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## **A Summons to Memphis: Exploring the Life and Times of the Reverend Mr. George White (1802-1887)**

Thomas G. Wilkes

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A SUMMONS TO MEMPHIS\*

Exploring the Life and Times of  
The Reverend Mr. George White  
(1802 - 1887)

Thomas G. Wilkes  
History 500  
November 21, 1990

*[novelist and short story writer] [Mr. Peter Taylor]*

\* title borrowed from Southern  
novelist and short-story writer

George White  
1802 - 1887

A native of Charleston, S. C., he removed to Savannah, Georgia, in 1822. As principal of the Chatham Academy, and for fourteen years of his own Savannah Academy, he acquired fame; he is best remembered by the brilliant, Classical scholarship of his students. Ordained an Episcopal clergyman in 1836, he engaged in mission work, preaching to seamen and to the Negro population, also establishing a church. For over sixty years he was married to Elizabeth Millen of Savannah; they had eight children, three surviving them. As a charter member of the Georgia Historical Association, he wrote important early histories, his Statistics of Georgia (1849) and Historical Collections of Georgia (1855). Between 1849 and 1858 he lived in Marietta, Georgia, served in relief or as missionary elsewhere in the state, and served a two-year rectorship at Trinity Church, Florence, Alabama. In 1858, he removed to Calvary Church in Memphis, which he served valiantly during the War Between the States and the yellow fever outbreak of 1878, which took his son. A tireless servant of the Church, and of God, he died Apr. 30, 1887.



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These were honored in  
their generations, and were the  
glory of their times.

Ecclesiasticus 44:7

## I

### Introduction

The course of this presentation of what is known and what is assumed about the life of the Reverend Mr. George White (1802 - 1887) will blend his career with his chronology; it is neither to be a straightforward year-by-year account, nor to mimic Edgar L. Pennington's sketch of Mr. White in terms of "Teacher, Historian, Priest." Those are different sides to him, but they are not equally balanced. Moreover, that picture of him does not adequately describe a man who somehow seems to have been more than the sum of his parts. He was a gentleman whose presence made a significant difference in four, separate states and in three graceful ante-bellum cities: Charleston, Savannah, and Memphis. Each of those cities grew up on rivers, the lifelines of the South, in the first three-fifths of the nineteenth century, and as they grew, George White grew with them. He undoubtedly gave to them as much as he took, and represented the hopes and ideals which defined them. When he writes, or teaches, we will learn from him, and allow the priest for the most part to speak in his own words. When he moves, we will follow him, and where he is written about, I will try to enlarge upon and collate what has been written. Ever mindful of what historian R. J. Shafer calls "lies of omission" and "clues to veracity,"<sup>1</sup> I hope, nevertheless to be able to make judgments based on what is probable fact about the character of the man, making the "most plausible interpretation" possible. Since no portrait can be drawn without a canvas, it also becomes necessary to place him in the context of his times.

George White was born and raised a Southerner, and he was the kind of man who gives the lie to Yankee versions of the Old South as backward, uneducated, or Romantic. He was a Classicist, and a learned man who not only exemplified but also promoted the cause of learning, participating in the Academy movement that proliferated in Georgia in his day. As a schoolmaster, principal, and clergyman,

his educational ends and purposes were undoubtedly superior to those which infiltrated the schools after the War between the States had ended. (He would weep to see his old Chatham Academy, today). Following the war, ". . . Francis Wayland, former president of Brown University, regarded the South as 'a new missionary field for the national schoolteacher,' and President Hill of Harvard looked forward to the job for the North of 'spreading knowledge and culture over the regions that sat in darkness.' "<sup>2</sup> George White represented what they came like carrion to "reconstruct." Yet, George would have recognized the old, evil adversary, that "light which shines in darkness but does not illuminate." He was, after all, a man of the cloth as well as a Southerner. More than this, however, the usual distorted image of the South as it was in those days is falsified most easily not by understanding men's arguments and ideas so much as by knowing what was in their hearts. George White was above all and most simply a good, hard-working, and benevolent man who lived a remarkable life of service toward others. He preached, spread the Gospel, defended the Negro (while apparently owning or employing slaves), taught Latin and Greek, sheltered schoolboys, organized schools, restored Churches and preserved historical records, and inspired the faithful in hard times by word and charitable act. His full life renders incredible the achievements as an historian by which he is most often remembered, and yet, that he was an historian seems less important than that he was a true son of the Old South. That he was a teacher seems less important than that he cared about children and the patrimony of knowledge bequeathed to them. That he was a priest seems completely incidental to the life he lived as a servant of God. As for that, his Methodist upbringing and the lack of any evidence that he was much moved by the Oxford Movement across the Atlantic (one can only surmise), leave one reluctant to call him "Father." The address of "Mr." seems to have been much more prevalent in his time and place. Yet, researching such a man and getting to know him requires the even more familiar address: We shall call him "George."

Now, George is an historical figure, living in an historical time. His life



spans eighty-five years, only twenty-two of them after the war. When he was a child of ten, an earlier war was being waged against the British. When he was an adolescent of seventeen, Florida was acquired by treaty with Spain; that same year saw the founding of the University of Virginia. When he was a young man of twenty-six, Webster's first dictionary was being published; that same year saw Andrew Jackson elected president. When he was twenty-eight, there were 12,866,020 people in the United States, an increase of 33% in ten years' time. When he was thirty-four, Tennesseans were joining Texans in defense of the Alamo. In the same decade he would have experienced a depression fueled nationally by land speculation in the territories. In succeeding decades, hundreds of thousands of immigrants were flowing into Atlantic seaports. When he was forty-three, the Naval Academy at Annapolis was founded. He would have been able to read contemporary authors Emerson and Longfellow, though one might suppose he would have preferred Southerners Poe and William Gilmore Simms. During his forties, he must have witnessed debates over abolition, and in his fifties he must have formed an opinion about secession. On the other hand, he was the kind of man unlikely to have been caught up unwittingly in the vortex of forces leading to war in 1860. By that time, he was living in Memphis, where he would have known that city's rise as a prominent cotton market (he would reach Memphis from his origins in Charleston at about the same time as the new Memphis & Charleston Railroad). He would have possibly observed the Battle of Memphis on the Mississippi in 1862, and he knew the early occupation of that city by Union forces. He would have heard the news from Vicksburg and Shiloh, and as Georgia historian he must have wept bitter tears at the news of Sherman's rape and pillage. He cared deeply about this state. Although Tennessee largely escaped the severity of "Reconstruction," he would have recognized carpetbaggers for what they were. After the war, he may well have had occasion to preach against the Darwinists and the wave of skepticism in post-war years. He also fought skepticism by example, leading the fight against three epidemics of yellow fever in the 1870's, epidemics which

would kill 8,000 people,<sup>3</sup> including his son, Dehon. If he found time to read during his later years, one might imagine that his life near the Mississippi lead him to look over a story or two by Mark Twain; he may have taken a few steamboat rides of his own. That he ultimately died in that city on the banks of that river, the waters of the Mississippi being the lifeblood of the South, is only appropriate. Like the river, he influenced countless lives. His course would flow from coastal Carolina and Georgia through the red-clay hills and on into West Tennessee. One can only envy him, for he knew Charleston, and Savannah, and stately Memphis, when each as a city defined itself differently, belonging as it did to another time, to another age, when cotton was king, and the rivers ran high.<sup>4</sup>

## II

### Searching for George

The progress of this research took place entirely within the city of Savannah, save for a few telephone conversations. It began with what was first known: the names of two books written by George White, his Statistics of Georgia (1849) and his Historical Collections of Georgia (1855). Nothing else was known about him except that he was a clergyman of some sort. His historical writings, to be treated later, do not lend very much information about George, himself, except for qualities of style and historical skill. In fact, the "Dutton Index" added to the Historical Collections in 1919 lists four page references to him that are erroneous; he isn't on those pages. Soon, however, a full-scale wild-goose chase ensued. Finding a census record for George for Cobb County, of all places, I made a critical error; although it provided the names of some of his children, it lead me to the false supposition that the family moved to Savannah from Cobb County, though the reverse was true. Thus, I diligently began to search the 1850's and 1860's, nothing turning up but confusing references to



THE GREAT MARKET, LONDON. A busy street scene with numerous horse-drawn carriages and pedestrians, likely a market area.

