

Ermine C. Robinson

Do you know who
this Cater was and
if and how he is
connected to our line?

GEORGIA NOTEBOOK

Tom Cator's Restless Ghost Not Alone on St. Simons

By BERNICE McCULLAR

Two little headless children who dance around the water in the moonbeams certainly don't belong in history. But still I kept thinking of them when I was sitting there at Bloody Marsh on St. Simons, looking out over the battle site.

It was there that Oglethorpe defeated the Spanish in July 1742, deciding for all time and history that we would be an English-speaking, not a Spanish-speaking people.

After the battle somebody said, "O, what a bloody marsh!" And Bloody Marsh it became. A huge boulder marks the site.

BUT OTHER THINGS happened there as well. Bloody Marsh became, a hundred years later, a part of a great plantation known as Kelvyn Grove. It was one of about 14 plantations there on St. Simons Island.

The owners were Huguenots, some of those who had come over from South Carolina, I think, and settled there with the coastal elite who had come from France and Scotland and elsewhere. The Kelvyn Grove owner was one Thomas Cater or Cator. He was murdered there on his plantation. The old yellowed books that do mention it say he was killed by his overseer. Some stories implicate Cator's wife. The guilty ones fled. But the Cator butler, who had seen the whole thing, snatched up the Cator child, a little boy, and carried him to Retreat. That was the plantation of Thomas Butler King, who was always away on official U.S. government business. But there at Retreat was the remarkable Anna Matilda Page King, his wife, the best cotton grower on the coast. She herself had been an only child, but she and King had eight or nine children. So

Retreat was a lively place. In the backyard was a cottage for the boys, known as Grasshopper Hall.

The lonely little Cator child was lucky to find refuge there. The Kings had hearts big enough to take in one more or a dozen more. He grew up in their household.

Then when he was grown and married, his daughter married a famous shell collector, and they owned Kelvyn Grove. It was later owned by Mrs. Maxfield Parrish, wife of the artist. She was greatly interested in the old songs of the coast. She collected them into a huge volume "Slave Songs of the Georgia Coast." They included the wonderful melodies that the Negroes sang in the fields or when they were rowing the boats that raced up and down the blue waters there for the aristocrats that sometimes bet \$10,000 on the races, or awarded that much as prize money.

Thomas Cator could not rest in his bloody grave. Legend says he walks the earth on dark and moonless nights, seeking his murderer. If so, his ghost is only one of many on old St. Simons. He has such interesting company as Mary the Wanderer and the Phantom with the Long Arms.

BUT MOST INTERESTING — and most puzzling — of all are the children. There they are, like a footnote to legend, dancing around their sparkling waters on nights lit with moonbeams, two children without their heads. But who are they, and what are they doing there?

You will find them in the old legends, in the worn old pages of old, old books, and you will hear tales of them along the coast. But nobody ever writes or says who they are and why they dance in Georgia's moonbeams. Mystery sprites, they!



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