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Biography of Mary Walton Johnston Charlton

(1846-1931)

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ABSTRACT

This biographical research paper documents the personal aspects, relationships, and events that influenced and shaped the life of Mary Walton Johnston Chariton. The research uncovered a life richly filled with education, literary and musical appreciation, religious commitment civic duty, social standing and a host of personal friendships. Through these activities she gained the admiration and respect of many members within the Savannah community. Like all individuals, her life was not without sadness nor disappointment and these elements molded her later years. Death at age 85, ended a varied and interesting life providing a unique personal profile.

The Biography of Mary Walton Johnston Charlton (1846-1931)

...Mother was an unusual woman, beautifully and soundly educated, a gentlewoman if ever there was in her attainments, as fine a musician as I have ever seen in amateur life, a pianist, like her mother and her daughters, probably the best girl horse back rider in Hancock County where she was born, a reader of good literature, capable as a housekeeper, an excellent cook when she wanted to try her art of cuisine, a worshipper of my father, a great defender of her children, and all those whom she loved, as true a friend man or woman could have, afraid of nothing in this wide world except that she might not be doing her duty or forgetting a courtesy...¹

With this quote, Richard Malcolm Charlton, provided a great deal of information regarding his mother, Mary Walton Charlton. While written by a loving son recalling his life near its end, there is evidence that this sentimental account glosses over peculiarities of character and polishes a somewhat tarnished persona.

Mary Walton was born on September 26, 1847,² at the family plantation "Oak Grove" about four miles west of Powelton, Georgia. She was the daughter of Richard Malcolm Johnston (b. March 8, 1822, Powelton, Georgia; d. September 23, 1898, Baltimore Maryland) and Mary Frances (Fanny) Mansfield (b. April 4, 1829, Sparta, Georgia; d. February 24, 1895, Baltimore, Maryland).³ Both sides of her family

¹Typed personal account of Richard Malcolm Charlton. Walter Charlton Hartridge Manuscript Collection, #1349. [hereafter referred to as WCII MSS #1349], Box 84: Folder 1602, on file at the Georgia Historical Society, Savannah, Georgia, [hereafter referred to as GHS].

²Hitchcock. Ben. Richard Malcolm Johnston. University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill: O. K. Hall & Co. 1978, pg. 31. [hereafter referred to as Hitchcock, (1978)].

³Johnston Genealogy, WCII MSS #1349, Box 87, Folder 1646, on file at GHS.

were second generation Georgians coming from the northern United States.

During her childhood she was called both by her first and middle names with her parents finally settling on Walton around the time when she was nine years old. She went by Walton the rest of her life.

It is important to understand some background detail about each side of Walton's family because the influences of each are perceivable in her life. Her mother's family, the Mansfields, were a prominent family in Connecticut and were great admirers of Yale University.³ Her mother received an outstanding education for her day. She studied at the school of Mr. Sereno Taylor, the most celebrated in Georgia. As a musician, she possessed a marked talent and in her early years delighted her friends in parlor entertainments with her piano performances.⁴ She played four musical instruments including the violin. Hitchcock points out that Mrs. Johnston's temperament was strongly influenced by her New England roots which may provide a hint regarding what a niece describes as her Aunt Walton's abrupt nature in early adulthood.⁵

Mary Walton's grandfather on the Johnston side was a planter as well as a lay minister of the Baptist faith. The family plantation was located in Hancock County, near Powelton with Sparta serving as the cultural hearth of the area. He saw to it that Richard, Mary Walton's father, received a quality education. After primary schooling, he went on to study at Mercer University in Penfield where he was a member of the first graduating class of 1843 and eventually served on the board of directors as well as becoming one of its most renowned alumni. He and Mary Frances marry on November 26, 1844 in Sparta. Mary Frances was only fifteen years old when married but no evidence was found suggesting that her young age caused any marital problems. The Johnston's union lasted 52 years.⁶

⁴typed account of Richard Malcolm Charlton, WCH MSS Collection, #1349, Box 84:1597, on file at GHS

⁵Handwritten interview of Edith Johnston. WCH MSS Collection, #1349, Box 87: Folder 1638, on file at GHS.

⁶Hitchcock (1978), pg. 42.

At the time of his marriage, Mr. Johnston had already received his law degree from the University of Georgia but practiced intermittently for the next ten years. During this time he also functioned as an educator, teaching at Mercer as well as the University of Georgia. He resigned his position there in 1861. At this time, he and his wife bring to fruition a long held desire when they opened a school for boys at the family plantation in Hancock County.⁷

Most of the ten children born to Richard and Fanny Johnston had been born by this time. Walton was a young teenager when her parents opened the school for boys called Rockby in January of 1862. Mr. Johnston brought a specific educational philosophy to bear at the school calling for liberal and humane treatment with the boys “placed on the same footing as his own children.”⁸ He felt education should be presented in a gentle manner and that it was the duty of all individuals to teach. Education in the classics was emphasized as well as a special emphasis on musical education. The Johnston children also received their education at the school including all the girls, a number of which held teaching positions after graduation. It was one large family of students out in the countryside of Hancock County.

