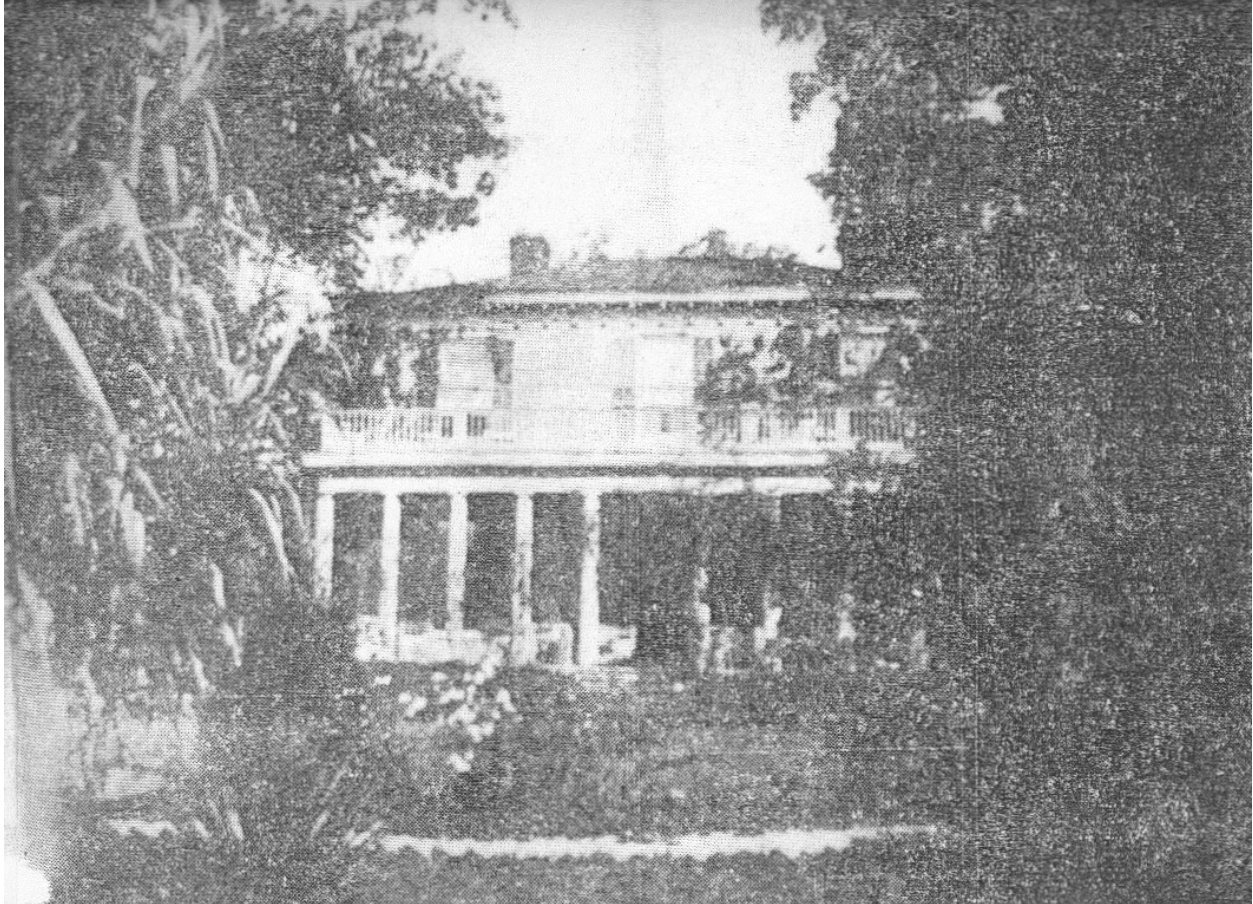


## Cool Spring Plantation

### One of Finest Edgecombe Ante-Bellum Homes Burned to Ground in 1889



1 Cool Spring - Before 1899 Fire

Br Dr. Margaret Battle

In 1747, Elisha Battle (1723-1799) came into Edgecombe County from Virginia, bringing his wife, two children, and about six slaves with him. He obtained land grants along the Tar River. The plantation was called Cool Spring, getting its name from a spring on the river bank about 400 yards from the house. The kitchen building stands today; the big fireplace (now minus its stone hearth) still has a hook hanging from its chimney. An adjoining room was a loom room in the early days, an ironing room later.

