

# LANGDON CHEVES.

---

Lancaster county is justly proud of the long roll of eminent men who have from time to time lived within her borders. These may naturally be divided into several groups. First, those who were born here and lived most of their lives elsewhere, like Robert Fulton, David Ramsey, the Smith brothers, John Blair Smith and Samuel Stanhope Smith, and Lindley Murray; second, such as were born elsewhere and came and lived their lives among us, like James Buchanan and Thaddeus Stevens; and, thirdly, men who came to us from other places, lived here for a time and then took their departure. Among these we may mention Benjamin West, the artist, and Langdon Cheves, orator and statesman. All the foregoing were men who attained eminence and more or less fame for their achievements in literature, law, invention, science and art.

All the above mentioned persons have been the subjects of extended biographies save one and of him I propose to say the little I have been able to learn here at home and elsewhere. I allude to Langdon Cheves, who came to this State about 1812 or 1814 and remained here almost twenty years, about half of which time he was a resident of Philadelphia and for some years an acceptable and public-spirited citizen of this place.

## **His Ancestry and Education.**

Langdon Cheves was born at Rocky River, S. C., on September 17, 1776.

His father was Alexander Cheves, a Scottish immigrant, and his mother was Mary Langdon, a native of Virginia. He had not the advantages of a university training, but his early education was confined to the schools in the Abbeville district, where his father resided. Nor did he at any future period of his career have any educational advantages save such as came to him from reading and study during his long and busy life. His father was evidently a farmer in very moderate circumstances, else he had been sent either to some Northern college or to Europe, as was the custom at that day among the well-to-do and educated planters. As it was, his education in the public schools was brief, as we find him at the early age of ten years in the city of Charleston, in his native State, trying to earn a living in a commercial house.

The business talent and other good qualities of the lad manifested themselves even at a youthful period of his life, so that by the time he had reached the age of sixteen years he had reached the dignity of confidential clerk in a large commercial establishment. It was a promising beginning and young Cheves' friends were satisfied that he was born to be a merchant, and a great one.

### **He Reads Law.**

But the young clerk began to have other views. No doubt by this time his maturing mind and judgment told him he was intended for a wider, if not a more useful, career. Two years more in the counting house brought his commercial career to a close and at the youthful age of eighteen he began the study of the law. That was in 1794, and three years later he was admitted to the practice of the law at

the Charleston bar. He seems to have made no mistake in the choice of a profession. He rose to distinction almost at a bound and in a few years stood among the foremost practitioners in the South Carolina Courts. A natural eloquence and fluency of speech were of great assistance to the ambitious young barrister and his reputation and his practice expanded side by side. Ten years after his admission to the practice of his profession, his yearly income exceeded \$20,000, an unusual figure in those early days, even among the most eminent practitioners. In 1808 he married a Miss Mary Dullas, of Charleston.

### **Enters on a Political Career.**

As was the custom a hundred years ago, and still is, not only throughout the South but elsewhere, prominent lawyers naturally gravitated into politics. This seems inevitable from their training and position and generally from inclination also. Langdon Cheves did not differ from the generality of lawyers in this particular. His brilliancy as an orator united to his abilities as a lawyer seems to have well adapted him to a political career. He had been gradually rising into fame as a politician and in 1810 that reputation sent him into the Congress of the United States along with John C. Calhoun and William Lowndes, a trilogy of statesmen that would have done honor to any Commonwealth.

### **He Goes to Congress.**

Nor was he a silent or an ornamental member of the distinguished body to which he had been sent. He at once took a prominent place on the floor of the House, and in 1811, the year following his membership, he delivered a speech on an intricate commercial question that at once es-

tablished his reputation for eloquence and learning. Washington Irving, who happened to be there and heard the speech, declared afterward that he got from it, for the first time in his life, some idea of the manner in which the great forensic orators of antiquity must have spoken.

His parliamentary career was rapid. He became Chairman of the Naval Committee in 1812, and as such was a strong and zealous supporter of the war with Great Britain. In the following year he was given a place on the Ways and Means Committee. But still higher honor awaited him. Henry Clay, the Speaker of the House in 1814, having been sent as a commissioner to the Netherlands in that year, Mr. Cheves was chosen Speaker in his place, an unmistakable tribute to his abilities as a parliamentarian. His competitor was the noted Felix Grundy, who was also the administration candidate. During his term as Speaker, A. J. Dallas, the father of George M. Dallas, of anti-tariff notoriety, was Secretary of the Treasury, and was persistently urging a scheme for the re-habilitation of the old United States Bank, but his game was effectually blocked by Speaker Cheves' superior influence and parliamentary tactics.