The school and residence buildings of Rockby were set in a beautifully landscaped enclosure planned and presided over by Mrs. Johnston who, though as talented in gardening as she was in music, had in this case the help of P. J. Berckmans, a horticulturist of wide and justified reputation. Close to the house were hedges, rare shrubs and all varieties of flowers and on the outskirts were orchards of peaches, pears and apples and a small vineyard.⁹ Later in her life, Walton wrote that the property “consisted of 2000 acres of land, a residence with 12 rooms, a cottage, a two room school house, in addition a fine old peach orchard and new’ orchards of peaches, pears, and apples, and many grape vine.”¹⁰

The Johnston’s operation of Rockby soon earned a highly regarded regional reputation drawing students from greater Georgia as well as from Savannah. Four of the graduates went on to become

7 Ibid., pg. 31.

8 Ibid., pg. 31.

9 Ibid., pg. 32.

10 Undated handwritten account of Walton Chariton. WCH MSS Collection, #1349, Box 88: Folder 1649, on file at GHIS.

governors of Georgia and many others lead prominent lives. One young fellow, Walter Glasco Charlton, attended Rockby, and later played a significant role in the life of Walton.

After a successful five year period of operation, two things happened that brought the Rockby years to a close. In August of 1865 the family experienced the death of the oldest child, Lucy, who apparently was held in high esteem, for her father was devastated by her untimely passing. Soon afterward, the effects of the Civil War contributed to a declining enrollment which could no longer support the school's operation. In 1867 the family closed the school, sold the plantation and moved to Baltimore.¹¹

The Move to Baltimore

The family's move to Baltimore was less stressful than one might imagine. This was due to the involvement of two other Hancock County families, the Edgar Dawsons and the Edgeworth Birds who had moved to Baltimore earlier in the decade. With the aid of these two families, the Johnstons were able to find appropriate housing and were soon introduced into the social circles of Baltimore. They purchased a nine acre suburban tract of land in the town of Waverly, approximately three miles from the center of Baltimore. It was a perfect location for a new school consisting of an adequate house and a rolling landscape where Mr. Johnston would walk and contemplate in his later years.¹²

Once established in Waverly, the Johnston's moved quickly to reestablish a new school using Rockby as an educational as well as a physical model. They called it Pen Lucy Pen, a Celtic word describing the prominent hill features on the property and Lucy, in memory of the recently deceased daughter. Pen Lucy opened in September of 1867 and was successful from the start as a number of boys transferred from Georgia with the enrollment supplemented by day trippers from Baltimore.¹³ One of the boys who came from Georgia was young Walter O. Charlton.¹⁴

11 Hitchcock, (1978), pg 34

12 Ibid., pg 35

13 Ibid., pg 36.

14 Undated handwritten account of Walton Charlton. WCH MSS Collection, #1349, Box 88: Folder 1649. on file at GHIS.

Pen Lucy school operated until 1883 when its doors closed due to the poor business practices of Mr. Johnston coupled with declining enrollment.¹⁵ However these were fruitful years. Though pressed for income, Mr. and Mrs. Johnston lived a full life after the schools closure, he becoming a man of Belles Lettres writing stories and anecdotes about his native Georgia and she maintaining an avid gardening interest and religious zest. During the Baltimore years he and his wife became friends and acquaintances with “a number of the most notable writers, and some of the most talented and popular editors, artists and illustrators of the day.”¹⁶ Mr. Johnston was close friends with Sidney Lanier, the poetic son of Georgia, acquainted with Samuel L. Clemens and moved within the social circles of the university community at Johns Hopkins University.

Perhaps the most stunning event in their lives was their conversion to Roman Catholicism. Mrs. Johnston first in the fall of 1874 and then Mr. Johnston in the summer of 1875. This was an unusual step for former southern Baptists but their religious devotion was testament to the strength of their decision. They became such prominent members in the Catholic community that the Catholic Society of Baltimore honored them on their fifty wedding anniversary with a gala celebration that included a deluge of congratulatory telegrams from all over the country.¹⁷

Walton at Pen Lucy

Walton's whereabouts are poorly documented for the years between 1867 to 1874. It's possible her time is spent at Pen Lucy where her musical skills apparently reach their peak. The records suggest her training was formal based on brief notes her music teacher, Mr. Szemelenyi, sent her requesting that she play at one of his soirees which he later reschedules.¹⁸

While her son, Richard, was quoted earlier regarding his mother's fine piano playing, another person also felt the same way.

