact mottoes are not registered in the English College of Heralds at all.

If we seek to know the significance of the arms and crest used by the Battles, there is no authoritative answer. Yet it does not seem fanciful to see in the fierce griffin and the strong right arm allusions to the name Battle and symbols of the determination of the family to fight for the faith and prize typified by the Cross and Crown.

Not satisfied with the information that Miss Battle had secured, Mr. Frank Battle Dancy, also a grand-child of Mr. James S. Battle, went to some pains to learn more. He could not investigate the matter in England but his study of the

heraldic authorities was not devoid of result. In neither Burke nor Fairbairn did he find illustrations of arms or crest. Burke, he found, as Miss Battle had reported, gives exactly the same *arms* for the Battayll or Battaille family as those of Mr. James S. Battle's seal:

Purp. a griffin segreant, within a bordure engr. or.

That is: A purple (purp.=purpure) shield bearing a gold (or) griffin rearing (segreant), within a gold (or) border (bordure) whose inner edge is scalloped (engr.=engrailed).

For the Battayll or Battaille *crest* Burke gives:

Out of an antique crown or, a dexter arm ppr. holding a cross crosslet fitchee in pale gu.

That is: A right arm in natural colors (ppr.=proper) rising out of an antique gold (or) crown holding upright (in pale) a red (gu.=gules) cross crosslet with a pointed foot (fitchee).

Earlier editions of Fairbairn give the same blazon as Burke. The latest adds the word *cubit* before arm:

Out of an antique crown or, a dexter cubit arm ppr., holding a cross crosslet fitched (the same as fitchee) in pale gu.

The genealogist and heraldist, John Matthews, 93 Chancery Lane, London, in a letter to Mr. Dancy, dated May 24, 1918, writes: "I beg to say that when an arm only is mentioned it is the same as 'cubit' arm, that is, cut off below the elbow. When the whole of the arm is meant, then it is called 'embowed',—that is, bent at the elbow." These statements are borne out by other authorities. The later editions of Fairbairn therefore did not add the word cubit to make a difference but only to clarify the description. This being so, the crest of the James S. Battle seal is not identical with that of the Battayll or Battaille family in Burke and Fairbairn inasmuch as it shows an embowed arm, that is, one bent at the elbow, while the Battayll or Battaille arm is a forearm. The seal crest is different in another respect from the Battayll or Battaille crest as set forth in Burke and Fairbairn: the cross is held at an angle, not *in pale*, that is, upright. Not having a clear idea of the heraldic meaning of *arm*, *cubit arm*, and *in pale* Miss Battle had failed to notice these differences.

Whether the seal form or that of Burke and Fairbairn is correct is not easy to decide. The oldest edition of Burke dates from 1842, the oldest Fairbairn from 1859, but the blazons they give are of course older, though neither of the books claims that they are official. Mr. James S. Battle died in 1854 and the seal certainly antedates that year, but how much we do not know. Mr. Dancy was of opinion that Burke and Fairbairn, being learned heraldic experts, were very likely to give the correct blazon, that the seal variations were due to a misunderstanding on the part of the engraver, and that consequently the arm should be a forearm only and should hold the cross upright. Furthermore he thought such a position symbolically more appropriate, recalling the position of the Cross on Calvary and pointing to the skies as a goal.

It is to be noted that "Crests are usually displayed upon a wreath . . . but when they issue from a crown . . . they have no wreath. Ladies with the exception of the sovereign have no crest."¹

¹The Manual of Heraldry, edited by Francis J. Grant, W. S., Lyon King of Arms, new and revised edition, Edinburgh, 1929, page 71.