### **He Becomes a Judge.**

The war with England having ceased in 1815, and his term of Congressional service having expired in the same year, he declined the re-election which was tendered him and resumed the practice of his profession at the Charleston Bar. In 1816 he was made a Judge of the Superior Court of South Carolina. He served his native State in that capacity until 1819. The United States Bank, having been re-chartered in 1816, was during the fol-

lowing years almost ruined through mismanagement. In 1819, Judge Cheves was elected the President of its Board of Directors, and during the three succeeding years succeeded in fully restoring its credit. That having been accomplished, he resigned his post in 1822, and the noted Nicholas Biddle became his successor.

### **A Commissioner of Claims.**

The next public office he held was that of Chief Commissioner of Claims under the treaty of Ghent. That and his previous position at the head of the United States Bank required his residence in Philadelphia, where the bank was located. Just when he took up his residence in Pennsylvania I am not able to say, as the records on this point do not agree. According to his own statement, made in this city in 1830, he had been "a resident and sojourner almost twenty years." It is just possible that his winter residence during that part of his career at Washington was in Philadelphia.

### **Comes to Lancaster.**

Langdon Cheves came to Lancaster in 1826. That at least is to be presumed from the purchase of real estate made by him in that year, although it is possible he may have been here a few years earlier, although that seems rather doubtful. At all events, he made his first purchase of landed property in the year already indicated in the following documents copied for me from the Court House records by Miss Clark:

Langdon Cheves, Grantee.

Wm. Coleman, Grantor.

From deed dated April 20, 1826, and recorded in Book H, No. 5, p. 51:

"Now this indenture witnesseth that the said William Coleman for the consideration of 7,000 dollars paid

by Langdon Cheves for all that certain two-story messuage or tenement and plantation or tract of land situate, lying and being in the Township of Lancaster, containing seventy-three acres etc."

### Other Purchases.

On June 21, 1827, Mr. Cheves purchased another tract of land adjoining his first purchase, as the following abstract of his deed shows:

Langdon Cheves, Grantee,  
Farmers' Bank, Grantor.

From deed recorded June 21, 1827:

"This indenture witnesseth that the said Farmers' Bank, of Lancaster, for the consideration of the sum of \$7,025, paid to the Farmers' Bank by the said Langdon Cheves, for all that certain messuage and tenement, a plantation in Lancaster township, beginning at a post in the middle of Little Conestoga Creek and lying by other lands of the Farmers' Bank, containing 108 acres, etc." Book I, No. 5, page 6.

On July 2, 1827 Mr. Cheves purchased a third tract of land, the deed for which was placed on record in Book 1, No. 5, page 24, on July 3, 1827, as the following abstract shows: "This Indenture witnesseth that Solomon Kauffman and Catharine, his wife, in consideration of the sum of \$661.25 paid to them by Langdon Cheves for tract of land on Little Conestoga Creek, adjoining lands of Langdon Cheves, containing 13 acres and 85 perches, together with houses, buildings, barns, etc."

### Abbeville Named.

It will be seen from the foregoing that Mr. Cheves' purchases amounted to 194 acres and 85 perches, lying immediately west of the present city

limits along the Columbia pike. As a tribute to his birthplace in South Carolina he named his purchase Abbeville, a name that has been adopted in our own local nomenclature and which it retains until the present day and no doubt will continue to hold even after Abbeville shall have become part of the city by the natural process of municipal expansion. The later history of part of these lands may also be given.

### He Sells.

Abbeville Institute, Grantee.

William Coleman, Grantor.

From Record book E, Vol. 5, page, 63.

Deed dated October 1, 1835, and recorded on the same day. On that day William Coleman sold to the Trustees of the Abbeville Institute for the sum of \$10,000 seventy-three acres and 19 perches of ground, the same premises which Langdon Cheves, Esq., and Mary Elizabeth, his wife, under date of April 3, 1830, did sell to William Coleman.

Alexander Hayes, Grantee.

Abbeville Institute, Grantor.

Deed dated April 6, 1840, and recorded on August 6, 1840, in Record Book 2, Vol. 6, page 468, conveys to the grantee 73 acres and 19 perches of land for the consideration of \$9,500. The trustees of the Institute were Samuel Bowman, President; John L. Atlee, Thomas E. Franklin, George W. Hammersly and Thomas F. Potter.\*

---

\*In the records of the Presbyterian Church of this city, I find that Mary, the wife of Langdon Cheves, was admitted to membership on November 14, 1826. The birth of two sons to Langdon and Mary Cheves is also recorded, Charles Langdon (no date), and Robert Hayne Langdon, born October 5, 1829.

