

COLONEL WILLIAM FRANCIS SKIDMORE AND DOCTOR ELLEN (TOWNE) SKIDMORE, OF WINCHESTER, TENNESSEE.

An appreciation by Warren Skidmore first published in the newsletter of the Skidmore Family History Group, no. 22 (February 2000).

I first heard from Colonel Skidmore back in the early 1980s. He had my name from some source and telephoned me about a developing interest he had in the history of his family. I think I then knew something more than he did about his immediate family as I had corresponded some 40 years earlier with an aged cousin of his from Jackson, Mississippi. She was born in 1890 and had inherited a fine stock of hearsay stories about her Tennessee family. Alas, she and Frank never met. I sent Frank the correspondence I had with his ancient kinswoman, now dead, and also what I had picked up about their family from Rickmansworth in Hertfordshire from other sources on both sides of the Atlantic.

At that time I personally typed my books on an old IBM Selectric Typewriter -- then the state of the art in what became "desktop publishing." It had balls of typefaces with proportionally spacing, but could not do fully justified margins or turn out printed copy that looked like they were set by linotype. Any major typing error meant that the whole page had to be retyped. I got up at 5:00 in the morning and typed away until it was time to go to work. Home computers were then in their absolute infancy. Happily Frank was already into them in a big way, and volunteered to take on the production of a book I had promised on the Stonestreet family of Sussex. It was our first project together, and Ellen and Frank put the book (in which they had no personal interest whatsoever) into their computer. It turned out "camera ready" pages on a cranky old printer. Better yet, it did a machine generated index, that while it took several hours to sort, was still days and days ahead of filing scratch cards in order and then typing an index from the cards. All of this relieved me of months of a mind-numbing chore.

So at the start of our Skidmore projects I supplied the copy, Frank had the technical computer expertise, and Ellen was always there to share in the keyboard chores and act as "faculty adviser" on the text. Later I learned enough computer lingo to turn out copy on my own (although I never have had Frank's patience to sit down and work on tough technical problems), and they got involved in a big way in collecting materials for some of the data banks we put together. I was deeply grateful to Ellen's participation when we copied the 1880, 1900, 1910, and 1920 United States census records. Her neat handwriting was a great improvement over Frank's spiky fist (which was frequently open to interpretation).

Our newly-formed triumvirate went on to greater glories in both England and America. I took Frank to the Hertfordshire Record Office, and we plowed through the lay subsidies for Rickmansworth at the Public Record Office in London. We went to the National Archives in Washington and copied all of the original Skidmore pension files. Frank and Ellen stopped several times in Atlanta at the branch there of our National Archives and copied microfilm. The three of us went for several weeks at a

time to the Family History Library at Salt Lake City. Skidmore/Scudamores on both sides of the Atlantic will, I think, continue to benefit from their interest and industry.

Ellen was born in 1934 in Pennsylvania, the daughter of a research chemist with the Eastman Kodak Corporation. She earned her undergraduate degree at the University of North Carolina, and her M.A. and Ph.D. (in 1980) from the University of Tennessee at Knoxville. A fellowship from the American Association of University Women made it possible for her to spend ten months in Paris doing the preliminary work on her doctoral dissertation *Pierre Cot: Apostle of Collective Security, 1919-1939*.

Ellen (Towne) Skidmore, descended from Thomas French (1608-1680) of Ipswich, Massachusetts, whose wife Mary was said to have been Mary, the sister of William Scudamore of Gloucester city in old England. This William Scudamore (of the Ballingham family) left a will in 1636 remembering his sister Mary French and her children called elsewhere “of Boston in New England.” Proof was found for this marriage (see *Mary Scudamore (Ca. 1598-1681), Wife of Thomas French of Ipswich, Massachusetts. An Old Debate Newly Resolved* on the Skidmore website) and Ellen was welcomed as a remote descendant of her husband’s family.

William Francis Skidmore was born in 1918 in Alabama, but is descended from a family that had lived for several generations at Winchester in Franklin County, Tennessee. He was already in the U.S. Army before Pearl Harbor and served throughout the whole of the war in Europe with the artillery. After the war he did tours of duty at the Pentagon and elsewhere, and ended his military career as head of the Reserve Officer’s Training Corp at the University of Tennessee at Knoxville. He ended a useful career teaching in the Business School attached to the university for several years after retiring from the army. His first wife, Esther Windhol, of Norwegian descent and the mother of his four children, died of cancer and he and Ellen (both on the faculty at UT) were married at Knoxville. After retiring they moved back to Frank’s old family home at Winchester, a small county seat with no big city problems.

When we moved on from books as too expensive to print, bind, store and then market he produced the Scudamore/Skidmore CD, an enormous chore filled with hundreds of problems for the amateur that were eventually solved. Converting the late John Hunt’s typed copies of the thousands of vital records then at St. Catherine’s House to a digitized text almost defeated him. The “tech support” people selling the software of no help but Frank eventually figured out a way to get around John’s *typed* “landscape” format. All the fields of the entire file (name, place, and date) can now be searched electronically in seconds, as opposed to paging through the typed entries. He also “burned” the CDs, and then shipped them. Now this duty and answering most of the queries that come in about the family, are answered by Cary B. Skidmore of New Mexico who he named to succeed him.

Now in 2012 the Colonel is aged 94. It can happily be reported that he is in good health, and attended by his posterity still largely living at home in Tennessee