15 Hitchcock, pg. 39.

16 Long, F.T. Reprint from the Maryland Historical Magazine, Vol. 34, no. 4, pg 271.

17 Hitchcock pg. 42.

18 Invitation from E. Szemelenyi dated 15, March, 1870., WCII MSS Collection, S1349, Box 87: Folder 1643, on file at GHIS.

As she recounted years later, her playing was much appreciated by young Walter Charlton, by now a student at the University of Virginia studying the Law. As Walton recounts in a document written later in her life,...” He was a frequent visitor to Pen Lucy spending all his Christmas and Summer vacations there always under the guise that he was coming to visit Mr. and Mrs. Johnston, who were like parents to him. He was a constant but quiet presence in the parlor listening to me practice.”¹⁹

While Walter Chariton appreciated the music he heard, his primary focus was on the player. He had grown quite fond of Walton Johnston, feelings which undoubtedly grew out of his school days at both Rockby and Pen Lucy. Later in his life, he would tease Walton in front of guests about how’ she used to be his school teacher bringing a sly smile to his face and an irritated “Walter”! from her lips.²⁰ Walter was in love with Walton but after his graduation from the University of Virginia in 1872, he likely returned to Savannah and to begin practicing law. This was ascertained from a series of love letters between the two which he sent to Pen Lucy from Savannah. Based on Walton’s later accounts of her youth, Walter apparently asked her to marry him which took her by surprise. She said she was “...terrified when he asked me to be his wife and had been loving me all along.”²¹

The same file contained several love letters which confirmed her acceptance of his proposal causing a heart-wrenching long distance romance until their marriage. Walter’s letter to Walton, dated November 14, 1873, sums up his feelings

“How I managed to exist so many years awaiting the knowledge that I possessed the acknowledgment of your love seems incomprehensible to me now.”²²

In the same letter he stated that he’ll write her on Wednesdays and Sundays at length. “But February will come at last - and with it

19 Undated handwritten account of Walton Chariton. WCH MSS Collection, #1349, Box 88: Folder 1649, on file at OHS.

20 Typed account by Richard M. Chariton, WCH MSS Collection, #1349, Box 87: Folder 1647 on file at OHS.

21 Undated handwritten account of Walton Chariton. WCH MSS Collection, #1349, Box 88: Folder 1649, on file at OHS.

22 Letter from Walter Chariton to Walton Johnston, WCH MSS Collection, #1349, Box 88:1649, on file at 01-IS.

the happiest moment of my life.²³ They exchanged vows on February 11, 1874, in Waverly, Maryland at St. Johns Church.²⁴ Life in Savannah

After their marriage the Charltons moved to Savannah where they live full productive lives as prominent members of the Savannah community. Walton was pregnant within several months of marriage and gave birth to the couple's first child on December 29, 1874. Named Robert Milledge Charlton after his paternal grandfather, his life ended on November 14, 1876 due to membranous croup.²⁵

Walton delivers five more children over an eleven year period, giving birth to Frances Mansfield (named after her maternal grandmother including her nickname, Fanny) on August 15, 1877; a still birth, unnamed, on June 25, 1879; Richard Malcolm (Dick), named after his maternal grandfather, on July 6, 1880; Walton on August 14, 1881 (unknown gender) who dies after only three days of life and Margaret Walter on April 8, 1885.

The three children that managed to live beyond early childhood helped create a normal family atmosphere in the Charlton household with no documentation suggesting any abnormalities regarding the family. The most prominent individual in the records at this time was Walter who was building a successful law practice and involved with various civic organizations. The two girls attended Lucy Cobb Institute in Athens Georgia, where their mother also

23 Ibid.

24 Wedding invitation. WCII MSS Collection, #1349., Box 87, 1643, on file at OHS.

25 Typed account of Richard M. Charlton, Hartridge MSS Collection, #1349, Box 87, Folder 1602, on file at OHS. R. M. Charlton recounts the time when his father reacted strangely to his own personal recollection as a youth when he (Richard) recalled meeting a stage actor visiting the Charlton home in Savannah. He distinctly remembers that he was two years old at the time. His father Walter forbade him to recall the story ever again for fear some strange curse may befall young Richard similar to the fate of his deceased brother, Robert.