Elisha's son Jacob Battle (1754-1814) lived in a house on the plantation about one mile from his father's; this house is known as Old Town.

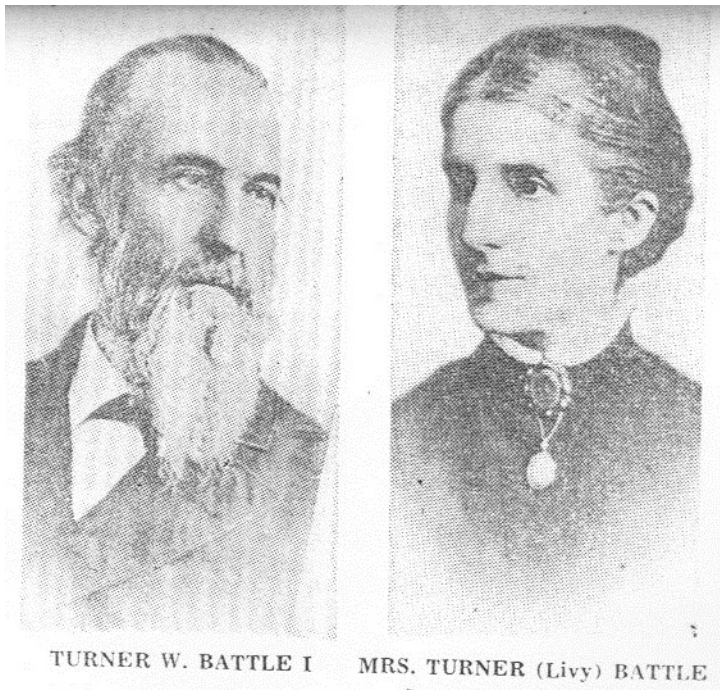
James Smith Battle ((1786-1854) enlarged his father's and grandfather's lands to 20,000 acres and the slaves to over 500. There were spinners, tailors, weavers, carpenters, and masons at Cool Spring. All the work clothes were made on the place, as well as wagons, carts and ploughs. James

restored his grandfather's old house. Rose garden and kitchen garden were north of the house; east of it were the dairy, smoke house, stables, and gin house.

About 1850, he built a new house in front (south) of the old one. Here was a library with books on floor to ceiling on one wall, and on both sides of the marble fireplace on another. The parlor also had a marble fireplace. Master bedroom, nursery, another small room and dining room completed the first floor. Upstairs were 4 bedrooms, each with an alcove for a washstand with its china accessories. The alcoves were curtained off or screened from the main room. A green house was on the west side and beyond that stretched the cotton fields as far as the eye could see. The front yard was a 12 acre grove with curving drive. A double lane of cedars bordered the walk to the dairy; 12 separate walks led from the house. The walks are gone now, but the daffodils still come up as mute witnesses to their former patterns. There used to be beds of iris, tulips, and lilies of the valley.

### Estate Divided

In 1854, on James Smith Battle's death, the 20,000 acres were divided between his five surviving children. The eldest son William received the cotton and grist mills and the farm called California; Cool Spring (now 3000 acres) went to his son Turner Westry Battle; Walnut Creek farm went to daughter Martha Ann, later Kemp Plummer Battle; Penelo farm went to Penelope, (who married General William Ruffin Cos); Shell Bank and Elm Grove farms went to Mary Eliza (who married first William Dancy and later Dr. Newsome Jones Pittman.)



