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THE RIGHT REVEREND WILLIAM BACON STEVENS

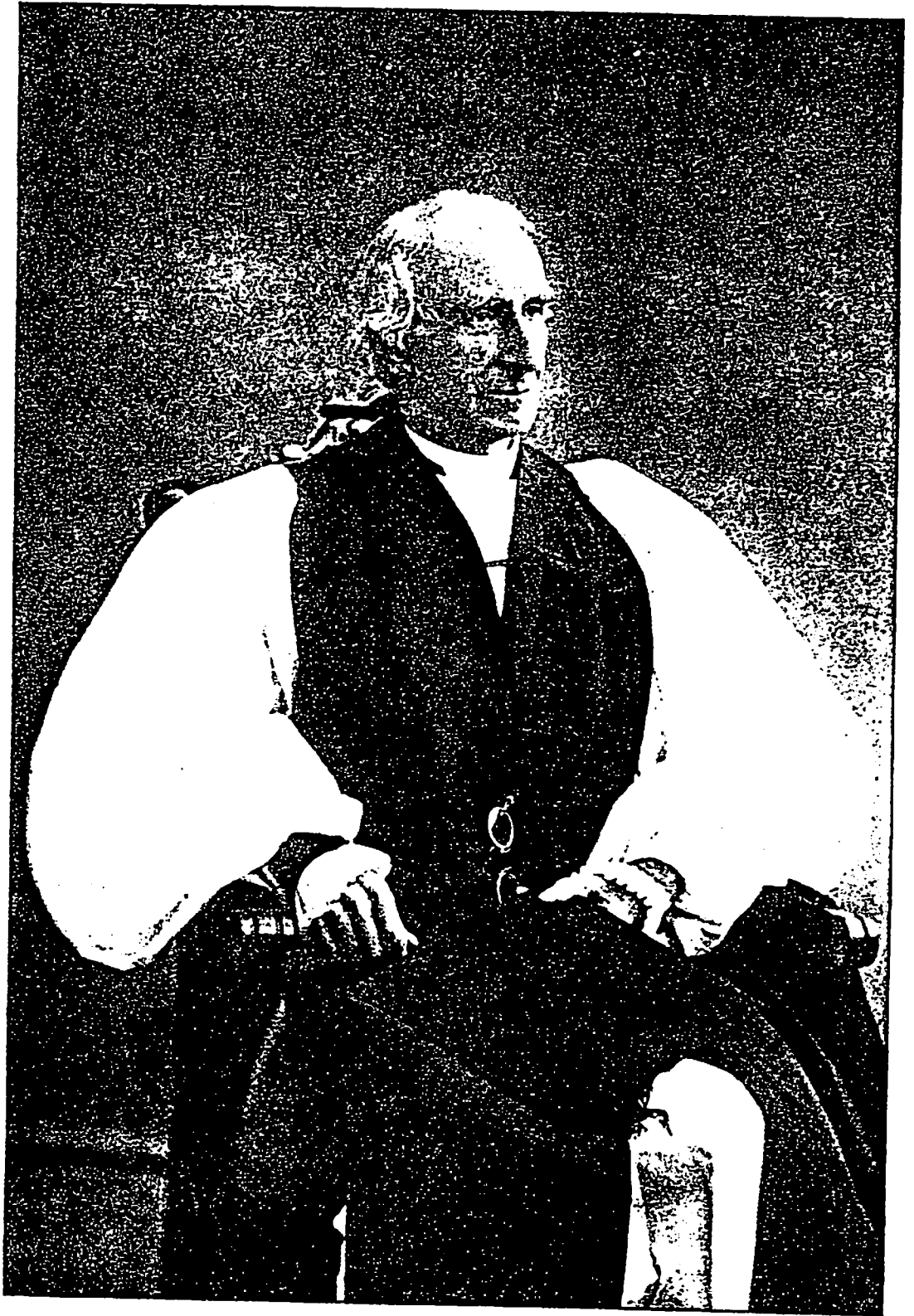
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RIGHT REVEREND WILLIAM BACON STEVENS, D. D., LL. D.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....1
Narrative.....2
Summation.....15
Endnotes.....16
Works Cited.....20

An Abstract of

The Right Reverend William Bacon Stevens

Above all other qualities, Bishop Stevens possessed the ability to influence others and develop their confidence. During his youth, 1815 in Bath, Maine, he managed to overcome normally debilitating health problems, while later in life he nearly circumnavigated the globe. To his honor and credit he was befriended, in 1838, by the likes of Bishop Stephen Elliott, Georgia's Episcopal leader during the Civil War years, and the Philanthropist Asa Packer, in 1862, Judge and gracious benefactor of Lehigh University. Bishop Stevens put his hand to other achievements as well, including the first comprehensive text, A History of Georgia, published in two volumes, 1847 and 1859, respectively.

