

The joining of the Cabaniss and Sorsby families

By City Historian Dr. Walter Howell

Margaret Ellen Cabaniss and Will Sorsby, the young couple whose marriage was put asunder when the husband killed a postal inspector, came from distinguished Clinton families.

Edwin W. Cabaniss, Margaret's father, was a native of Rankin County, editor of the *Brandon Republican*, and a lawyer. He inherited a plantation with slaves in Hinds County in 1858. The property was worth about sixty thousand dollars at the time, but was lost when the plantation was burned and slaves freed during the Civil War.

Cabaniss practiced law after the war and during Reconstruction ran unsuccessfully for the legislature in 1868 as a Democrat. He was elected mayor of Jackson in 1869 and in 1870 was appointed chancery court judge by the Republican-controlled legislature. Charles Caldwell, former slave and now leading black Republican in Hinds County, sponsored Cabaniss's appointment.

During this time, Cabaniss married Margaret New, a descendant of the Nutt family in Natchez. The couple purchased "Violet Banks," a stately ante-bellum home in Clinton in 1875.

The relationship of Edwin Cabaniss and Charles Caldwell is difficult to define. The appointment of a white Democrat supported by a black Republican had to meet strong political needs. Both gained from the appointment.

While there is no evidence that Cabaniss was involved in the Clinton Riot, he was identified as one of the assassins of Charles Caldwell in December 1875.

Cabaniss played a leading role in county politics after the overthrow of

Republican rule and was a delegate to the Democrat-

ic Conservative state convention in 1876.

Cabaniss settled into the practice of law in Clinton. He and his wife celebrated the arrival of daughter Margaret Ellen in 1888, and a son a couple of years later. Cabaniss was appointed postmaster of Clinton in 1902 by President Theodore Roosevelt.

The Sorsby family has deep roots in Clinton. Will Sorsby's grandfather was a respected physician, and his namesake, Uncle William, had served in different diplomatic posts in South America and was the

U.S. minister to Bolivia in 1908. Will's father, Everett Sorsby, operated a grocery store in Clinton and lived on Capital Street, across from the town square.

Will Sorsby lived three short blocks from "Violet Banks" and, in a village that had just reached 300 people in 1900, he knew Margaret Cabaniss from an early age. Will worked for the A. (Alabama) and V. (Vicksburg) railroad in Jackson when he proposed marriage to Margaret in 1905.

Judge Cabaniss died unexpectedly in February 1905, eight months before the planned wedding. Will Sorsby was 21 years old and Margaret 17, when their marriage took place at Violet Banks in October. S. M. Ellis, a local Baptist preacher, conducted the ceremony. The couple lived in Jackson.

Judge Cabaniss's widow, Margaret Cabaniss, was appointed her husband's replacement as Clinton's postmistress. She arranged to have her son-in-law named assistant postmaster. Will and Margaret moved back to Clinton and lived at Violet Banks with her mother and brother.

EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the second of a series of several articles by Dr. Howell about the Sorsby and Cabaniss families.



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