attended as a young girl²⁶ and Richard attended the Savannah School for Boys.²⁷

From the year of his marriage up to 1900, Walter was a very busy man. He was appointed to the Eastern Circuit Judgeship of Georgia, 1873-77; was solicitor general to the same court from 1881-85²⁸ was a city alderman,²⁹ and a vestryman at Christ Church where the Charltons remained prominent members during their lives.³⁰ Walton's activities are not clearly apparent at this time but it can be assumed she's primarily involved with motherly duties. Federal Census records suggested that her workload was eased by two servants living in the household as of 1880.³¹ A recollection of Richard Charlton suggests his mother had the time to experience many social activities even during her children's formative years. He recounted a time when he and Margaret were in Forsythe Park with their nurse and their mother was away at a cooking lesson.³²

The letters Walton receives from her father, Richard Malcolm Johnston, during this time, show a concerned and loving father and grandfather interested in his descendants lives. As any typical father or grandfather, he expresses his desire for more letters from Walton and Walter which is evident from the following excerpt:

"Dick's letter I am always glad to get. They serve to fill up the wide gaps between your letters and the wider of Walter's. Fanny's also make an occasional pleasant break in the long silence. I suppose when they get older and when Margaret has learned to write that you and Walter will devolve upon them all the work of letting us know how you are doing."³³

26 Hand written interview of Mary H. Eliot. WCII MSS. #1349, Box 87:1638; Obituary of Walton Charlton., WCII MSS 41349 Box 88. Folder 1649. both on file at GHS.

27 Typed account of Richard Malcolm Charlton, Hartridge MSS Collection, #1349, Box 84: 1602), on file at GHS.

28 Who Was Who in America, 1943. pg 213

29 Savannah City Directory, 1897, pg. 555.

30 1888 Index, Savannah Morning News, pg. 433.

31 Federal Census 1880, Microfilm, Vol 4, Ed 24, Sheet 10, Line 45, on file at the Chatham County Public Library, Savannah Branch, Savannah, Georgia. 32 Typed account of Richard Malcolm Charlton. WCII MSS Collection, #1349, Box

84: 1602, on file at GHS.

33 Letter from Richard Malcolm Johnston, Baltimore, to Walton Charlton, Savannah, April 27, 1889. WCII MSS Collection, #1349, Box 87:1643, on file at GHS.

A Major Crisis

As best as can be deduced from the presence and absence of certain public records and strong suggestive evidence from other sources, a slowly brewing crisis came to a head between the years of 1899 and 1904. The crisis centered around the oldest daughter, Frances, and the repercussions it had on the family. Up to this point, no records suggested she lived anything but a normal life. She apparently received a normal boarding school education at Lucy Cobb Institute,³⁴ became accomplished at the piano³⁵ and was presented as a debutante in 1896.³⁶ Apparently, Frances developed mental problems that necessitated her removal to the Home for the Insane in Milledgeville in 1900. This condition was suggested in the probate records but was not confirmed until a thorough examination of all the Charlton family manuscript records contained in the Walter Charlton Hartridge Manuscript Collection, #1349, at the Georgia Historical Society.

Frances' absence from many public documents could be understood from the standpoint that her condition may have been an embarrassment to the family. If her condition hadn't been confirmed later in the research, one might have deduced her absence was related to a move or to marriage, since she was in her mid-twenties at this time, but further research found several anomalies suggesting otherwise. She was listed inconsistently in the Savannah City Directories. She appeared in 1900 and 1901, was not listed in 1902 or 1903, and reappeared in 1904, and never appeared again.³⁷ The first conclusive evidence discovered regarding her life was her tombstone in Laurel Grove Cemetery where she was buried next to her father³⁸. Her date of death, October 23, 1957, documents her

34 Hand written interview of Mary H. Eliot. WCII MSS, #1349. Box 87:1638: Obituary of Walton Charlton, WCII MSS #1349 Box 88: Folder 1649, both on file at GHIS.

35 Typed account of Richard Malcolm Charlton WCII MSS. #1349, Box 87, Folder 1602, on file at GHIS

36 Handwritten account of Edith Johnston interview. WCII MSS #1349. Box 87. Folder 1638, on file at GHIS

37 Sholes' 1900 Savannah City directory, pg. 395, Goette's 1901 Savannah City Directory, pg 250; Goette's 1904 Savannah City Directory, pg.

38 Personal reconnaissance, October 23, 1993.

length of life at 80 years, which meant she outlived both parents and her siblings.

Curiously, no record of marriage, property ownership, nor death certificate existed in her name in the public record system of Chatham County. However, further research eventually uncovered a story that leads back to Walton Chariton and the relationship between her and Frances.

