

Claiborne Jackson and the Sappington Family

Biography

Dr. John Sappington was an important figure in Saline County, and in Missouri generally, in 1830. He had come to Missouri with his wife in 1817, settling in Arrow Rock and pioneering the use of quinine to treat malaria, which made the region more appealing to the waves of immigrants who would come in the 1840s and 1850s. He also manufactured salt, ginned cotton, and produced hemp and tobacco. By 1830 Sappington was one of the largest slaveholders in the Boon's Lick area, now known as Little Dixie.

Story

When Claiborne Jackson, an ambitious young man who ran his own mercantile store, met John's third daughter, Mary Jane Breathitt Sappington, on Christmas Eve 1830 he no doubt saw an opportunity to improve his social standing. John Sappington, seeing Jackson as a man who could care for his daughter, approved of the relationship. The two were married on February 17, 1831. By July, Mary was dead, most likely from malarial fever. Desiring to remain in the powerful and influential Sappington family, Jackson married a second Sappington daughter in 1833. Louisa Catherine Sappington was barely 18 years old at the time. The marriage paid dividends for Jackson, who became wealthy selling Sappington's Anti-Fever Pills in the Lower Mississippi Valley, and who entered politics as a state representative in 1836. Things were going pretty well for Jackson when tragedy struck again. His second wife died after giving birth to their third son in 1838. With two sons to take care of and a strong political ambition Jackson returned to the Sappington family to ask to marry a third daughter. For the third time the answer was yes, and on November 27, 1838, Jackson married Eliza Pearson, the Sappingtons' oldest, widowed, daughter.

The serial marriages of Claiborne Jackson paid off for him in social standing, catapulting him into state office as governor of Missouri in August of 1860. His rise to the top would end quickly, however, as he presided over the failed effort to drive Missouri out of the Union, eventually dying in 1862 while still in exile.