William Bacon Stevens was born on July 13, 1815 in the sleepy New England town of Bath, which sits along the banks of the rambling Kennebec River in the Province of Maine.⁽¹⁾ He was the youngest of seven children, only three of which survived childhood in this harsh and bitter environment.⁽²⁾ So racked with sickness in his youth that even his mother distressed for his life, offering him up to the Lord with these words: "Here Lord, I give him to thee. Do what thou wilt. He is thine."⁽³⁾ Regarding William Stevens family, he was born the:

son of William and Rebecca (Bacon) Stevens; grandson of William and Catherine (Whittemore) Stevens, and great-grandson of Benjamin and Martha (Bailey) Stevens. His father was a Lieutenant in the War of 1812, and was commandant at Fort Preble, Portland, Maine; his grandfather was in the sea service in the Patriot cause in the Revolution, and his maternal ancestors served in Queen Anne's War.⁽⁴⁾

Little information is available regarding the ancestors of Bishop Stevens beyond the following:

The name Stevens occurs in the records of Maine at an early date, and as early as 1720 John Stevens, from whom the Stevenses of this article may be decended, was a Kennebunkport. Thirty-five pages of the record, Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailors of the Revolution, are given to accounts of the Stevenses.⁽⁵⁾

Some information regarding his fathers military career was contained within a diary entry made by Major Zina Hyde who recounts the exploits of the Bath Militia in their contest against the forces of Great Britain. From his diary entry dated July 25, 1812, we read:

H. G. Allen elected captain of Bath Light Infantry in room of Capt. Clap, promoted to major, Wm. Stevens, 1st lieutenant, and Wm. Torry, ensign. (6)

Following his father's death, in 1822, from a disease of the lungs which he contracted during his military career, Mr. Stevens and his remaining family moved to Boston to live with his maternal grandparents.⁽⁷⁾ Motivated by poor health and a need to change climate, Mr. Stevens undertook travels throughout this country that would ultimately land him in Savannah, Ga. by way of many towns and states, notably Charleston, S.C. This would prove to be the first of many trips, both domestic and foreign, during which Mr. Stevens would make significant acquaintances. Following the recommendations of Dr. Vanderburgh, of New York City, Mr. Stevens undertook a trip westward that first led him to Washington, D.C. From his personal account of that trip we read:

Thence to Washington, and there I stayed at the house of Mr. Coyle. While in Washington I attended one of the levees of President Andrew Jackson and shook hands with him in the White House. I also became personally acquainted with Ex-president John Quincy Adams, Dan'l Webster, Henry Clay, Theodore Freylinghaysen, and a great many other persons then and since illustrious in America's history. I had proposed staying in Washington only three days, but the various objects of interest detained me for several weeks. I was constantly in the House of Representatives or the Senate and heard most exciting debates on the States Rights question from Daniel Webster, John C. Calhoun, Thomas H. Bratton, George R. McDuffy of S.C., etc.⁽⁸⁾

It would be based upon some of these relationships, that Mr. Stevens would later draw strengths for his many professional

tasks, as he does during the formation of the Georgia Historical Society.

Upon Mr. Stevens arrival in Savannah, Ga., he delivered a letter of introduction to Dr. Edward Copp'ee written by Lowell Mason of Boston.⁽⁹⁾ From his autobiography, Mr. Stevens makes the following observations:

On my return to Savannah I went at once to Dr. Copp'ee's cottage which was now through the extreme kindness of the family my home. The family then consisted of the Doctor and his wife, Alethea, the eldest daughter, Eliza, subsequently married to Dr. John J. Mitchell of Savannah, the son of Governor David Brady Mitchell, and a son Henry who graduated from West Point Military Academy in 1843, and was subsequently Prof. of English Literature in the University of Pennsylvania and the first President of Lehigh University; Carolina, who died unmarried, in Germantown; Charles, who died while in the Junior class of the University of Georgia, at Athens, and Laura, who died young in Savannah.⁽¹⁰⁾

It would be into the Copp'ee family that Bishop Stevens would join in marriage, to the daughter, Alethea, on the 1st day of January, 1838. The wedding took place in the parlor of the Copp'ee residence, and was performed by the Reverend Joseph L. Jones, Pastor of the Presbyterian Church of Savannah.⁽¹¹⁾

From this marriage, they brought forth three children about whom limited information is available, save the following: their first child, Eliza Copp'ee born in Savannah, December 20, 1838, and listed in the U. S. Census for the year 1940.⁽¹²⁾ About the middle child nothing is now known, however, some information requested is to date not received. The third child, Nina, was apparently born in 1850, after the family moved to

Philadelphia. She was mentioned in the Bishop's autobiography as being instrumental in it's assembly.⁽¹³⁾ Bishop Stevens' extended family from this marriage to Alethea, included Dr. Edward Copp'ee, his wife, Caroline Eugenia, n'e Raingearde de Lavillatte, and two surviving children, Henry and Alethea.⁽¹⁴⁾

Bishop Stevens' wife, Alethea, passed away during the month of May, 1868, and attempts to locate a copy of any obituary or information about her death have not materialized.⁽¹⁵⁾ Birth and church records, requested from both the local historical society and the Episcopal Diocese of Philadelphia, have not been received, regretfully.

In the following year, 1869, