

**Squire William Pope**

**By**

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## A LANDOWNER PLUS

An editor of a local newspaper once asked if William Pope was more than “just a man who owned land”. It’s a reasonable question for the Popes in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries were major property owners on Hilton Head, but to answer the editor’s question, Squire Pope used the wealth that his several plantations created to support the island’s religion, to advance education here, and to participate personally in South Carolinas’ politics.

William E. Pope was better known as Squire Pope. Squire is an English term that is oftentimes applied to a highly respected persons and possibly ones who are holders of a public office such as justice of the peace, but they are short of nobility. My impression is that the term was not in common usage in the Carolinas in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries, but Pope was clearly entitled to the appellation; it also effectively distinguished him from the many other Popes in the South.

The squire’s first wife was Ann Scott; they had two children, Gertrude and William John, both of whom lived to maturity, although the father outlived the son.. William John was born in 1815 and the Squire married first cousin Sarah Lavinia Pope in 1816; those facts suggest that Ann Scott died as a result of William John’s birth. The Squire and Sarah Lavinia had several children but only one lived to maturity

The first Popes came to America probably from the northern counties of England in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century; one branch settled in Virginia in 1654 and from the state’s Westmoreland County the family spread into Georgia, Kentucky, Alabama, and Carolina. Hilton Head entered the Squire Pope story in 1785 when his father, also named William, and mother moved to the Island from nearby St. Helena’s and almost immediately began acquiring land.

In 1786 the elder Pope first purchased 365 acres, and subsequently, the Squire bought 1000 acres of Skull Creek Plantation and renamed the area Coggins Point. During his lifetime he added Skull Creek and Point Comfort Plantations, both on Hilton Head, and Crescent Plantation near Bluffton, to his holdings. Other members of the Pope family held Grass Lawn, Hogg Island, and Leamington Plantations.

The first Popes to come to America were Quakers, but with the passage of time, plus marriage and location, they became Anglicans; as for Squire Pope, he was a prominent Anglican-Episcopalian, baptized in 1788 and as an adult was an Episcopalian communicant. In 1842 he donated land for Bluffton's Chapel of the Cross. His main house on Hilton Head was at Coggins Point, tabby ruins probably of a secondary structure can still be seen near the junction of Squire Pope Road and Gumtree Road, but he also had a summer home across the road from the Chapel and the Church of the Cross in Bluffton.

Detailed information about the Squire's education as a youth is not available but he had several characteristics of an educated man . For example, Federal troops when they entered his Hilton Head residence found there a large library; more over, he was one of the founders of the May River Academy; that was in 1823. In addition, his name was cited as a friend or patron of the Richland School for scientific and practical education; it was located at Rice Creek Springs between Camden and Columbia.

As a politician the Squire represented St. Luke's Parish in the South Carolina legislature: he was in the House of Representative from 1810 to 1814, 1816 to 1818, 1850 to 1852 and in the Senate from 1822 to 1832. He was an avid advocate of South Carolina's belief in nullification -- the right of a state to nullify the law of the federal

government. When the Civil War erupted and many of the landowners sold their slaves, the Squire is reported to have refused to do likewise saying that to do so would separate families and that he had not the heart to see that happen. An 1850 US census noted that Squire Pope had 180 slaves, half men and half women.

When in November of 1861 Federal troops landed on Hilton Head and occupied the island, most whites, including Squire Pope, left. He went to Sandersville, Georgia where he died in 1862 at the age of 74.