Presence by Absence

The search for Frances within the public documents continued to eliminate sources thereby augmenting the importance of her absence. The probate records provided further evidence regarding Frances absence but also raised questions about her and her family. The wills of her father, mother, sister, and brother were investigated for information. Two other Chariton documents which provided pertinent information suggested Frances' situation. These were petitions to the Court of Ordinary by her father requesting the legal guardianship of both Frances and her sister Margaret. The petitions were dated January 23, 1904, which was the same year that Frances no longer appeared in the city directories. Both petitions centered on an insurance policy that Walter G. Charlton wants to borrow against so he can provide for the maintenance of his two daughters. His rationale for petitioning the court for legal guardianship of Margaret was to borrow money against the policy to use for her educational needs.³⁹ This statement implied that she possessed the necessary faculties to receive an education at that time. In the petition for Frances, who was 27 years old by this time, the suggestion of a mental illness appears for the first time in the public records. Her father asked for legal guardianship not for her schooling but for her maintenance due to the fact that she "is temporarily incapacitated mentally."⁴⁰ This discovery led to more questions than answers.

Research turned to the will of Walter G. Charlton, who died on February 11, 1917, (43 years to the day of his wedding anniversary) and the will of Walton who died on November 18, 1931. Both wills were quite simplistic. Walter named his wife as executrix and sole

³⁹Chatham County Probate Records, Savannah, Georgia. Margaret W. Charlton, Guardianship, 1904, File 738, pg 704-710.

⁴⁰Chatham County Probate Records, Savannah, Georgia. Frances M. Charlton. Guardianship, 1904, File 739, pg. 711-717.

beneficiary thereby making it unnecessary for any inventory of his estate.⁴¹ Nothing glaringly unusual can be inferred by the absence of any of his children from his will since he leaves his entire estate to his wife who may need it to maintain her existence. Walton's will leaves everything to her daughter Margaret who is also named executrix thereby eliminating any inventory of Walton's estate.⁴² However, her will never mentions Frances nor Richard which seems unusual. One can infer that Richard may have become successful and does not need the benefits of his mother's estate and Margaret, who never married, may have been the more logical recipient. However, the fact that Frances was still alive and that she was not mentioned in her mother's will seemed unusual.

Neither sibling of Frances mentioned her in their wills either. Margaret passed away September 21, 1935, naming her brother Richard as her executrix and the prime recipient of the balance of her estate. Several family heirlooms were included in her will which she instructed for distribution among family members after Richard's death.⁴³ Frances was not mentioned in her sister's will. Richard died in 1955 and he left everything to his second wife, Beatrice Wallace Martin Charlton, who he named executrix, and mentioned no one else.⁴⁴

While one can rationalize her absence from each parent's will, it was not so easy to accept her absence from both parents' obituaries. Both Richard and Margaret were listed as survivors but Frances' absence provided a concealed suggestion that she remained alive but the Charltons were reluctant to admit the fact. Also the manner in which Richard and Margaret were listed in their mother's obituary. "*survivors in Savannah* include a son, Richard, and a

41 Chatham County Probate Records, Savannah, Georgia. Walter G. Charlton, Will, 1917, File 935, C12, pg. 614-19.

42 Chatham County Probate Records, Savannah, Georgia. Mary W. Charlton, Will, 1931, File 1272, C16, pg. 815-819.

43 Chatham County Probate Records, Savannah, Georgia. Margaret W. Charlton, Will, 1935, File 1368, C17, pg. 1570-1580.

44 Chatham County Probate Records, Savannah, Georgia. Richard Malcolm Charlton, Will, 1955, File 1950, Book 2Ps, pg. 256.

45 Obituary, Mary Walton Charlton, WCII MSS #1349, Box 88, Folder 1649, on file at GHS.

46 Ibid.

daughter, Margaret.”⁴⁵ suggests that Frances was somewhere else.

Another indirect reference to Frances can be discerned from the same obituary. In it, Walton’s devotion to Lucy Cobb Institute is stated with the addition of “which she attended and where her daughters later went.”⁴⁶ (note the plural use of daughters)

Finally, after an exhaustive search, evidence proving Frances condition was found in the obituary of her sister Margaret. In the obituary she was listed as a survivor, qualified by the revealing statement, “who has long been an invalid”⁴⁷ This is the first public acknowledgment of her existence in the public record since her father’s application for her guardianship. It was an unfortunate and sad discovery of the truth.

With this aspect determined, reasons for her condition arose which brought the research back to Walton Chariton. The story became clearer after further review of the manuscript records of Walter G. Chariton.

Frances and Her Relationship with Her Mother

Based on several recorded testimonies existing in the Walter G. Charlton files of the Hartridge Collection, Walton and Frances did not see eye to eye on many matters. It boiled down to the fact that Walton wanted her daughter to emulate her and her lifestyle which Frances was uncomfortable doing. While not an unusual problem in any parent/child relationship, in this case it may have been more intense and seemed to contribute to Frances’ mental breakdown. The successes both sides of the family already knew were probably contributing factors to her mother’s high expectations for Frances which may have been exaggerated.