another George (I supposed) of earlier decades (his father, I said to myself). At Savannah's Public Library (SPL) I perused countless records in the historical collections (cemetery records, the census index, various histories, etc.) to no avail. The card catalogue listed Edgar L. Pennington's biography on George, but it was missing from the shelves. In frustration, I turned to the newspapers, which I approached systematically, photocopying appropriate pages from the index and settling into a year-to-year search, from 1887 backwards. The newspapers, as I soon began to realize, provide only incidentals, but I soon had my first clue, from April 25, 1887: "Rev. George White, a member of the Methodist Church at that time . . . but later an Episcopalian."<sup>5</sup> The words "at that time" meant the year 1815. Slowly I began to doubt my theory of there being two Georges, allowing for the fact, however, that the Cobb census named a son named George, Jr. Reference to "Dr." White still seemed odd, the Historical Collections having informed me of an "M.A.," but no other degree. The papers also told me that he had been associated with the old Chatham Academy (about which I was unaware),<sup>6</sup> that he was a native of Charleston,<sup>7</sup> that he had lived in Savannah for thirty years,<sup>8</sup> and that a certain "George White" had been rector of Calvary Church in Memphis.<sup>9</sup> The newspaper data grew scarce at that point, except for several short entries regarding the compilation and publication of his historical writings,<sup>10</sup> I temporarily abandoned the newspapers in 1851. (Eventually, I would discover that newspaper references to him in the 1840's are scarce, and that many of those in the 30's and 20's are repetitive advertisements for his academies or minor references to him in ship passenger lists. I have surmised that he visited Charleston by boat, and possibly New York. The newspapers are often difficult to read, but a continued search would benefit by further, more exhaustive reading. The permutations of possible references in the index are numerous, except for the 1840's). On visits to the Georgia Historical Association, in Savannah, (GHS), I traced the records of the Chatham Academy and books on the history of the Episcopal Church. Eventually, I discovered the GHS copy (rare) of the Pennington biography. It is short, and must be read for what it does not

say, but it confirmed the general impression of George that had begun to form in my mind. It also offered the names of several sources, chiefly biographical dictionaries with articles on George. The records at the Chatham County Courthouse were a disappointment. Several volumes of the property records index for the late 1840's and early 1850's offered nothing. The people in the probate records office were particularly helpful, but nothing turned up there, either. Having discovered Memphis, I eschewed the local death records. I looked for a possible obituary in the New York Times, but without success. Having discovered the period of his time in Savannah, I went back to basics: the census. There I found a number of useful numbers and dates, but still no address. I searched Methodist titles and the shelves at GHS and in the Minis Room at Armstrong State College (ASC), to no avail. As the search continued, however, it expanded to various, more useful books, general histories, vertical files, rare books, Church journals, and manuscript collections. After linking George to Christ Church, I spoke briefly with the Rev. Mr. Bill Littleton, who informed me that all such records for Christ Church were to be found in the GHS collections. After linking George to a Church in Springfield, I spoke with former ASC professor Mr. Orson Beecher in that area; he was surprised to hear that an Episcopal church had ever been located there. I did not, however, contact St. John's, in Savannah, where there may be some records due to the fact that George served in the capacity of interim rector briefly (not to be confused with R. M. White of the same era).

Leaving Savannah proved impossible. I was unable to travel to Charleston as I had hoped, in quest of George's childhood. What records the Historical Society in Charleston might have, I do not know. A better place to start might be St. Michael's Episcopal Church, where the Methodist Rev. Mr. White was ordained an Episcopal clergyman. In search of Memphis, I fared somewhat better. Locally available records, namely histories on Tennessee or Memphis, provided nothing, and telephone calls to Calvary Church were not answered (Tel. 901-525-6602; the address is 102 N. 2nd Street), but, I knew of a road to Memphis that winds its

way through Middle Tennessee. I contacted Mrs. Elizabeth N. Chitty, Associate Historiographer at the University of the South, my Alma Mater and, of course, an Episcopalian institution. Mrs. Chitty was most helpful. Not only does she know the state of Tennessee like the back of her hand, but she also happened to have two books containing references to George White in Memphis, which she shared by telephone.

During the course of this search, I have determined any number of reference sources which will be little or no help to anyone continuing the search I have begun. The National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections (indices for 1984, 1979, 1973-4, 1967-9, 1959-61) lists only the Hughes-Folsom Papers (1979:79-818) located at GHS for anything pertaining to George White. Other sources found of little or no use include the following:

Savannah City Directories  
NY Times  
Poole's Index to Periodical Literature (mid-1800's)  
Appleton's Cyclopedia of American Biography  
Howell's four-volume History of Georgia  
Dictionary of American History  
Gamble's History of the Government of the City of Savannah  
William Sprague's multi-volume Annals of the American Pulpit  
[including Episcopal volume (GHS) and Methodist volume available on microfiche, LAC, (at ASC)].  
William Harden's two-volume History of Savannah  
[including the list of dignitaries in the chapter on Lafayette's visit to Savannah].  
Robert Manson Myers' The Children of Pride  
Robert Manson Myers' A Georgian at Princeton  
Most consulted works on Georgia and Tennessee history  
[those found useful will be mentioned].  
Vertical Files (GHS collections) on Christ Church, the Episcopal Church, St. John's Church, the Methodist Church [the Chatham Academy file was of some help].  
Other works by Edgar L. Pennington, including The Confederate Episcopal Church in the Southern States (GHS), and The Organization of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the Confederate States of America (GHS)

The local census records for 1830 and 1840 are of some help, although they are in poor condition and difficult to read. The census for 1840 is difficult to find (GHS copy); it is listed under "Savannah" rather than "Chatham County." There is an 1850 census record for George for Cobb County. The books written

by him are all available in the GHS collections, assuming he has not written any others than the three now known. Looking for others, I ran "George White" in various permutations through the computer, or OCLC, but the effort resulted in nothing new in the way of published works. In fact, his Statistics of the State of Georgia was not in the computer's records at all, nor his smaller work The Yazoo Fraud; only Historical Collections came up on the screen. Curiously, after selecting the correct "George" from a given list of others, and thus after having supposedly reduced all data to the information pertaining only to my particular subject, I was offered two listings, the first being his Historical Collections, the second a strange item appearing as follows:

"Maggie by my side" (1850), song by  
Stephen Foster, 1826 - 1864, as sung  
by George White . . . .

Needless to say, I remained skeptical. On the other hand, I took into account the fact that the first line of the song is "The land of my home is flitting, flitting from my view. . . ." Sounds awful. Yet, if our good George didn't sing it, he should have. His land is gone, now, forever.

That does not mean, however, that a complete picture of George, himself, cannot be pieced together; there seems to be enough to go on for someone to write a more extensive biography of him than has been written. Charleston records will help, but, it seems to be in Memphis that he reached the pinnacle of his career and the height of his powers as a minister to those in need. I can only offer suggestions for places to begin:

Calvary Church, Memphis  
West Tennessee Historical Society, Memphis  
Braden-Hatchett Thomas Wolfe Private Collections, Memphis  
Rhodes College Library, Memphis  
Memphis State University Libraries  
University of the South, School of Theology Library,  
Sewanee, Tennessee.  
His Memphis home: 268 Vance Street 11

Tracing his descendants would be necessary. His wife, Elizabeth Miller of Savannah, passed away shortly after him. Apparently, they were survived by only three of their children: George, Tallulah, and Mrs. Laura (While) Leach.<sup>12</sup>

In addition, there are many "rumors" of George in the sense that his name is often cited by authors using information from his historical collections. A more exhaustive search will someday have to follow the trails of both book references and newspaper references of this kind.

### III

#### News of George: Rumors, References, and Census Data

Historian Rosenstock-Huessy described history as "corrected and purified tradition, enlarged and analyzed memory."<sup>13</sup> The minutiae of odd and occasional references to George White cannot be ignored; the truth often lies in the particulars. On the other hand, Barbara Tuchman reminds us that all facts are not of equal value; she argues for a discriminating history.<sup>14</sup> Simple citations of George White's historical books by other authors often tells us nothing. Yet, their use of him suggests his importance for their work, either for his accuracy or availability, or both.

Numerous authors mention his name, as in ". . .according to White's Statistics there were . . . ." Other authors quote him. For example, L. L. Knight in his Georgia Landmarks and Legends quotes a passage on the Georgia Military Institute in Marietta, chartered in 1851, citing "White's Statistics" as the source.<sup>15</sup> Knight's account is interesting for its praise of the heroism of the very young men from that place who fought against General Sherman; many were killed. White's account is interesting for its praise of the discipline and course of study that were modelled on West Point. He was a schoolteacher, first, it would seem. In Medora Field Perkerson's White Columns in Georgia, passages from White appear again for her description of Madison:

The houses remain to give veracity to historian George White's statement in 1845 that Madison was "the wealthiest and most aristocratic village along the stage coach route between Charleston and New Orleans."<sup>16</sup>

And for a description of Jacksboro:

"The place had formerly a very bad character," says George White in Statistics of the State of Georgia (1849). "It was reported that in the



mornings after drunken frolics and fights you could see the children picking up eyeballs in tea saucers."<sup>17</sup>

The first quotation is eloquent, and skilfully lends an aristocratic quality to Madison by linking it to Charleston and New Orleans. The second reference is strange, but is poetic and alliterative, and lends a story-telling quality to the picture of "George White, historian."

