

A COSTUME PARTY AT FLAT ROCK

In Honor of Serena Williams' Eighteenth Birthday - 1866

PAINTED BY ALICE MIDDLETON (LATER ALICE MIDDLETON LOWNDES)

A few years ago Henry Burke, a Richmond resident with a second home in Flat Rock on Greenville Highway, discovered an interesting painting in the possession of a cousin in Stamford, Connecticut. The painting was by a mutual ancestor, Alice Middleton, and the subject was an 1866 costume party in Flat Rock in honor of Serena Chesnut Williams' 18th birthday. The venue was the Williams' summer home in Flat Rock, which we now know as Dunroy. Pencil notations identified most of the participants and Henry became interested in researching the biographical and genealogical details. He teamed with Elise Pinckney, a former editor of *South Carolina Historical Magazine*. Ms. Pinckney is a Charleston resident with a summer place on Rutledge Drive. The result of their collaboration was a meticulously researched six-page article in the Fall, 2001 issue of *Carologue* magazine, a publication of The South Carolina Historical Society.

The guest list reads like the social register of Flat Rock at the time, with many familiar names represented: Blake, Chesnut, Johnstone, King, Lowndes, Memminger, Middleton, Singleton, Trenholm. The fully draped bay window, unusual for historic Flat Rock houses, can be seen in the background. The lightly sketched oval portraits on either side of the bay window are thought to be of Catherine "Kate" Boykin Miller Williams, wife of the owner, on the left and Mary Boykin Miller Chesnut, Kate's sister and a celebrated Civil War diarist on the right. Both were painted by Samuel Stillman Osgood, who painted several works for both families. The portrait of Mrs. Chesnut is now in the collection of the Smithsonian's National Portrait Gallery.

The following listing, keyed to the painting, is an abridgment of the material that originally appeared in the *Carologue* article:

Dramatis Personae (Left to Right)

1. **Mary Beatrice Dehon** (1847-1917) a cousin of the artist
2. **Charles Moore Cuthbert** (1851-?) from "Wood Edge" on Glassy Mountain
3. **Louisa Preston King** (1833-1920) daughter of Judge Mitchell King by his second wife
4. **Unidentified**
5. **Serena Williams** (1848-1876) whose birthday was being celebrated
6. **Walter Wilkinson** (not further identified)
7. **Unidentified**
8. **Euretta Elizabeth Middleton** (1840-1899) cousin of the artist
9. **Catherine "Kate" Boykin Miller Williams** (1827-1876) wife of David Williams, Serena's mother and hostess for the evening
10. **Mitchell King** (1841-1916) son of Dr. Mitchell King
11. **Mary Boykin Williams** (1851-1931) Serena's sister
12. **Mr. Jackson** (possibly Henry Rootes Jackson, 1845-1895)
13. **Elizabeth Laura Middleton King** (1820-1884) wife of Dr. Mitchell King and mother of Mitchell King above
14. **David Rogerson Williams, II** (1822-1907) owner of what we now know as Dunroy, Serena's father and host for the evening
15. **Henrietta Louisa Blake** (1843-1872) from "The Meadows" in Fletcher
16. **Willis Memminger** (1844-1876) son of Confederate Secretary of the Treasury Christopher Gustavus Memminger
17. **Helen Coles Singleton Green** (?-?) widowed the year before, she had Lowndes and Rutledge forbears
18. **William Elliott Johnstone** (1849-1923) from nearby Beaumont
19. **Evelyn Ann Roper** (1846-1929) of "Dolce Farniente" in Flat Rock
20. **Arthur Delancy Middleton** (1850-1844) brother of the artist
21. **Sarah Virginia Memminger** (1848-1895) sister to Willis
22. **William Russell Dehon** (1849-1927) Mary's brother
23. **MacMillan Campbell King** (1811-1870) son of Judge King
24. **Emma Izard Middleton** (1847-1937) sister of the artist
25. **Emily Rutledge Lowndes** (1847-1937) future sister-in-law of the artist
26. **Savage Deas Trenholm** (1844-1895) of neighboring "Mountain Lodge" in Flat Rock
27. **Walter Blake, Jr.** (1841-1879) likely a cousin (hopefully distant) of Henrietta Blake; they later married
28. **Susan "Sudy" Robertson** (1843-1918) of "Straun" in Arden
29. **Willis Wilkinson** (1841-1924) classmate of Mitchell King at the College at Charleston
30. **Lucy Memminger** (1842-1874) another sister to Willis
31. **Alice Izard Middleton** (1844-1902) the artist; from "Saluda Cottages in Flat Rock; later married Richard I'On Lowndes
32. **James Chesnut** (?-?) not Sen.. James Chestnut, Jr., David Williams' uncle and brother-in-law, but probably a nephew
33. **Caroline Lowndes** (1846-1919) sister to Emily
34. **Francis Porcher Cuthbert** (1845-?) older brother of Charles
35. **Susan "Sudy" King Williman** (1851-1930) granddaughter of Judge Mitchell King and cousin to the Mitchell King attending the party
36. **Daniel Elliott Huger** (1847-1876) another grandson of Judge King
37. **George Kirkwood King** (1821-1907) another son of Judge King
38. **Caroline Porcher Cuthbert** (1818-1873) mother of Charles and Francis