⁴⁷Obituary Margaret W. Charlton, WCII MSS # 1349, Box 88, Folder 1649, on file at OHS.

⁴⁸Handwritten recorded interview of Mary H. Eliot, WCII MSS Collection, Box 87:1638 on file at OHS.

Charlton, Walter G. Will. File 935, pg. 614-19.

⁵⁰Handwritten interview of Edith Johnston, WCII MSS #1349, Box 87, Folder 1638., on file at OHS.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵²Handwritten interview of Margaret Stoler, WCII MSS #1349, Box 87, Folder

From the files, descriptions of Walton include persistent, intelligent forceful and sharp while Frances was gentle, timid, shy, and perhaps homely.⁴⁸ It was also stated in the same interview that Frances “became ill with influenza, became depressed and eventually developed insanity.” But it seems qualified as if this was the standard family explanation which may very well be true, but consider the handwritten recorded account of Margaret Stolefs which stated that:

“Frances was my friend. She had brains, but they gave out because her mother pushed her so. There are some girls who are meant to go with girls, like Cornelia Lee. But her Mother pushed her out into society. Wanted her to be a leader and her brains gave out.”⁴⁹

Mary H. Eliot continued with “Aunt Walton broke up the friendship with Edith Johnston thinking it bad that a person have *one* close friend.”⁵⁰

The Effect on the Family

Frances’ illness and removal to Milledgeville had a profound effect on the family causing great emotional shock. The family evidently moves after her committal and Walter “quits drinking and never drinks again.”⁵¹ No documentation was found that described Walton’s reaction to this unfortunate event but surely it must have been a personal blow. Undoubtedly, it becomes a topic of gossip in Savannah social circles. The “abrupt and rude personality”⁵² of Walton apparently subsides after Frances’ committal and she later admits that she “was wrong to push her as she did.”⁵³

Walton Charlton’s Life After Frances

1638, on file at GHS.

53 Ibid.

54 Handwritten interview of Mary H. Eliot. WCH MSS #1349, Box 87, Folder 1638, on file at GHS.

55 Society section of the March 13, 1909 Savannah Press, WCH MSS #1349, Box 39, Folder 563, on file at GHS.

As in the case of Frances, detailed recollections of Walton Charlton came from personal testimony obtained from several handwritten accounts of interviews with relatives and acquaintances of the Charlton family. While the recorder provided no date for the interview and does not identify himself, the individuals interviewed seem to be credible sources. This analysis was based on the tone of the content which was consistent and honest with equal emphasis on positive and negative aspects of Walton Charlton's character.

While Walton may have lived a life of "her own in her own mind,"⁵⁴ she was also described by the same person as intelligent, personable, gay, and cheerful. She was well liked and she was a leader. She maintained several close friendships with other women of her age including Mrs. Pleasant Stovall, for whom her daughter Margaret later worked. Other friends from the Savannah social scene included a Mrs. Skeele, Mrs. Annie Karow, Mrs. Annie Backus and the Misses Olmsteads. Walton and the above individuals were members of a literary club called "The Swallows"⁵⁵ which staged plays in Savannah homes.

Her activities at Christ Episcopal Church, her participation on the board of the Orphans Home for over fifty years and her organizational efforts for the Kerniss,⁵⁶ an annual event staged for the raising of monies for charities, strongly suggest a humane and philanthropic side to her persona. However, she apparently was not without idiosyncratic behavior that may have been a contributing factor for Frances' subsequent mental breakdown.

Margaret Stoler said that "Frances told me when a man asked her to go out she never knew whether or not he wanted her or her mother asked him to do it."⁵⁷ Other peculiarities were shared by Mary H. Eliot, who said Walton was always late for church and funerals and probably did this on purpose "to make herself conspicuous. She didn't have a shy bone in her body."⁵⁸

56 Handwritten interview of Mary H. Eliot, WCII MSS #1349, Box 87, Folder 1638, on file at GHS.

57 Handwritten interview of Margaret Stoler, WCII MSS #1349, Box 87, Folder 1638, on file at GHS.

58 Handwritten interview of Mary H. Eliot, WCII MSS #1349, Box 87, Folder 1638, on file at GHS.

From the same source, Mary H. Eliot stated that, Walton said that her father always told her “to be smart, but not too smart” but Mary felt that this was advice she didn't heed well.