One who mentions more than his name but does not quote him is Kenneth Coleman in his A History of Georgia:

. . . the Reverend George White contributed Statistics of the State of Georgia in 1849 and Historical Collections of Georgia in 1853, but his expunging of anti-slavery sentiments in some documents he reprinted reflected the rising sectionalism that was diverting some of the state's best talent into a rigid defense of slavery.<sup>18</sup>

The assumed anti-slavery sentiments may well be reflected in the simple ownership or employment of slaves seemingly indicated by the census records.<sup>19</sup> One would assume, however, that a school needed cooks, maids, and maintenance hands. Two or three slaves for such purposes would not have been unusual; they were almost demanded by the economic realities of the time and place. Moreover, one cannot assume a "rigid defense of slavery" from his treatment of documents in his collections. Mr. Coleman should be more specific. He might do better to quote George White, the actual man. Reporting to the twenty-first diocesan convention at Christ Church, Savannah, in May, 1843, White commended the "congregations of Blacks at White Bluff and Savannah" for sharing in "the weak efforts of the undersigned" (note the self-effacing phrase).<sup>20</sup> The following year, he reported:

. . . he felt it his duty to preach wherever an opportunity was presented. The colored congregations in this city, have shared largely in his feeble efforts.--In his addresses to this neglected part of our population, he has endeavored to accommodate himself to their peculiar character and habits. He availed himself of every opportunity to correct long-established errors peculiar to the colored population, and he does not recollect the occasion, when his admonitions were not received, with respect and attention; and here will his Clerical and Lay brethren permit him to remark, that a long acquaintance with this class of people, justifies him in saying that the introduction of our peculiar mode of worship among them, would imminently tend to rectify mistakes in regard to the main points of religion, and elevate the standard of piety.<sup>21</sup>

There is more pastoral concern in those words, and more tenderness of feeling,

than in any loud and vexatious abolitionist harangue. Sometimes, the truth of history lies in key words and phrases, and the importance of them for us lies in our response. In Carlyle's words, ". . . as we do nothing but enact History, we say little but recite it . . . our whole spiritual life is built thereon."<sup>22</sup> In our attitude toward the unique problem of slavery in the ante-bellum South, and toward the good men whose consciences wrestled daily with that problem, it is important to heed Carlyle further: "Neither will it adequately avail us to assert that the general inward condition of life is the same in all ages."<sup>23</sup>

Odd references like that by Mr. Coleman cannot be allowed to stand on their own; they do not present a complete picture. On the other hand, they lend themselves to consideration and to being challenged. Thus, they are important, just as are snippets from items in the news. White's name crops up frequently in news accounts of the period. Often, the mention is incidental. For example, an anonymous 1865 article looking back as the Revolutionary War mentioned White's Statistics as its source; the writer referred to "Dr. White" as if he knew him.<sup>24</sup> An 1873 article about the sudden death of a judge, the Hon. R. J. Harden, mentions the judge's early life as a schoolteacher under White at the Chatham Academy. Judge Harden succeeded Bishop Elliot as President of the Georgia Historical Society.<sup>25</sup> Thus, a connection can be drawn between the three men, and thus between White's interests in education, the Church, and history. In another article, a curious item from 1882, a man remarks that "Your allusion to the vertebrae of an animal found by Mr. Ferguson. . . brings to my recollection that when a boy, nearly half a century ago, the Rev. George White (now of Memphis, I believe) used to visit my father's place at the Isle of Hope, in search of the remains of this antediluvian animal. . . ."<sup>26</sup> Was George White, the "teacher, historian, priest," also an archeologist? Does this item tell us anything about him as a man? He seems to have had an engaging mind active in the pursuit of all kinds of knowledge. Perhaps this even indicates to us that he took a scientific approach to history. In any case, he seems to have made a name for himself around town. The following, a humorous newspaper debate on the subject of the study of Latin, found its way

into the papers in 1844, one of the few such references for George in the 40's.

My good sir, for goodness sake, steer clear of your apparent propensity to that "dead language" which is jargon to all, save the Pope and the Papists. . . . .

Cave Fidus; you have erred . . . I would not be in your coat for a groat were you to tell our lawyers and doctors in Savannah, who are not papists, that the language of the Romans is dead there. Besides, look to the groupes of young gentlemen, who daily flock to our academy, and some private schools, in our favored city, in earnest search of classic lore. Have you never been at any of the examinations in these institutions? Have you not witnessed the most interesting exhibition, afforded to us, at the Exchange, by the Rev. George White? If you had, you certainly would have concluded that the Latin language was not a "dead" tongue to the teacher, nor to the speakers, on that occasion . . . .<sup>27</sup>

What can this article tell us? First, it may tell us something about George's facility with Latin. It certainly tells us that Latin had become a topic of public debate. It also seems to indicate the popularity of the academies, and the public presence of George White as someone who had become known by reputation.

He was also known as a clergyman, as "the Rev. George White," and his name often appeared in the papers in that way. Thus, it was reported in 1832 that a Mr. James Larouche was married to a Miss Parker "by the Rev. George White."<sup>28</sup> In 1831, Mr. Dwight Lathrop was married to a Miss Mary Srebbins (her name is not very legible on the document) "by the Rev. George White."<sup>29</sup> Other entries of this kind appear. Also in 1831, the "Rev. George White" is listed as a passenger on a ship arriving apparently from New York (by way of Charleston, perhaps?).<sup>30</sup> In 1826, an article reports that the Phillips Academy had been relocated to rooms under Solomon's Lodge "formerly occupied by the Rev. George White."<sup>31</sup> Previously, that location had been the site of the first, organized Sunday school, an inter-denominational effort started in 1815 "by members of the different evangelical churches in Savannah, and . . . conducted at first by Rev. George White."<sup>32</sup> George never seems very far away from children. Whatever "evangelical" is taken to mean,<sup>33</sup> it is evident that George was an avid preacher, and that he even prayed for the Baptists! When they gathered to dedicate their new church on Chippewa Square, "The Rev. George White of the Methodist Episcopal Church commenced with prayer."<sup>34</sup> It is apparent that the details from such

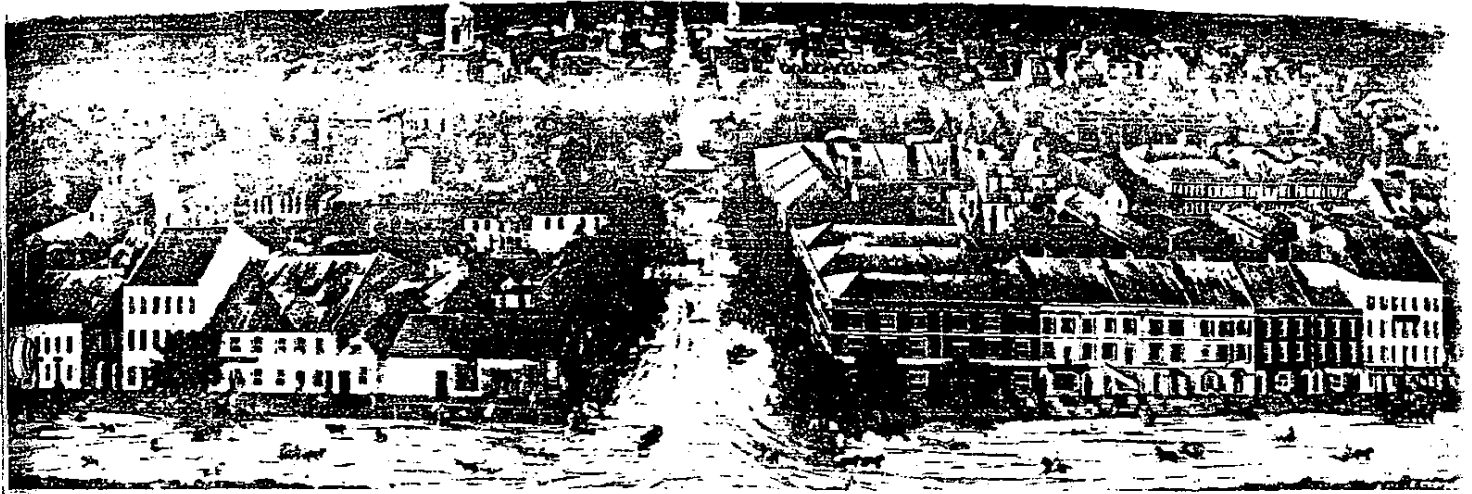
accounts can tell us much about the character of a man, and about his daily activities, or at least lead us in a particular direction. They can even tell us something about his life, and even his soul.

Still, newspaper accounts are not always reliable, besides which the soul needs a body. It needs factual information. The local census records for 1830 and 1840, when combined with that of 1850 for Cobb County, define the outlines of a family. When George left Savannah for Marietta, he was married to one "Elizabeth, age 48," the census tells us. She and George were the same age. Living with them were two sons, George, age 20, and Dehon, age 10, along with a daughter, "Teluna," age 5. I have assumed that "Taluna " is a misspelling for "Tallulah," from other accounts to be considered shortly. His son, George Jr., worked as a clerk. They lived in a house with census visitation number 136236, with a real-estate value of "1,500" (I assume dollars). Elizabeth is listed as being a native of South Carolina, like her husband, but other accounts always refer to her as a Savannah native. From the names and ages, one can decipher the earlier census records for Savannah. In 1830, the "2 males under age 5" presumably includes George, Jr. In 1840, the "1 male age 5 to 10" must be George, the other infant apparently not having survived. The "1 male under 5" is probably Dehon. Other males and females listed, presumably other children (although possibly academy students), elude naming. Of interest in the Savannah records, however, are the references to the slaves, and the faint "3rd District, Brown Ward," the precise location of the Chatham Academy.<sup>35</sup> That is the closest the records come to a "home." I have provided the slave listings.<sup>36</sup>

#### IV

#### Who Is George?: The Existing Accounts

There exist several biographical sketches of George that, when taken together, shed light upon one another. The longest, a small pamphlet written by Edgar L. Pennington,<sup>37</sup> is also the least satisfying, leaving major gaps, while one of the



This illustration shows the city of Savannah from the Fort Mifflin. It depicts the city as it appeared in 1733, showing the fort and the city built on the bluff of the river. The view is from the fort, looking south along Bay Street, down Bull Street and through Mission Square toward the distant steeple of the Independent Presbyterian Church.

shortest, a 1906 sketch in the Candler & Evans Cyclopedia of Georgia,<sup>38</sup> is the most eloquent, if not perfectly factual. It may be the earliest, and its language has little in common with the others, which all seem to be drawn from the sketch by George White's daughter, Tallulah (date unknown).<sup>39</sup> None of the sketches has provided a photograph, etching, or photographed portrait; surely one must exist in Memphis, if not Savannah. Some of the biographical sketches contain errors. One is extremely brief. Another is from the newspapers.