## Returns to South Carolina.

After living in this city for about eight years, Mr. Cheves decided to return to the old Abbeville in South Carolina, where he was born fifty-four years before, and where he owned a large plantation. I am unable to give any reason for this determination. I have never heard of any. Perhaps it was the natural desire most men have to return to and spend the evening of their days amid their childhood surroundings. His career up to this time had been a busy and an exciting one. He no doubt had won a competency and was disinclined to further legal or political labors. What could have been more agreeable to a man with his literary culture and tastes than to pass his declining years in the ease and quiet he could now command? For twenty-eight years, and until the time of his death, he remained in that peaceful retirement of country life. Occasional essays and reviews on current topics came from his pen, but public life no longer seemed to have attraction for him.

## Cheves a Secessionist.

When the nullification excitement of 1832, under the leadership of his old congressional associate, John C. Calhoun, broke out he gave his assent to the movement, but criticised and condemned it because it did not go far enough. He regarded the secession movement of his native State as little less than folly, believing that the entire South should act as a unit in the secession movement. He was a delegate to the famous Nashville convention in 1850, and declared himself favorable to the scheme then first proposed for a separate Confederacy to be composed of all the Southern States. He did not live to see or take



part in the formation of the Confederate Government in 1860. He died in Columbia on June 25, 1857, and may fairly claim rank among the able men the South sent to the front during the first half of the nineteenth century.

### **A Little Known Newspaper.**

There came into my hands several months ago the first issue of the newspaper called "The Republican or Anti-Masonic Opponent," a journal that no man now living remembers and which few have seen. It was published in this city and the first number bears the date of April 29, 1830, and it was printed and published by Mr. Cyrus Jacobs, a prominent Mason, to counteract the influence of the "Anti-Masonic Herald," which had been started in New Holland in 1828, by Theophilus Fenn, Dr. Thomas W. Vesey, Nathaniel Ellmaker, Roland Diller and several other influential men during the violent anti-Masonic excitement that swept over the land consequent upon the alleged murder of the man Morgan, by Masons.

In this old newspaper I found that the more prominent men of Lancaster city gave a parting banquet to Mr. Cheves when he left this place. All the facts connected with the occasion go to show that he was held in high estimation in this community, and I accordingly add this testimonial of appreciation to this brief sketch.

It is a fact worthy of note that Mr. James Buchanan, who at that time was serving his last term as Congressman from this district, took no part in this mark of appreciation to Mr. Cheves. Whether they were political friends or enemies I do not know, but the occasion was one at which all minor considerations and differences

should have been set aside for the hour.

### Dinner to Mr. Cheves.

Mr. Cheves being about to retire to South Carolina, for the purpose of making his permanent residence in that State, the following note was addressed to him on behalf of a number of gentlemen of this city:

“Lancaster, April 6, 1830.

“Honorable Langdon Cheves:

“Dear Sir: A number of the citizens of Lancaster, whose hearty approbation has been given to your conduct as a public man, and whose admiration and respect have been won by your virtues as a private citizen, understanding that you are about to leave this State, for the purpose of taking up a permanent residence in South Carolina, and desirous of an opportunity of manifesting the esteem and affection they entertain toward you, through us request your acceptance of a public dinner, at Mr. Graeff’s Hotel, on Saturday next.

“With sentiments of the highest respect and esteem, we have the honor to be your obedient servants,

“WILLIAM COLEMAN,

“JOHN REYNOLDS,

“GEORGE L. MAYER.”

### His Acceptance.

To which the following reply was received:

“Abbeville, 9th April, 1830.

“Gentlemen: I am much flattered and obliged by the kind and friendly invitation you have been so good to communicate. The notice you are pleased to take of my unimportant public services I view as an evidence of your private esteem (the most agreeable point of light in which I can consider it), for they are so long gone by as to be naturally forgotten,

except as that sentiment may revive a recollection of them. In private life it has always been my study so to conduct myself as to act the part of a good citizen of a free republic, in which I deem it a blessing to have had my lot cast; and it is highly gratifying to me to perceive that I have not failed in gaining the approbation and esteem of this respectable community, in which I have lived for some years in great happiness. I accept with great pleasure the invitation for the day mentioned.

“I am, gentlemen, with great respect and esteem, your obedient servant,

“LANGDON CHEVES.

“William Coleman, John Reynolds and George L. Mayer, Esqrs.”