These characteristics paint a picture of a woman who moved easily within the society of Savannah, was well liked and respected but was also disliked for her peculiar pretentiousness, habits and suggestive vanity. Probably her ambitious prodding of Frances backfired, and she was unable to mold her into the type of person she expected her to become. It seems that Frances' condition remained a suppressed and concealed aspect for the rest of her life. However, it does seem apparent that she dealt with the situation with a semblance of rationality and humility. These qualities were deduced from the records as Mary H. Eliot was recorded as saying that Walton's rude and abrupt behavior disappeared after Frances' committal.⁵⁹ Further research found evidence which suggested that Walton had a gradual cathartic recovery over the incident through the appreciation of literature, poetry *and* associations with her several close friends.

Literature and Friendship

It's quite apparent from items found in Walton's Common Place Book, located in the Hartridge Manuscript Collection, Box 39, Folio 563, on file at the Georgia Historical Society, that poetry and literature, specifically from the mid to late Victorian period, were important aspects in her life. It was hard not to recognize that these items were meaningful and provided solace to her to some degree. This was based on their content and subject matter which also suggested that poetry and literature helped her deal with the unfortunate circumstances surrounding her daughter Frances. Two poetic examples stand out, “Relativity” by Henry J. Lowe which discusses the dichotomy of the eternal and finite aspects of life and “Eleanor's Room” by Julia Boynton Green which describes a mother's sensual response to a daughter's empty room (Figure 1). While the

first example is broad in scope the second raises the question as to whether Walton had Frances in mind when she clipped this poem from the newspaper and pasted it into her Common Place Book. The first two lines raise this issue best:

"I sit within my daughter's room
Peacefully and cool in shuttered gloom..."

It seems apparent from the above examples poetry provided an opportunity for personal reflection and possibly internal soothing of the soul.

The collection is not without wit, however, as well as a strong belief in the equality of women. An undated and unprovenient poetic entry, likely published in a local newspaper and reprinted from the Independent, exemplifies these conclusions. Entitled "Kiplings Psychology," its a reactionary piece written by Marion C. Smith in response to the most recent poetic utterance from Rudyard Kipling, "The Female of the Species" (Figure 2). It's striking sarcasm pokes fun at an undoubtedly chauvinistic portrayal of women by Kipling.

Of equal importance is her association with "The Swallows" which perhaps was more like a bluestocking club.⁶⁰ A newspaper account of one of the plays presented by the club was described in the society column of the Savannah Press, March 13, 1909.⁶¹ Miss Florence Olmstead authored the play described in the article as "the most delightful and cleverest bits of work imaginable - most happily conceived and sparkling with wit." Looking beyond the superficial surface of the play's theme one can infer to some extent about the deeper meaning of the play and the possible association with Walton's character.

The play consisted of well known, recent past and contemporary literary figures conversing with each other in the drawing room of Mrs. Humphrey Ward. She is visited by George Eliot, Maria Edgeworth, Charlotte Bronte, Fanny Burney and Dr. Johnson (Samuel). The new's article continued, "Each character

⁶⁰ Reader's Encyclopedia, s.v., pg. 116

⁶¹ Walton Charlton's Common Place Book, WCII MSS #1349, Box 39, Folder 563, on file at GHS.

brings forth a light satiric touch and bringing them into an imaginary colloquy that was touched with a delicious humor.”

The literary themes espoused by the play’s characters during their actual literary lives sheds an interesting light not only on the literary knowledge of Walton Charlton, but may in fact expose certain attitudes she may have developed regarding life’s imperfections. One can not help wondering whether a correlation between Frances and Walton can be deduced from these literary topics.

An examination of these figures finds a pervasive similarity in their literary handling of the human condition. Johnson’s abiding theme focused on the vanity of human wishes and the impossibility of human happiness in an imperfect world;⁶² the novels of Burney usually dealt with *the* experiences of a young girl coming into contact with the social world;⁶³ and George Eliot’s didactic literature focused on the moral development of her characters, many of whom dealt with the difficulty of arriving at an individual and mature view of life.⁶⁴

The inherent literary attributes of these authors have an eerie relevancy to the events surrounding the possible root causes of Frances’ mental incapacitation and her mother’s possible contribution to that situation. A certain, but undocumented, feeling suggests that Walton may have come to terms with the unfortunate circumstances surrounding her daughter’s mental breakdown and the causes behind it when one compares the themes for which the literary figures are known. Of particular relevance are the themes put forth by Johnson and Burney which apply directly to the conflict between Walton and Frances. Often times mere recognition of a fault allows for personal forgiveness, which, while fairly hidden, seems to be suggested in these documents.

Probably the most revealing piece of material regarding Walton relates to the camaraderie she experienced from her close circle of friends. It came in the form of a touching tribute paid her by her friend Mrs. Backus. Again found in Walton’s Common Place Book, it is dated April, (no day given), 1921, and entitled “Portrait of a Lady.”