What is known of George's early life, his life before coming to Savannah, is scanty in all the sketches of him. The Candler & Evans ignored it. The Pennington related only that George was born in Charleston, South Carolina on March 12, 1802, and quoted from E. M. Coulter's sketch that George's parents had been "poor, but industrious," honest, pious, and Methodist.<sup>40</sup> (Pennington acknowledges both Tallulah and Mr. Coulter throughout, but often fails to make use of quotation marks). George was self-educated, was licensed to preach at the age of eighteen, and was dubbed the "beardless preacher." Similar descriptions are used in an anonymous account in The Story of Georgia.<sup>41</sup> Tallulah and Pennington both suggest that his interest in the Episcopal Church stemmed from the influence of Bishop Dehon in South Carolina (a bishop for whom he would name a son), and thus antedated his arrival in Savannah. Little more is known.

The earliest mention of him being in Savannah may well be a newspaper listing on April 6, 1822.<sup>42</sup> On that day, the Brig Francis cleared port, and the Schooner Albany Packet arrived port, stopping one day for supplies at Charleston, and depositing on the docks in Savannah one "Rev. Mr. White."<sup>43</sup> This may be too early; Pennington has him arriving in 1823. So does Coulter. Tallulah is silent on the subject.

Once in Savannah, he set himself about the business of teaching in a school, although the earliest instance remains obscured to us. Pennington said that he opened a school in 1824; Tallulah uses no dates between 1802 and 1831; the Candler & Evans uses no dates, whatsoever. Pennington locates the school in Solomon Lodge

Hall, where we have already observed George conducting "Sunday School."<sup>44</sup> In 1826, he was elected principal (at age 24) of the Chatham Academy. Generally, he can be considered to have been a strict disciplinarian who rooted his course of study in the Classics. He gave the Academy fame before leaving it after two years for one of his own design (although he would have a continuing relationship with it ), administering his own school for fifteen years. It would come to be considered one of the best in the South.<sup>45</sup> The Story of Georgia mentions the "Chatham Academy of Atlanta," clearly erroneously.<sup>46</sup> Pennington relates that George, as clergyman, officiated as chaplain for the reception of the Marquis de Lafayette in Savannah in 1825,<sup>47</sup> but this is not easily verifiable. Harden's History of Savannah does not mention him in its list of dignitaries present.<sup>48</sup> This is all the information given for the 1820's in these accounts, except for the mention by Pennington that George marries "Elizabeth Miller of Savannah," a woman who "walked beside him more than sixty years." That places the marriage no later than 1827. Apparently, Pennington does make a serious error, here. The accounts by both Tallulah and Mr. Coulter inform us that his wife's name was not "Miller," but rather, "Millen." Tallulah adds that her father was a silk merchant. Pennington errs again at the end of George's life, stating that the married name of another daughter surviving George was Mrs. Laura "Leach," when it should read "Leath."<sup>49</sup> Pennington is not alone in error, however. Coulter reports four surviving children; the others report three. All report eight children as having been born. From the census, we know that at least one probably dies as an infant,<sup>50</sup> and we know from Pennington that son Dehon dies in Memphis of yellow fever, in 1878.<sup>51</sup>

The 1830's in Savannah give us an idea that George must have been a very busy young man. He continued in his administration of a school throughout the decade, and yet, he was ordained an Episcopal deacon in 1833, and a priest in 1836 (in St. Michael's, Charleston).<sup>52</sup> None of the accounts say much about his life as a pastor in these years, even though there is some information available. Pennington lifts from Coulter the simple statement that George spent the last five

years of his residence in Savannah engaged in mission work "on the islands," and preaching to seamen.<sup>53</sup> Tallulah says even less. The Story of Georgia mentions a doctorate in Divinity, but does not say when or where it was obtained. Nor, for that matter, do we know the origins of the M. A. degree which is often attached to his name. Without very much knowledge about his ecclesiastical work, however, we already have an indication that he was conscientious and caring,<sup>54</sup> and a fine preacher, "a beautiful reader, his elocution both in reading and speaking being perfect, and yet as simple as that of a child. His congregation never wearied of hearing him."<sup>55</sup> Yet, knowledge of his church activities in the 1830's seems to be submerged in the waters of the Savannah River. He surfaces briefly, however, in Professor Roger K. Warlick's volume on the history of Savannah's Christ Church, where "many events of special significance take place" during the 1830's,<sup>56</sup> and where the rector Edward Neville would briefly resign (for six months) in 1836 with "an arrangement for soon-to-be-ordained George White to fill in for him."<sup>57</sup> He also reports on the Diocese and the "success of its missions" at the time, and locates George at Springfield at a later date, in the summer of 1839. That same summer, George was a charter member of the Georgia Historical Society.<sup>58</sup> A new edifice for Christ Church was consecrated during Lent in 1840, with George, "of nearby Springfield," in attendance.<sup>59</sup> Henry Thompson Malone in his The Episcopal Church in Georgia relates that Stephen Elliot, on becoming bishop in 1841, found a mission at Springfield well under way, George White having established "St. Michael's" there, although without an actual church building.<sup>60</sup> These must have been prosperous years for the Church, since in addition to the new Christ Church edifice, St. John's of Savannah and St. Stephen's of Milledgeville were built, and even George had a chapel in Springfield by 1842.<sup>61</sup> By 1844, the mission had become an established church.<sup>62</sup> It was at about this time that Bishop Elliot ordered religious education to be disseminated to the children of slaves, an order that George, obviously, took to heart.<sup>63</sup> That he had a church of his own seems to be suggested by his absence from some of the



records for Christ Church in the 1840's, although there are many such records where he might turn up. Some business papers indicate that he owed money to the church, some \$90.00 it appears, in 1841, and there seems to be a similar debt, of \$50.00, in 1850, but he is absent from records in between.<sup>64</sup> The Christ Church records also hold some of his research notes,<sup>65</sup> but for a closer look at George's whereabouts during the 1830's and 1840's and outside of the schoolroom, it will be necessary to look at his reports to Diocesan conventions.<sup>66</sup> Dehon, of course, would have been born in 1840, and Tallulah in 1845.

The next significant date in George's life seems to have been 1849. In that year, he moved from Savannah to Marietta,<sup>67</sup> an event completely ignored in Tallulah's account of his life, though he remained there for some years. Prior to this time, he would have compiled and published his Statistics; the other works, The Yazoo Fraud and his Historical Collections would have been the fruits of his labor while in Marietta, at least in their finished form. An interesting letter exists in which he requests access to the papers of former Georgia governor Mr. Milledge, a letter written politely but in the admonishing tone of the schoolmaster/concerned historian.<sup>68</sup> It shows us how he went about collecting information, and it indicates his seriousness. The Candler & Evans biographical sketch mentions him as becoming "rector of a church in Marietta," but this is not confirmed by the Diocesan convention journals. What is confirmed there is his serving in a missionary capacity to Lagrange and West Point, Georgia, reported in various accounts as being between 1854 and 1856, except that the convention journals list him as such as early as 1853. He also filled in at St. John's, in Savannah, during the 1853 illness of their rector, The Rev. Mr. R. M. White.<sup>69</sup> In 1856, he moved on to become rector of Trinity Church, Florence, Alabama, for two years.<sup>70</sup> Mr. L. L. Knight, mentioned previously, makes the wild statement about George that "the last twenty-four years of his life were spent in pastoral labors in Alabama."<sup>71</sup> Yet, we know that he certainly goes on to Memphis in 1858, first as assistant rector to Bishop Otey, then as rector, at Calvary Church. All

other accounts speak to his heroism in fighting the yellow fever epidemic, there; the Candler & Evans account mentions the death of more than one son ( I assume the extra death is incorrect ) and tells us who performed the last rites:

A man of strong constitution, he passed through two or three epidemics each of Asiatic cholera and yellow fever in Memphis, standing bravely to his post, ministering to the sick and burying the dead, performing the funeral service himself for his own sons.<sup>72</sup>

He held the post in Memphis until three years before his death. Tallulah wrote of his weakness and disability during those years, but the best account of his long tenure in Memphis is Pennington's.<sup>73</sup>