In 1854 Turner Westray Battle (the first) (1827-1895) became the owner of Cool Spring. Some idea of living conditions and customs may be had from the following letters:

January 29, 1850, Mrs. Turner Battle wrote to Miss Mary Eliza Battle, "The distressing weather has rendered traveling almost impractical, but as soon as the roads are in a better state, we will count

on having you at home. Turner will see Brother William tomorrow and make arrangement as to your escort. Our quiet routine of home duties and pleasures lack much of its zest when you girls are absent. We miss the joyous laughter and pleasant evening music that soothe or enliven us... We should feel thankful for escaping colds and coughs this bitter, bitter winter... the river has been frozen across, and though I have wished to go over to Pork Island, the state of the roads has prevented my making this attempt... The stove reached here this evening, more than a month since it was started from Raleigh..."

On Feb. 22, 1851, Mrs. Turner Battle wrote to Miss M.E. Battle, (Philadelphia) "Turner reached here today and I write you to let you know his wishes about the commissions that you are kind enough to attend to for us. He neglected to mention anything about the chamber sets. Please get two sets of colored ware for the chambers. I do not wish them at all costly; no gilt about them. The parlor chandelier I prefer to be of bronze four burners to burn on oil. The dining room lamps please get of bronze also, with two burners. Please get these plain and substantial, to burn lard or oil. I hardly think it necessary to get one for the hall.

"Turner mentioned seeing some mirrors with the gilt frame. The mantel measures 5 feet, 4 inches... I think the parlor mirror would be prettier to be rounded off in some graceful way at the top... square at the bottom, and somewhat curved out at the top. In getting the lamps, please get some of those 'little concerns,' (I don't know the name), that protect the walls from smoke of the burners, one for each burner. "I miss you girls very much and look forward with great eagerness to your return to dear quiet home. The white hyacinths are looking so lovely. They bloom prettier here than anywhere else, I think. Cool Spring is beginning to assume its vernal beauties, and then you know sweetly everything looks."

March 3, 1855 Mrs. Turner Battle to Mary Eliza Battle in Philadelphia: "...please when selecting the suspension lamps be careful not to forget to have them provided .... with a plenty supply of wicks. As to the parlor mirror, I can only say I leave it to your taste... though I have a penchant for a mahogany or rosewood frame. You know our carpet and curtains are dark, and the mantel is of Egyptian marble." (The gilt mirror was selected.) "... they house will be ready when they reach here I expect. Mr. Price will be here next week; isn't he worrying. We must make him hurry when he comes, if we hope to get in the new house this sprint..." (This house is reported to have been started in 1850, James S. Battle died in 1854, so it may be that 'Livy' was only redecorating.)

November 28, 1855. On the marriage of Martha Ann Battle to Mr. Kemp Plummer Battle, Mrs. Turner Battle (Livy) writes: "We had 40 guests who remained all night, so you might know I was busy to make them all comfortable such cold weather and thus stored them away, two by two. The Misses Sommerville, Miss Broronlove, Miss Sud Plummer, Miss Margaret Norfleet, Miss Betty Parker, Mrs. Austin, Mollie Battle, Mittie and little ones were the lady part of the company who rested here all night and such a nice clever set of gentlemen... Pattie", (the bride), "behaved in the most proper manner imaginable. She was a good deal frightened, but evinced her usual self control. She looked more handsome than I ever saw her, in a dress of white corded silk, worn under an embroidered lisse, with three shirts. Kemp, of course, was all smiles and happiness... The girls accompanied her to Chapel Hill on Friday where there was to be great feasting and merry making." (This was right after the wedding.)