62 Reader’s Encyclopedia, s.v. pg 525.

63 Ibid. s.v., pg 149.

64 Ibid s.v., pg 306.

Portrait

- I. Her Element: Air, i.e., Elastic Medium
- II. Color: Red (human) predominates
- III. Natural Object-as Symbol: An informal garden with some formal spots
- IV. Musical Symbol: F Natural. A Fantasy varying from rich choral chords to the quick syncopated notes of skipping spirit
- V. What Country: England, a squires of high degree with a London season
- VI. Language: Thackeray's Language would best express her
- VII. Habitual Position: None. Going to the next place
- VIII. Era or Age: 18th century contemporary and somewhat akin to Lady Mary W. Montague
- IX. What artist would love to paint her? Van Dyke in her drawing room moments; in others, Van Eyck.
- X. Quotations that express her: "age cannot wither or custom stale her infinite variety" "from grave to gay; from lively to severe.

Such a fine tribute suggests many things including the education these individuals possessed, their understanding of one another and their overall temporal conception of the ideal woman. This particular document was especially appreciated by Walton since the original *and* Walton's hand written copy both appear in her Common Place Book.

In November of 1931, at the age of 85, Walton goes to Milledgeville to visit a friend, Mrs. H. D. Allen. One cannot help but

wonder whether this was also an excuse to visit her invalid daughter. While there she suffered a fall and broke her hip. Pneumonia set in and she died a few days later on November 18 as her daughter Margaret was enroute via the Central of Georgia to be by her bedside. Margaret returned to Savannah with her mother's body for services at Christ Church. She was interred next to her husband in Lot #443 in Laurel Grove Cemetery.⁶⁵

Her son Richard, who returned to Savannah in 1925 to be with his mother after a long and mysterious absence, recounts later in his life that he
“...made her (his Mother's) last years moderately happy. She died at 85, her mind still alert, her slight and frail body succumbing to the temptation to move too quickly, resulting in a fall, broken hip, pneumonia, and death within three days. A remarkable feature of her last day was a remark to her physician who had found her cheerful and slightly improved. The break was a clean one without hope for a cure. She said “Powell, I think I'm going to die tonight. She died at 10 that night.”⁶⁶

65 Obituary of Mrs. Walter O. Charlton, WCII MSS #1349, Box 88, Folder 1649, on file at GHS.

66 Typed account of Richard Malcolm Charlton, WCII MSS #1349, Box 84, Folder 1602, on file at GHS

Conclusion

The life of Mary Walton Johnston Charlton certainly was far from dull and she would not have had it any other way. Quality education and early exposure to important personages around her parents home bred a certain sophistication which provided a distinctive confidence as she moved within the many levels of Savannah society. She had a successful and enduring marriage to a highly prominent and respected Savannah lawyer. Her education and rationality helped her deal with the unfortunate mental incapacitation of her oldest child which became a concealed blemish on an otherwise respected family record. She was a dilettante of poetry and literature as well as a focused civic leader. She earned the respect and admiration of many and was rightfully addressed as Mrs. Charlton.

EPILOGUE

Several other avenues of exploration are suggested regarding this topic. I would try and find documents regarding Frances' duration at the Home for the Insane in Milledgeville to determine who was responsible for her interment in Laurel Grove Cemetery. I was lead to understand that these records may be unavailable to the general public, however.

Secondly, I found the Rockby school to be incredibly interesting from primarily a landscape perspective since it was an enclosed development with an array of horticultural plantings. I plan to visit Hancock County in the near future exploring its location and possible remnant landscape elements..

More work could be done on the Christ Church Records and the Records of the Orphan's Home in which Walton Charlton was involved. Initial searching through these files were not as explicit as the Charlton MSS in the Hartridge Collection at Georgia Historical.

The personal interview did not work out as I would have liked. I attempted communication with Walter Charlton Hartridge, II, of 119 E. Charlton Street, Savannah, Georgia. I spoke with his wife regarding the personal interview and she said that her husband would cooperate but was extremely busy with his law practice. I left a few specific questions about the identities of Edith Johnston, Mary

H.Eliot and Margaret Stoller who supplied most of the information in the text regarding the hand written interviews. Repeated calls to the residence have gone unanswered and he never attempted to call me back but this person may be able to provide *unknown* information.

Another quirky subject is the mysterious disappearance of Richard Charlton from 1911 to ca. 1925. He is married to a Norwegian woman during this time and is living in the Boston area. The records suggest that he may have also not seen eye to eye with his mother and felt the pressures of the family success. This would be an interesting avenue of study.

Lastly, the topic of Kermiss came up in my research and so far the its relationship to Savannah is fuzzy at best. Its a celebration common in the Low Countries of Europe and may have been staged around Christmas here in Savannah

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