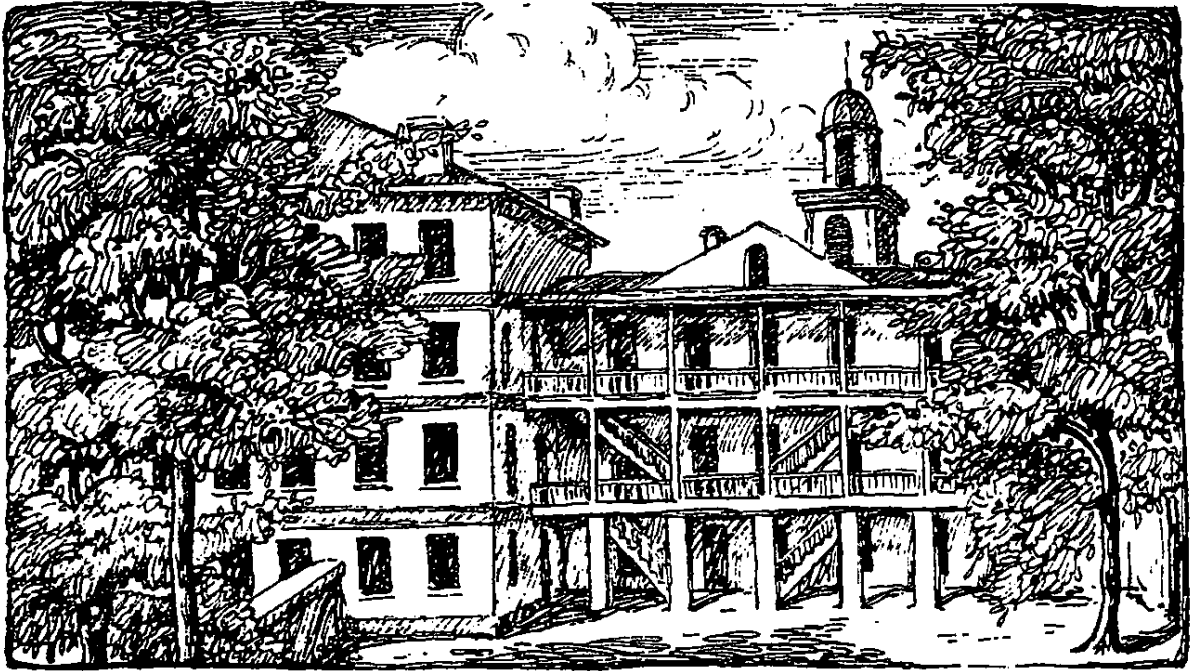
## V

### Schoolmaster George

There is a lot of material, comparatively speaking, on George as teacher and principal. Yet, the essential schoolmaster stands out. In 1921, E. M. Coulter published an essay on the Academy Movement in Georgia,<sup>74</sup> but without making any mention of George White. Since he would write about the man elsewhere, this is certainly an oversight. George's name was prominent in this regard, and appears in association with his academies regularly in the newspapers, and in books.

Two books are particularly useful. The first is Haygood S. Bowden's Two Hundred Years of Education, a source used by Mr. Pennington. The other is the work Cerveau's Savannah, by Joseph F. Waring. Waring's account is not totally complimentary toward George, but neither is it wholly accurate. It lists his Episcopal ordination as having been in 1843, seven years too late, and his tenure in Marietta as having lasted ten years rather than five or less.<sup>75</sup> Nevertheless, he gives us a good, concise description of the Chatham Academy:

The Academy had been chartered in 1788 but there was no building for it until 1813 when the whole block from Bull to Drayton was used, the center building and east wing by the Academy and the west wing by the Union Society. The Academy as a semi-private institution (it had some endowment and charged small fees) had a long and honorable life as a preparatory school for college until after the Civil War when it was merged with the new public school system.<sup>76</sup>



CHATHAM ACADEMY

*On January 5, 1813, Chatham Academy was opened for the reception of pupils, 219 attending. Chatham Academy was launched into being February 1st, 1788, by an act of the Georgia Legislature, then holding its sessions in Augusta, under auspices of a Board of Trustees, appointed by the State.*



*Chatham Academy*

voted to each county and Dr. White gave the boundaries and extent of each, the first of which

Many prominent Georgians urged the Legislature to "Make

The word "honorable" seems to have special poignance. Yet, according to Waring, not all was well in those days; he gives an account by a disgruntled former student there of a whipping given him by the principal at the time, George White. Various accounts tell us George was a stern taskmaster. We should keep in mind, however, that whippings were not uncommon in those days. This particular student in the course of his tale seems to have very little to say about what he actually did to get into trouble. He is chiefly of interest for giving us an important detail about George, unsympathetically informing us that George had lost the use of one of his eyes.<sup>77</sup> Whatever the feelings of the student, it should raise our level of sympathetic understanding, and it makes George's literary achievements seem all the more remarkable. It also may shed some light on the curious metaphor George used to describe Jacksboro.<sup>78</sup> An 1879 newspaper article on the history of the Chatham Academy relates that George took charge of the school in 1826 "on condition that the apartments should be allowed him free of rent," that he then left the school in 1827, that he returned in March, 1829 (paying rent), and that the "arrangement appears to have continued in force until June, 1832."<sup>79</sup> Cerveau adds:

. . . he was asked to be Principal of the Academy in 1826, gave it up after a year to start what he called White's Academy---his own show unimpeded by by a Board of Trustees, and it ran for two years with such great success that the Trustees persuaded him to come back to Chatham Academy in 1830. . . .When White decided once again to set up his own school, the old Academy found itself with a rival. White's Academy eclipsed the Chatham for the next fourteen years and was in its way famous.<sup>80</sup>

There was plenty of competition for George, too. Mr. Bowden, in his book, depicts an era in which any number of people were setting up shop and forming street-corner schools,<sup>81</sup> the names and leadership of which changed from year to year. George's advertisement could be found in the papers.<sup>82</sup> Bowden makes no mention of George's return to the Chatham Academy in 1829, making it 1830 instead, but he makes it clear that George took charge, made changes, and insisted upon his own curriculum.<sup>83</sup> A mid-year advertisement for a French teacher<sup>84</sup> may serve to underscore that insistence. Bowden also gives accounts of the public parades and examinations of the students.<sup>85</sup>

As he explains, intellectual achievement was judged according to Latin and

Greek erudition, and the public examinations were a blend of Socratic dialogue, Ciceronian discourse, and community involvement. The public was invited through advertisements.<sup>86</sup> The Board of Examiners expressed "unqualified satisfaction" with the results of George's examinations for students at the Chatham Academy,<sup>87</sup> and he was still getting high marks in 1835 at his own "Savannah Academy." It was said to be "also in a flourishing condition," for which "we must cheerfully unite in urging its continued claims upon the public."<sup>88</sup> In 1840, his school was still prospering, with "new equipment of philosophical apparatus, cabinet of materials, visitors welcome to come and examine classes at any time, Evening classes for young men."<sup>89</sup> An advertisement from 1844 suggests that he was still going strong.<sup>90</sup>

Generally, the course of study was one of Latin and Greek, Mathematics, Natural Philosophy, Chemistry, and English Grammar, but, it also at various times included French, Spanish, Music, Drawing, and Elocution.<sup>91</sup> After 1835, he was teaching young girls, and after 1842, very young children.<sup>92</sup> There is disagreement about his methods, some criticizing his program for being too rigorous, and for his corporal punishment; this is particularly true of Cerveau. His daughter, Tallulah, however, defends him not only by characterizing him as a man "born with a kindly spirit," but also by viewing him objectively through the eyes of one of his students (not Cerveau's student, to be sure) who acknowledged, "The whippings were frequent, but moderate." George even is said to have softened his views on such punishment, but, we might do well to question the loss of Authority in our own, more "enlightened" views, today (not that we should whip children, but in recognition of the fact that respect for authority is not what it once was). The ideal of the military school, and military discipline, was held high in those days, and it should be noted that George made himself clear as to what he expected. The parents were free to send their children elsewhere, and less expensive schools did exist. Girls were treated differently.<sup>93</sup> All George's schools thrived.<sup>94</sup> Moreover, it is difficult for us today to judge a man harshly when his contemporaries did not.

His schools continued to thrive, the parents were evidently pleased, the Board of Examiners had no quarrel with him, the Chatham Academy called him back, and his students dazzled the community. A former student who wrote about him for the newspapers, in 1884, excused his shortcomings and spoke of him with high praise.<sup>95</sup>

In the context of his times, George the schoolmaster was a remarkable man, the kind of remarkable man that one side in the war of 1860 sought to abolish. Already in the 1830's, the academies were being criticized in some quarters, particularly outside the South, as exclusive, aristocratic, elitist, and wholly un-American.<sup>96</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville was by this time writing of an America in which "democracy would extinguish that liberty of the mind to which a democratic social condition is favorable; so that, after having broken all the bondage once imposed on it by ranks or by men, the human mind would be closely fettered to the general will of the greatest number. . . . there is here a matter for profound reflection to those who look on freedom of thought as a holy thing. . . ." <sup>97</sup> The academic world of schoolmaster George would not long survive, the twilight of the nobility of ideas giving way at the war to the darkness of that curious cult of practicality, skepticism, innovation and indoctrination which replaced it. Mass instruction became the thing. If George had been somewhat authoritarian ( too strong a word, I think), he also represented a particular kind of authority. No doubt, the good Reverend schoolmaster would have complemented his instruction by instilling in his students a certain level of belief in God. Some of his students must have gone into battle, carrying that belief with them; it was that for which they lived, and for which they died. The same must be said, in the end, for the schoolmaster who instilled such convictions.

## VI

### George Himself

George's daughter, Tallulah Georgia White, in her very name gives us a clue to George's love for the state in which she was born, and yet, it was Tallulah who

wrote, with an assumed objectivity, that "It is a matter of regret that the man who left behind him a record of such valuable service to the State should have left nothing by which his own record can be made up."<sup>98</sup> Yet, we do have some records of George in his own words. The earliest such record, perhaps, is a letter written from Savannah on February 24, 1823 (thus, an 1822 appearance in Savannah seems likely).<sup>99</sup> It offers no return address other than "Savannah," but was sent to William Hughes of Riceborough, Georgia to seek a post at the Sand Hills school. From it, we see that he is struggling with his Latin and Greek, but willing. His references to "brothers" suggests, perhaps, a Methodist enterprise. It is gracious, and is signed "Your oedient Servant." After that, very little survives, locally, for the early years of his life. One would think a schoolmaster might have had papers or personal journals, but then, if he did, they may have left town with him. Yet, there remains the collection of his reports as Episcopal clergyman to Diocesan conventions. We also have his historical works.