Jan. 17, 1856 Ellen Brownlowe to Mary Eliza Battle on the above wedding: "I have been wishing to write you ever since I was at Pattie's wedding; to tell you how much I enjoyed the party, how delighted I was to be with you all; how I admired Livy as mistress of ceremonies. I think Cool Spring one of the most beautiful country residences I ever visited... But far more striking to a visitor is the hearty hospitality of its Master, seconded so admirably by the unequalled grace and dignity, the gentle elegance of Livy's welcomes. I do think Livy the loveliest creature I ever beheld. Now I am not saying this for you to tell her, Eliza, I am expressing an opinion in confidence. Then in the family picture come the fair young sisters – hem – (I'm clearing my throat, Eliza). But I shant tell you what I think of you. I think Neppie is beautiful... only here is more intelligent in her beauty", and a vein of quiet humor. Pattie I have thought the best almost of the earth and having more common sense than any of you."

The church was a very important of Mrs. Turner Battle's life. She used to come to church every Sunday in a carriage drawn by two horses. She always brought a pail full of flowers for the church, and food for the needy at the Falls. Livy (Mrs. Battle) was remembered as a very dainty person, always seen with a book in her hand, and never involved in domestic chores.

### A Fateful Night

One of her closest friends was Mrs. Benjamin Bunn, Mittie Harriet Amanda Bunn). They lived only six miles apart, but communicated mostly by mail, because the roads were so bad. On a fateful night in 1899, three members of Bunn household were awakened from a sound sleep by something. Little Maud Bunn came crying to the head of the stairs; her mother downstairs had been awakened too. The house was searched; (the men in the family were armed with gold headed canes, no guns being allowed in the house.) Nothing was found, no doors were open, the grounds were searched. But no explanation was apparent. Then in the morning came the news that Cool Spring has burned to the ground at the same hour that the Bunn family six miles away had been alarmed. Jie Bunn had been fatally burned, (the Turner Battle's grandson and third cousin in the Bunn children.)

So upset were the Turner Battles by this tragedy, that the rebuilt Cool Spring was one story high and all room in the house had windows that opened to the floor. No one would ever be trapped in an upstairs room.

After Turner Battle's death, the property was divided between his five children: Jacob (1852-1916); Turner Westray Battle, the second (1856-1907); Gaston Battle (1871 – 1937); Harriett Westray Battle Bunn (1856–1884). The second Turner was a bachelor and left the Cool Spring home place to his nephew, the third Turner, son of Jacob. This third Turner was an Annapolis graduate and eventually sold his share to Mr. Tom Simmons. Mr. Simmons' daughter, Mrs. Betty Lynch, now owns the part of Cool Spring that has the house and grove. Jacob's share, about 750 acres, was left to his two daughters Mrs. Frank Wilkinson and Mrs. Edward Eatman. So this part of Cool Spring has been in the family over 200 years through six generations.

The workers on Cool Spring have contributed much to the success and legends of the plantation. The Battle sons have grown up knowing the Negro boys on the plantation as their friends. Many of the daughters have learned the art of cooking from the mistress of the kitchen. Nobody can forget Will and

his trouble with the new overseer. There was a misunderstanding with the result that the overseer shot Will in the back with bird shot, then overtook him and in the scuffle, Will pulled out a knife and inflicted a minor wound. But this became infected and the overseer died. Will walked all night to find James Battle then 25 miles away to present his case. On hearing all the evidence, the master decided his slave was innocent and set a precedent in getting him a lawyer. Will was found guilty in lower court but cleared in the higher court.

Uncle Dick had a wife who belonged to the neighbors. When the latter decided to move to another state, Uncle Dick came into great distress to James S. Battle. Arrangements were then made to have the neighbor buy Uncle Dick. The he began thinking of the prospect of a new master; so he came again to James Battle, asking to be kept. Whereupon the wife was bought by the Battles. Uncle Dick and Aunt Rose, his wife, are buried close to James S. Battle in the family graveyard at Old Town on Uncle Dick's request.

During "War Between the States", the three white men on the plantation were away; this left Mrs. Turner Battle (Livy) running the estate. The farm products were being used to supply the Confederate Army. Nevertheless the 30 or 40 colored families on the plantation were just as well behaved and industrious as if the master and overseers had been home.