### The Banquet and the Toasts.

On Saturday, April 24th, the company sat down to an elegant dinner, prepared by Mr. Graeff; the Mayor of the city, Nathaniel Lightner, and Adam Reigart, Esq., presiding.

After the removal of the cloth the following toasts were drunk:

1. Our Country—“The land of the free and the home of the brave.”

2. The President of the United States—“The mind which made a great General without the education of the camp has made an able statesman without the training of the Cabinet.”

3. The memory of General Washington and the patriots of the Revolution.

4. Charles Carroll, of Carrolton.

5. The army of the United States—In peace a security against war, in war a security for an honorable peace.

6. Our guest, Langdon Cheves—The able advocate of our naval system and our naval glory; the financ-

ier who redeemed and re-established the faith of American currency; the patriot, the citizen beloved and esteemed; dear alike to the nation and his friends.

### He Makes an Address.

Mr. Cheves then rose, and under deep feeling addressed the company as follows:

Gentlemen: The opinion you are pleased to express of my public services places them much too high, but I consider it evincive of the kind feelings you have always shown to me. When I came to reside among you you recognized me at once as your fellow citizen, with a liberality and kindness which excited my gratitude. That, however, I might have attributed to the courtesy and urbanity which gentlemen of good feelings and good manners extend, as civilities to the stranger. But this last, this farewell notice of me, is of the most unequivocal kind, and springs of necessity from the heart. I value it therefore not only as a proof of your esteem, but as some evidence that I am not altogether unworthy of it. I shall part from you with feelings of strong regret. Indeed I leave not only your society but your State with real regrets—I have lived in it as a sojourner and a citizen almost twenty years of the prime of my life—I have had seven children born in it—one of them in a few weeks will be bound to bear arms in defence of his country; and all of whom God in his good providence has been pleased to bereave me, lie buried in your soil. These are links and bonds which bind my affections to your State, which will be continued after separation, but which nevertheless make that separation painful.

Permit me to give,

The county of Lancaster, fair and fertile; industrious and patriotic—it merits the rich blessings it enjoys.

7. The Navy of the United States—Alike the glory and defence of the Republic.

8. South Carolina—The fame of her revolutionary patriots is brightly reflected in the lives and characters of her illustrious statesmen of the present day.

9. The age of improvement, invention and energy, directed by science and art, is advancing the comfort and happiness of man.

10. The memories of Fulton and Clinton, the benefactors of their country.

11. Pennsylvania—Firm in her purpose and constant in her affections—she will be found in the vanguard, supporting the re-election of our present Chief Magistrate of the nation.

12. Our Union—A social compact, as sacred as it is excellent.

13. The fair sex.

### Volunteer Toasts.

By George Louis Mayer—South Carolina and Pennsylvania—Each proud to acknowledge the virtues, the talents, and patriotism of our distinguished guest.

By Henry Rogers—The North and the South—A union firm and inflexible between them, is the only safeguard of the safety, happiness and prosperity of both.

By Dr. Humes—George Wolf, the Governor of Pennsylvania.

By John Graeff—The memory of Chancellor Ridgely, of Delaware.

By E. Brien, Abbeville—Whether in Carolina or Pennsylvania, equally honored as having been the residence of Langdon Cheves.

**(After Mr. Cheves Had Retired.)**

By the Mayor—Our friend and guest—His elevated character, talents, and moral worth, made his residence amongst us a matter of pride and gratification—his departure one of unfeigned regret; wheresoever he may go the respect and esteem of our citizens will accompany him.

By Mr. Jenkins—There is something in real worth and talents we cannot describe; to embrace both in a name, I give you, Langdon Cheves.

During his residence in this place, Mr. Cheves associated himself with the Presbyterian Church of this city. On August 20, 1829, he was one of a committee of twelve members of the church appointed to extend a call to the Rev. Richard W. Dickinson to be the pastor of the congregation, to succeed the Rev. William Ashmead. (See record in Church Book).

Author: Diffenderffer, Frank Ried, 1833-1921.

Title: Langdon Cheves / by F. R. Diffenderffer, Litt.D.

Primary Material: Book

Subject(s): Cheves, Langdon, 1776-1857.  
Abbeville (Lancaster, Pa.)  
Lancaster (Pa.)--Biography.

Publisher: Lancaster, Pa. : Lancaster County Historical Society, 1907

Description: [45]-58 p. ; 23 cm.

Series: Journal of the Lancaster County Historical Society ; v. 11,  
no. 2

Call Number: 974.9 L245 v.11

Location: LCHSJL -- Journal Article (reading room)

=====

+++++

Institution Name  
Institution Address  
Institution Phone Number  
Institution E-mail Address