The latter have made his reputation, but George the historian seems to have obscured George. Nevertheless, the works are important sources of the early history of the region and are in their own way a tribute to his own reverence for the past. His Statistics of the State of Georgia (1849) is not only statistical, but also, in places, eloquent.<sup>100</sup> It contains "Natural, Civil, Ecclesiastical History, together with a particular description of each county."<sup>101</sup> The chapter on Chatham County contains no mention of the author, but the work as a whole, covering everything from aboriginal tribes to descriptions of flora and fauna (even insects and crustaceans) is the work of a dedicated man who obviously cared deeply about his state. His Historical Collections of Georgia (1855), full of biographical sketches, anecdotes, county descriptions, historical accounts, and engravings, was compiled from original sources. It includes the charter of the colony of Georgia, treaties with the indians, and Revolutionary War documents, all from records gathered from libraries in Charleston, Savannah, Milledgeville, and New York, as well as from the memories of the people. In it we find that the

author was an honorary member of the Wisconsin Historical Society, and also a corresponding member of the New York Lyceum and the Brooklyn Institute. His stated hope was to "succeed in breaking and gathering out the stone from the quarry, and in hewing the heavy timber from the mountains, wherewith, hereafter, some accomplished architect, in its full proportion and finished beauty, may near the fair fabric of the history of Georgia."<sup>102</sup> The use of him by historians reflects their indebtedness. The book sold well; the third edition of the 700-page volume sold for three dollars.<sup>103</sup> He did not get rich. A third work, The Yazoo Fraud (1852), is a small pamphlet describing land fraud schemes late in the eighteenth century involving the South Carolina Yazoo Company. Again, his sources were all original documents.<sup>104</sup>

For his own written words, it remains only to look at his reports to Diocesan convention. Of these, some were spoken, others sent in absentia as reports from him on what he had been doing that year. They are short, but tell much. Sadly, there is no sermon; perhaps he did not write them down—the mark of many an evangelical preacher who knows his Bible by heart. The first time we see George is the thirteenth annual convention held at Macon in May, 1835, and listed simply as "Rev. George White, Deacon, Savannah."<sup>105</sup> Nothing more. Listed the same way in 1836, he was allowed to speak:

I am at present, and I have been for some months, engaged in preaching to the Seamen in this city. I have usually officiated twice on Sunday, and once during the week. A worthy member of our church has recently invited me to preach to his slaves on the afternoon of every Sunday. I have accepted his invitation, and hope that my labors may be followed by the Divine blessing. It is not in my power to report to you the number of marriages, baptisms, and burials at which I have officiated.

At the fifteenth convention, on April 10, 1837, we find the "Rev. George White" a full-fledged ordained minister under a sub-heading below "Christ Church," and another report:

The undersigned begs leave to report that he officiates in the Penfield Mariners' Church, located in the city of Savannah. He usually performs divine services three times a week. The ladies of Christ Church, through Mrs. Jones, have furnished me with more than one hundred Prayer Books for distribution among seamen. To the Young Men's Bible Society I am indebted for a large supply of bibles and Testaments. . . .



He goes on to account for his ordination, and again mentions a number of baptisms, marriages, and burials. Next to "baptisms" is the qualifier "(infant)," which suggests that for this evangelical, an adult baptism was something special. At the sixteenth convention in 1838, at Christ Church, Savannah, he again mentioned his work with the seamen, adding a note of concern: "The congregations until very recently, have been large and attentive." A motion by him at that convention was approved resolving that a missionary sermon be preached each year one day prior to the convention; he was appointed to preach the first, in 1839 at Augusta, but there is no record of it. Yet, he was there in 1839, listed as "George White, Teacher of a Seminary and Chaplain for Seamen, in Savannah." He reported "an excursion into the country" resulting in the organization of a church at Springfield in Effingham County, and the following year at Clarksville, in 1840, he reportedly was its rector. The congregation of "St. Michael's" was officially recognized by the convention. In both 1839 and 1840 he mentions his continuing mission to the seamen. He does not report to the convention of 1841. In re-appears in 1842, taking pride in the new church building of St. Michael's, and thanking people for their donations, specifically the ladies of Christ Church. At Christ Church, at the twenty-first convention, in May, 1843, we find him no longer listed as a rector but only as "residing in Savannah." Apparently, he has laid the groundwork for someone else and then moved on (just as he did at the Chatham Academy), and his report indicates his reasons:

Various circumstances have prevented the performance of Divine services in this Church during the past year. It is hoped that arrangements will be made at an early period for the support of a Missionary in this Parish. If the regular services of a clergyman could be procured there is no place in the lower country where one might be more profitably employed. An active and pious young man is wanted, as well as Prayer Books, and Tracts explaining the doctrines of the Church. The building is finished and ready for consecration, and for neatness and convenience, will not suffer by a comparison with any country Church in the Diocese. The means of the Parish are very limited, and it must rely for a considerable time upon members of our own communion. The debt is gradually diminishing, and if Episcopalians will only reserve a part of their means for the support of this infant Parish, "Jacob's hand here would not be lifted up in vain."

Evidently, he has been involved with his school, possibly as a means of supporting his family, since St. Michael's struggles to survive. He goes on to mention his

continuing missionary work on the islands, and then, at Augusta in 1844, he makes himself clear as to his school responsibilities:

Owing to circumstances, the rector has not been able to devote much time to his Parish. Residing thirty miles from it and engaged in the management of a large school, he found it very inconvenient to visit it as often as he desired.

He then mentioned his work with "the colored congregations," already looked at,<sup>106</sup> and with Baptists, Lutherans (apparently, not with Methodists), and with the Seamen. He did not attend the following year's convention, at St. Stephen's in Milledgeville in 1845, but we hear from him again in 1846, at Emmanuel Church, Athens. He was listed as "doing Missionary Work Among the Adjacent Islands," and was reported on as being in connection with St. John's Savannah, by that church:

This parish, after the resignation of the rectorship by the bishop, [the Rt. Rev. Stephen Elliot] was under the charge of the Rev. George White of Savannah until late in December.

He was, in turn, replaced there by the Rev. R. M. White, who, among other things, reported that he found the Sunday School in very good order. Sounds like George! R. M. White, interestingly, had just come from Milledgeville, where the Sunday School was reported to have been doing poorly. There, somewhere near children, we leave George, for he disappears from the record.

Actually, his name is still listed so that we can at least follow him. He was reported simply as "George White, Savannah" in 1847, similarly in 1848, and as "George White, Marietta" in 1849. Curiously, the convention in 1848 was held in Marietta; perhaps arrangements were made then for him to move there, although he was not present. At the next three conventions, 1850, 1851, and 1852, he was listed the same way, but a change occurred in 1853, when his listing read "George White, Missionary to Lagrange and West Point." It was also reported for that year that he had again served for a time at St. John's, Savannah, during the illness of R. M. White, its rector. Records for 1854 and 1855 (not consulted) may well explain his whereabouts in those years. We know he became rector of a church in Florence, Alabama in 1856, soon thereafter going to Memphis and to Calvary Church. It remains something of a mystery, however, why a Charlestonian

who decided to make his living in Savannah and did so much for the children and the descendants of the children of the city of Savannah and the state of Georgia should have to venture outside the state to secure an existing parish of his own. He certainly seems to have served the Church in Georgia well and dutifully. It was our loss, and Tennessee's gain, but, first, it was Alabama's gain. Little is known of his two years, there, but Pennington relates that from Diocesan journals in Alabama it is known that Bishop Cobbs visited his church in Florence and was pleased with what he found. One can only suppose that the Sunday School was thriving.

## VII

### George: West Tennessean

For a fair account of George's life in Memphis, one need only consult the account by Edgar L. Pennington, which relied on a number of newspaper references and Tennessee Diocesan journals. There is also a history of the Church in the state of Tennessee by Mr. Arthur Nool, and a book on Calvary Church by Ellen Davies-Rodgers, neither of which I have had in my hands, but from which I will be able to share some information. The latter work contains an entire chapter on George White entitled "The Longest Rectorship: The Rev. George White, D. D. , 1859-1883." In Pennington, one will find that Calvary Church had been enlarged before George's arrival,<sup>107</sup> and that in 1874 the church witnessed 51 baptisms, 37 confirmations, 13 marriages, and 62 burials.<sup>108</sup> His work with "the colored people" is noteworthy; it seems to have been extensive, resulting in improved religious practice and diminished prejudice on both sides. Despite the war, the church sported a new organ and supported a "Church Home"; it prospered.

