

THE STORY OF

SEA ISLAND COTTON

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Brick House/Stanyarne Hall

JOHNS ISLAND

Brick House was a two-and-a-half-story stuccoed brick residence situated near the north bank of Abbapoola Creek. Although the eighteenth-century owner of the tract, Joseph Stanyarne, bequeathed to his wife Elizabeth Stobo the "use and occupation of my plantation where I now reside and also of the brick Messuage [residence] and other buildings thereon,"¹ photographs show a nineteenth-century building whose dominant design influence was the Greek Revival.

At the façade's strong central pediment was a lunette window above unusual round-arched openings that read as Classical niches. Four French doors opened into twin parlors; matching doors across the second level indicate a two-tiered front porch whose design has not been documented. Palladian windows at the gable ends were elegant details on the very plain side elevations.

The interior had a four-room plan, with a large sliding door in the center wall connecting the two front parlors. Smaller rear rooms were separated by the stair hall. Greek Revival door surrounds with their ornate corner blocks, and mantels with molded architraves, were decorative elements typical of the 1830s.

Exactly when Joseph Stanyarne's "brick Messuage" was replaced, and by whom, has not been learned. His son William, who lived at nearby Acorn Hill, was heir to the property after his



Brick House/Stanyarne Hall, ca. 1930 (*From the collections of the South Carolina Historical Society*)



Brick House Interior, ca. 1930 (*From the collections of the South Carolina Historical Society*)

mother, but both died in 1784.² Anna Stanyarne, William's daughter, inherited Brick House Plantation, and owned it during the years when sea island cotton became the primary crop on Johns Island. Miss Stanyarne might have spent some of her time on Johns Island, but her principal residence was in Charleston, and she was not actively engaged in planting.

Anna Stanyarne's brother-in-law Charles Freer, the husband of her sister Mary, seems to have planted and occupied the Brick House property, although he resided in Charleston, and also planted rice near Willtown. Freer's estate inventory, made in 1816, includes furniture and personal possessions "at the Johns Island residence of Miss Stanyarne."³ Freer's daughter Maria Augusta was a great favorite and principal legatee of her aunt Anna, who bequeathed her much of the family silver (eighteen spoons and a ladle engraved "Stanyarne").⁴ Maria Augusta Freer treated Brick House as her heritage—it was she who placed several ornate marble tombstones in the family cemetery on the property,⁵ lending credence to the local tradition that her family had lived there. It could have been during the Freer tenure that the house was built.

After Anna Stanyarne's death in 1836, the Brick House was sold to make a partition among her heirs. Advertised as 891 acres "more or less,"⁶ it was conveyed as 967 acres. The buyer, B. D. Roper, paid \$17,200, less than \$18 an acre, for the plantation with its masonry house.⁷

When Benjamin Dart Roper bought Brick House in 1837, he was sixty years old and had been planting on Johns Island for at least thirty years. Since 1824, his plantation seat had been at Rush's Plantation, south of Abbapoola Creek, but he and his wife Barbara Calder Jenkins kept a house in Charleston throughout their lives. In their later years, they often shared quarters with one or more of their children and grandchildren.⁸ Theirs was a happy home: Roper's

will left slaves, horses, household goods, and the “plantation called Rush’s on John’s Island where I usually reside... to my beloved wife with whom I have now lived forty-three years and upwards in a union of undiminished affection...”⁹

In 1850, Roper had already given plantations to his two eldest sons, but he still owned nearly 2,000 acres on Johns Island, 847 acres of it under cultivation. This land made seventy-one bags of sea island cotton in 1849. The 1850 census lists three of Roper’s sons on Johns Island. At The Oaks, originally conveyed to B. D. Roper by his father-in-law Micah Jenkins, were M. Jenkins Roper and his wife Susan. Thomas and Mary Roper and their baby Julia were at Capes, also formerly owned by Micah Jenkins. Dr. William Roper and his family were at the Brick House.

William Roper had married only a few years before. His wife Mary Julia Stevens, a Stanyarne descendant, was more than a decade younger than he. During her ten years as a married woman, Mary Julia had at least four children, and died in 1856 not long after the birth of Gertrude. William Roper was married again, to the even-younger Mary Anne Mathews, also of Johns Island,¹⁰ and for the 1860 census reported a household of daughters, the baby being one year old.

Dr. William Roper began planting the Brick House while it still belonged to his father. After their parents’ deaths, the heirs divided the estate, and William continued at the Brick House, producing fifty bags of cotton in 1859.

Roper struggled financially after the Civil War and made some bad decisions about his property. Mortgages he gave were foreclosed during the 1870s, and Brick House Plantation was sold for satisfaction.¹¹ Decades as a farmhouse rented with the land were followed by years of vacancy, and the “very fine old house” was demolished in the 1950s.¹²

1. “Will of Joseph Stanyarne,” Charleston County Wills, Book 14, p. 263, Charleston County Public Library.
2. “Will of Joseph Stanyarne.” Laylon Wayne Jordan and Elizabeth H. Stringfellow, *A Place Called St. John’s, The Story of John’s, Edisto, Wadmalaw, Kiawah, and Seabrook Islands of South Carolina* (Spartanburg: The Reprint Company), p. 289.
3. Charleston County Inventories, Book E, p. 366, CCPL.
4. “Will of Anna Stanyarne,” Charleston County Wills, Book 40, p. 338, CCPL.
5. Jordan and Stringfellow, p. 279.
6. *Charleston Courier*, January 27, 1837.
7. Charleston County Register of Mesne Conveyance, Deed Book Q10, p. 90.
8. James W. Hagy, *Directories for the City of Charleston, South Carolina, for the Years 1830-31, 1835-36, 1836, 1837-38, and 1840-41* (Baltimore: Clearfield Company, 1997).
9. “Will of Benjamin Dart Roper, Sr.,” Charleston County Wills, Book 46, p. 201. Charleston County Inventories, Book C, p. 322, CCPL.
10. Thomas W. Roper family file, Waring Historical Library, Medical University of South Carolina.
11. Jordan and Stringfellow, pp. 158-159.
12. Annie Jenkins Batson, “Jenkins Family History” (1977, South Carolina Historical Society File 43/234).