

## **Miller, Alexander Calizance (or Calezance)** <sup>[1]</sup>

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**ca. 1780–2 May 1831**

Alexander Calizance (or Calezance) Miller, planter and teacher, was born in France before the Revolution, served under the Prince de Condé at the Battle of Düsseldorf, and escaped to Philadelphia in 1797. His parents are unknown, but there are indications that they perished in the Reign of Terror. His French name was Alexandre Ferdinand Leopold Calizance de la Marque, according to one family tradition, Louis Leopold Calezance de la Marc, according to another, and de la Marche, according to a third; there is a notable Calasanz family in Catalonia. Miller adopted his surname from the captain of the ship that brought him from Rotterdam.

The penniless emigré made his living by exercising the genteel skills with which he had been brought up—teaching drawing, piano, and violin—first in Philadelphia and then in Warrenton, N.C., where other French refugees had settled. By 1805 Miller was teaching in the Falkener Seminary, the first boarding school for young ladies in that section of the country. He encouraged Jacob Mordecai of Richmond to open his female seminary in Warrenton <sup>[2]</sup> in 1808. Mordecai promised, in a public broadside, to offer the students "Vocal and Instrumental Music, by an approved master, of distinguished talents and correct deportment." Miller continued at Mordecai's school until 1812, leaving a strong and lasting impression on all the Mordecais.

Meanwhile, Miller was acquiring influential friends, beginning with the Philadelphia-connected merchant, John Bradley, of Wilmington <sup>[3]</sup>, who introduced him to leading lights of the Cape Fear <sup>[4]</sup> area. General and Mrs. Benjamin Smith <sup>[5]</sup> of Smithville, Dr. John Lightfoot Griffin, General-to-be Joseph Gardner Swift <sup>[6]</sup> of the U.S. Army Engineers, Judge John Hill, George Burgwin of the Hermitage, and General and Mrs. Thomas Brown of Bladen County <sup>[7]</sup> all were charmed by what Swift called his "remarkable personal beauty and elegance of manner." Miller painted the portraits of several. His European military experience brought him the rank of major in the North Carolina militia in 1811, no doubt unhindered by his father-in-law, General Thomas Brown <sup>[8]</sup>, who was appointed to command the detached militia of the state when the second war with Britain broke out.

On 4 July 1811 Miller married Mary Brown, the general's daughter and John Bradley's niece, at Ashwood, one of the Brown plantation homes on the Cape Fear in Bladen County <sup>[7]</sup>; Joseph G. Swift was the attendant at his marriage as Miller had been at Swift's, and each eventually named a son for the other. For the rest of their lives the Millers resided at Ashwood, where Alexander was a planter; the 1830 census reported that he enslaved twenty-one people. The plantation was located near the residence of Governor John Owen <sup>[9]</sup>, who had married General Brown's other daughter, Lucy.

Alexander and Mary Miller were communicants of St. James's Episcopal Church, Wilmington <sup>[3]</sup>, where their children were baptized. A Mason, he died at Ashwood after a wasting illness; he probably was buried in Carver's Creek Cemetery near General Brown's Oakland plantation. The children who grew to adulthood were Thomas Calizance, a prominent Unionist lawyer of Wilmington and owner of Orton plantation, who married Annie W. Davis; Dr. Joseph Swift, of Wilmington, who married Ann Empie Wooster; and August Alexander, a childless Bladen County planter. Miller descendants live in North Carolina and California.

There are indications that Ellen Mordecai was referring to Alexander Miller in his Warrenton days when she wrote in her fanciful reminiscences of "Hastings" (Warrenton): "Amongst the beaux present was one very handsome man, a foreigner who said he 'was not what he appeared' and thus investing himself in mystery became an object of universal interest among the ladies, while the 'harsher sex' had but little patience with him. He spoke most touchingly of his fallen fortunes, titles, and dignities; half hinted that the Montmorency blood flowed in his veins, said that his name was assumed, but that nothing would induce him to divulge the real one, so of course the girls were all dying to know it. He spoke of his mother as having been one of the most lovely women he had ever seen. . . . He was accomplished; that is he drew prettily and played well on the piano and violin. When he pleased he could be fascinating and when he did not he could be provokingly wayward; he was so admired by the fair sex that it was no wonder he was spoiled."

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#### **Additional Resources:**

The mysterious Frenchman : Alexander Calizance Miller in America, 1797-1831. The Historical Society of Pennsylvania:  
<http://discover.hsp.org/Record/hsp.opac.v01-71275> <sup>[10]</sup>

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#### **Authors:**

[Craig, William Ellwood](#) <sup>[14]</sup>

#### **Origin - location:**

[Bladen County](#) <sup>[15]</sup>

[Warren County](#) <sup>[16]</sup>

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