In 1866 and 1873, the city of Memphis was visited by cholera.<sup>109</sup> The first visitation was devastating; the second was less so, but thousands fled the city. Three months after the second visitation, however, the city was struck by a

more serious pestilence, a particular strain of yellow fever. In one week in October, 300 deaths were reported, the plague claiming more than 1,100 in all.<sup>110</sup> it was only its first visit; it would return in 1878, a year that went down in medical history, when the plague took thousands of lives. The fever spread up and down the Mississippi; all river trade eventually slowed to a halt. It was as if the South, itself, was gasping for breath, sick from impoverishment and subjugation, its main lifeline choked off. Before it hit Memphis, the men who finally called for preventative measures were, ironically enough, the members of the Cotton Exchange.<sup>111</sup> When it took Memphis in its grip, it took the life of the son of Jefferson Davis. The city, itself, was in panic; people flooded into the suburbs and into train stations. They packed the Louisville train, and crowded into the Charleston Depot.<sup>112</sup> It was the native of Charleston, however, who stood his ground, remaining at the church in the midst of the chaos which the city had become. He stayed to keep open the doors of that church, and the world responded to those open doors. Gifts of food, clothing, and money poured in, from the North, and from the impoverished South. Bishop Quintard went to New York to appeal for help.<sup>113</sup> The man from Charleston made the greatest sacrifice of all. In keeping the church doors open, he sacrificed a son, Dehon, the same son named for the Bishop that had drawn him to the Church, originally. Several clergymen along with four sisters of the Episcopalian Order of St. Mary all gave their lives, as did religious from many denominations.<sup>114</sup> Yet, George survived, he and his wife going "from house to house, ministering to the sick and burying the dead."<sup>115</sup>

He did fall ill for a time, but it was not pestilence, but over-work, that caught up with him, at a time and place where he must have been happiest. He was stricken with paralysis "whilst addressing the Sunday School," just before Christmas in 1879.<sup>116</sup> The Savannah newspaper report of this news immediately slipped into the past tense, but, it was not the end. George would live another eight years before passing away on April 30, 1887. His life at Calvary Church

had been a full one. He had continued his historical work; at the Diocesan convention of 1875 he was appointed historiographer for the Diocese, although he never completed a history.<sup>117</sup> His charitable activities extended to membership in the Knights Templar,<sup>118</sup> and to over over 100 parish families and a Sunday School of some 135 children and fourteen teachers.<sup>119</sup> The Church was debt free. Of the children, who were especially susceptible to yellow fever, many would likely have died.

The Church building underwent further remodelling, and a letter from an architect credits George for the restoration: "The internal arrangements, the sanctuary, and nave, were all his. He symbolized the whole . . . not a stone was placed except through him." Even the communion table was raised, and after his death the pulpit would be dedicated to the man who used it.<sup>120</sup> He is also said to have paid for much of the restoration out of pocket.<sup>121</sup> In Church affairs, he was similarly active, At the Diocesan convention which elected Bishop Quintard in 1865, it was George who stood among the delegates to propose the two-part division of the Diocese into East and West<sup>122</sup> (a scheme approved but not settled until recently, with a three-part division). Thus, it can be said of George that even at the end of a devastating war, he was not subdued, but was building, planning, striving. . . seeking.

He has received many words of praise in his memory, and that is as it should be. Samuel Eliot Morison admonishes us against historians who "will admit no highmindedness, no virtue, no nobility of character."<sup>123</sup> George White had all these in abundance, and he touched many people's lives. His life can almost be said to illustrate history, and even to suggest with von Ranke that history is a story written by the finger of God. Yet, we must be careful of lapsing into historicism, of pointing to some great metaphysical purpose directing his path as we have followed it. We can only observe the man, and acknowledge what was apparently a great simplicity of soul. Some of the words of praise capture that spirit. For the Memphis Daily Advocate he was a man "who loved Memphis,

who loved her people, and who had a heart full of sympathy for all her children."<sup>124</sup>  
He was praised by his daughter, by his former students, and by the congregation who loved him in return, but it was Bishop Quintard whose tribute came closest to the truth. He spoke of a man who simply loved, and he allowed George to work and to teach even after death:

. . . You know how spontaneous was his tenderness of heart, and how he manifested towards all that tact of love, which is so much better than the most consummate art. It was the steadfast heart surcharged with love, and the loyal soul that ever looked to God, in which were the springs of your pastor's power.

His life closed with a long illness, so patiently endured, and so uncomplainingly borne that they who watched by his bedside found it the very school of Christ, in which they learned lessons of entire submission to the will of God, and of hope in all its richness and fullness . . .

Think, good people, what the close of such a life teaches . . .<sup>125</sup>

This was a special and significant man. Just how significant, or special, it is impossible to know, and yet, it seems all but impossible not to believe that just as assuredly as the hand of Providence deposited him on the docks at the river in Savannah, it also carried him to the banks of the Mississippi. A soul from the deepest South had been summoned to Memphis. Though the railroad is gone, that is where we must seek him, should we choose to follow. One wonders what his childhood must have been like, but a greater mystery remains: very little is heard from him during the war. That war would have had an effect on his life, in Memphis, and in his own awareness of the destruction of the South he loved. His beloved state of Georgia would be ravaged by Sherman's torches and left in ruin. Even the peaceable subjugation of Savannah (as if Savannah could be defined without its hinterlands) would involve the despoilation of his old Chatham Academy as the schoolroom was taken by storm for use as a hospital:

. . . Sherman's army seized upon the building and converted it into a hospital for their sick and wounded people. The military authorities seem to have been unmindful of the care ordinarily bestowed upon such institutions in the military and naval services in other parts of the world.<sup>126</sup>

Apparently, some fifty thousand dollars in damages were the result, which may be more peaceable than a torch, but then, the schoolhouse hasn't been the same, since. Such news would have reached George, eventually, in occupied Memphis,

just as would the news from Vicksburg, from Atlanta, from Charleston.

Unfortunately, the Tennessee Diocesan journal for 1861 is lost, and no other exists until that of 1865. There is one account, nevertheless, which depicts for us the essential, simple-hearted George, the man rooted firmly in time and place and circumstance, who in one simple but noble gesture told us everything we need to know. It so happens that early on a Sunday morning, following the fall of Memphis in 1862, General Sherman had joined the congregation attending services at Calvary Church. As had been the Confederate practice, during the reading of the prayer for all in civil service, George omitted the passage which asks for protection of the President of the United States. Sherman quickly stood in the midst of the congregation and spoke the deleted phrase, then took his seat. It was, as it has been described, ". . . another exhibit of the only method he knew to break the spirit of the people."<sup>127</sup> The following day he ordered the church to use the phrase from then on, or find its doors closed indefinitely. No record remains of George's immediate response on that Sunday morning; one would assume he finished his prayer. That his spirit was broken is highly doubtful. From schoolhouse to pulpit to yellow fever, his accomplishments tell of a man who never lost heart. As for his church, it is reported that he continued "at his post of sacred duty to pray and preach." The lowly Sherman, who took it upon himself to disturb another man's prayer, was no match for him. His threats were irrelevant, for though he was Pestilence, itself, the doors of the Church would always be open.

END

Census Information

Census of 1850 (Cobb County, Georgia): census visitation #136236  
 real estate value=1,500  
 George White, age 48, male, author Statistics of Georgia, place of  
 birth: South Carolina.  
 Elizabeth, age 48, female, place of birth: South Carolina.  
 George White, Jr. age 20, male, Clerk, place of birth: Georgia.  
 Dehon, age 10, male, " " " "  
 Teluna, age 5, female, " " " "

Census of 1840 (Chatham County): 3rd District, Brown Ward.

"George White"

1 m under 5  
 1 m 5 to 10  
 1 m 30 to 40  
 1 f 5 to 10  
 1 f 15 to 20  
 1 f 30 to 40  
 1 f slave 10 to 24  
 1 f slave 36 to 55

Census of 1830 (Chatham County):

"George White"

2 m under 5  
 1 m 20 to 30  
 1 f under 5  
 1 f 20 to 30  
 1 m slave 36 to 55  
 2 f slaves under 10  
 1 f slave 10-24  
 1 f slave 24-36



## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup>R.J. Shafer, A Guide to Historical Method (Homewood, Illinois: Dorsey Press, 1980), chap. VII.
- <sup>2</sup>Andrew Lytle, "A Christian University and the Word," in Sewanee, The University of the South, ed. William Butt and William Strode (Louisville: Harmony House Publishers, 1984).
- <sup>3</sup>General editors, Encyclopedia Britannica, (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1972), s.v. "Memphis," by Gerald M. Capers.
- <sup>4</sup>Thomas A. Bailey, The American Pageant (Boston: D. C. Heath & Co., 1966).
- <sup>5</sup>Savannah Morning News 25 April 1887 (8/1).
- <sup>6</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>7</sup>Ibid., 30 March 1884 (4/6).
- <sup>8</sup>Ibid., 29 November 1873 (3/1).
- <sup>9</sup>Ibid., 16 December, 1879 (3/3).
- <sup>10</sup>Ibid., e.g. 8 June, 1855 (2/2), 3 March, 1884 (2/2).
- <sup>11</sup>Edgar L. Pennington, George White: Teacher, Historian, Priest (Hartford, Conn., Church Missions Publishing Co., 1943), p. 20.
- <sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 22.
- <sup>13</sup>Rosenstock-Huessy, quoted in "The Faith of an Historian," by Samuel Eliot Morison, American Historical Review vol. 56, pp. 261-275.
- <sup>14</sup>Barbara Tuchman, Practicing History (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1981), p.88.
- <sup>15</sup>I was unable to find this passage in White's Statistics. The work citing him is by L. L. Knight, Georgia Landmarks and Legends, vol 2 (Atlanta: Byrd Printing, 1914), p. 673.
- <sup>16</sup>Medora Field Perkerson, White Columns in Georgia (New York: Bonanza Books, 1952), p. 44.
- <sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 310
- <sup>18</sup>Kenneth Coleman, A History of Georgia (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1977), p. 180.
- <sup>19</sup>For the Census records, See Appendix: C.
- <sup>20</sup>"Journal of the Proceedings of the Twenty-first Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the State of Georgia," (1843), MS, 17-A-1, Coll. of the Georgia Historical Society (GHS).
- <sup>21</sup>Ibid., Twenty-second convention (1844).
- <sup>22</sup>Carlyle, "On History," in The Varieties of History ed. Fritz Sterne (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), p. 91.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 93

<sup>24</sup>Savannah Morning News 26 January 1865 (2/4).

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 21 April 1873 (3/2).

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 31 July 1882 (4/3).

<sup>27</sup>Daily Georgian 2 February 1844 (2/5). I have included the whole article.  
See Appendix: A.

<sup>28</sup>Georgian 19 January 1832 (2/6).

<sup>29</sup>Ibid. 11 June 1831 (3/1).

<sup>30</sup>Ibid. 1 October 1831 (3/2).

<sup>31</sup>Ibid. 28 September 1826 (3/5)

<sup>32</sup>Savannah Morning News 25 April 1887 (8/1).

<sup>33</sup>Cf. "Oxford Movement" p. 2.

<sup>34</sup>Georgian 4 February 1831 (2/1).

<sup>35</sup>See Map, Appendix: B.

<sup>36</sup>Census records for Cobb County obtained from Savannah Public Library records, on microfilm; for Savannah, from Georgia Historical Society records, on microfilm, for 1830 = Coll. M-19-16, (12) "Chatham County" p.263; 1840 = Coll. M704-38, listed as "Savannah" within "Chatham County," p. 53. See Appendix: C.

<sup>37</sup>Op. Cit. Pennington.

<sup>38</sup>Allen D. Candler and Clement A. Evans, eds. Cyclopedia of Georgia (Atlanta: State Historical Association, 1906), p. 562.

<sup>39</sup>Tallulah Georgia White, "George White" in Men of Mark in Georgia, vol.2, ed. By William J. Northern (Spartanburg, S. C.: The Reprint Company, 1974), p. 416.

<sup>40</sup>E. M. Coulter "George White" in The Dictionary of American Biography, vol. XX, p. 99.

<sup>41</sup>The Story of Georgia (Biographical volume), ASC Collections [Minis Room], The American Historical Society, 1938.

<sup>42</sup>Georgian 6 April 1822 (2/5).

<sup>43</sup>See Appendix: D. (ship arrival notice)

<sup>44</sup>Supra, p. 12, n. 31.

<sup>45</sup>Pennington's chief source for this and other information on the Academies is H.S. Bowden, Two Hundred Years of Education (Richmond: Dietz Printing Co, 1932).

<sup>46</sup>Op.Cit. The Story of Georgia.

<sup>47</sup>Op. Cit. Pennington, p. 7.

<sup>48</sup>William Harden, A History of Savannah and South Georgia (Chicago: Cherokee Publishing Co., 1981).

<sup>49</sup>Supra, p.8, n. 12.

<sup>50</sup>Supra, p.13; also See Appendix: C.

<sup>51</sup>Op. Cit. Pennington, p. 19; Op. Cit. Tallulah, p. 419.

<sup>52</sup>Op. Cit. Tallulah, p. 418.

<sup>53</sup>Op. Cit. Coulter, p. 100.

<sup>54</sup>Supra, p. 10, n. 21.

<sup>55</sup>Op. Cit. Tallulah, p. 419.

<sup>56</sup>Roger K. Warlick, As Grain Once Scattered, The History of Christ Church, Savannah, Georgia 1733-1783 (Columbia, S. C.: The State Printing Co., 1987), p. 65.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., n. 423 (Professor Warlick's source for this information is Neuville's letter, in GHS Collections, MS. 978, f. 42).

<sup>58</sup>Op. Cit. Pennington, p. 7.

<sup>59</sup>Op. Cit. Warlick, p. 69.

<sup>60</sup>Henry Thompson Malone, The Episcopal Church in Georgia (Atlanta: Foote and Davies, 1960), p. 70.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., p. 74.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., p. 78.

<sup>63</sup>Supra, p. 10, n. 21.

<sup>64</sup>Christ Church Collection. MS. 978, Box 3, f.49; Box 3, f. 60. (GHS)

<sup>65</sup>Ibid. MS. 978, Box 7, f. 134. Infra, n..102.

<sup>66</sup>Infra; chap. VI.

<sup>67</sup>Op. Cit. Coulter, p. 100.

<sup>68</sup>John Milledge Papers, MS. 560, Box 1, f. 1 (the index lists it as f. 4, but it is, and should be, in f. 1). (GHS) See Appendix: E.

<sup>69</sup>Op. Cit. Episcopal convention Journals,(1853).

<sup>70</sup>Op. Cit. Coulter, p. 100; Op. Cit. Pennington, p. 12. (Pennington's sources include convention journals for the Diocese of Alabama for 1857).

<sup>71</sup>L. L. Knight, Georgia and Georgians (Chicago: Lewis Publ., 1917), p. 2,736.

<sup>72</sup>Op. Cit. Candler & Evans, p. 562.

<sup>73</sup>Op. Cit. Tallulah, p. 418.

<sup>74</sup>Georgia Historical Quarterly, vol. 5, pp 11-42.

<sup>75</sup>Joseph F. Waring, Cerveau's Savannah (Savannah: Georgia Historical Society, 1973), p. 66.

<sup>76</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 63.

<sup>77</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 66.

<sup>78</sup>*Supra*, p. 10, n. 17.

<sup>79</sup>Savannah Morning News 9 May 1879, from GHS vertical files s.v. "Chatham Academy." See Appendix: F.

<sup>80</sup>*Op. Cit.* Waring, pp. 64-65.

<sup>81</sup>*Op. Cit.* Bowden, see chap. "The Age of the Academies."

<sup>82</sup>Georgian 15 June 1826 (2/5). See Appendix:G.

<sup>83</sup>*Op. Cit.* Bowden. See Appendix:H.

<sup>84</sup>Georgian 27 January 1831 (3/1). See Appendix:I.

<sup>85</sup>*Op. Cit.* Bowden. See Appendix:J.

<sup>86</sup>Georgian 5 June 1826 (2/6). See Appendix:K.

<sup>87</sup>*Op. Cit.* Bowden. See Appendix:L.

<sup>88</sup>*Ibid.* pp. 200-201.

<sup>89</sup>*Ibid.* p. 206.

<sup>90</sup>Georgian 2 January 1844 (3/6). See Appendix:M.

<sup>91</sup>*Op. Cit.* Bowden, pp. 165, 195, 218-219.

<sup>92</sup>*Ibid.* pp. 195, 216.

<sup>93</sup>Savannah Morning News 30 March 1884 (4/6). See Appendix:N.

<sup>94</sup>*Op. Cit.* Tallulah, p. 417.

<sup>95</sup>Savannah Morning News, see n. 93.

<sup>96</sup>Richard Hofstadter, Anti-Intellectualism in American Life (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970), p. 325.

<sup>97</sup>Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America, ed. by Richard Heffner (New York: Signet Classics, 1956), p. 149.

<sup>98</sup>*Op. Cit.* Tallulah.

<sup>99</sup>Hughes-Folsom Papers, MS. 406, Box 1, f. 2 (GHS). See Appendix:O.

<sup>100</sup>*Cf.* "Madison" p. 9.

<sup>101</sup>George White, Statistics of the State of Georgia (Savannah: W. Thorne Williams, 1849).

<sup>102</sup>George White, Historical Collections of Georgia (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1969), p. ii. [originally published New York: Pudney & Russell, 1855].

<sup>103</sup>Savannah Morning News 6 June 1855 (2/2).

<sup>104</sup>George White, The Yazoo Fraud (Marietta: Advocate Printing Office, 1852).(GHS).

<sup>105</sup>Op. Cit. "Journals of the Proceedings of the Conventions of the Episcopal Church in the State of Georgia," collectively 1823-1853. MS. 17-A-1 (book form),GHS.

<sup>106</sup>Supra. p. 10.

<sup>107</sup>Op. Cit. Pennington, p. 12.

<sup>108</sup>Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>109</sup>Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>110</sup>Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>111</sup>Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>112</sup>Ibid., pp. 16-17.

<sup>113</sup>Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>114</sup>Ibid.

<sup>115</sup>Ibid. p. 15.

<sup>116</sup>Savannah Morning News 16 December, 1879 (3/3).

<sup>117</sup>Op. Cit. Pennington, p. 14.

<sup>118</sup>Op. Cit. Tallulah.

<sup>119</sup>Ellen Davies-Rodgers, The Great Book, Calvary Protestant Episcopal Church, 1832-1921 (Memphis: Plantation Press, 1973), pp. 239-272.

<sup>120</sup>Arthur H. Nool, History of the Church in the Diocese of Tennessee (New York: James Pott & Co., 1900), p. 105.

<sup>121</sup>Op. Cit. Pennington.

<sup>122</sup>Op. Cit. Nool, p. 155.

<sup>123</sup>Op. Cit. Morison, see n. 13.

<sup>124</sup>Op. Cit. Pennington, p. 21.

<sup>125</sup>Ibid., pp. 21-22.

<sup>126</sup>Savannah Morning News 23 May 1879, from GHS vertical files s.v. "Chatham Academy."

<sup>127</sup>Op. Cit. Ellen Davies-Rodgers.

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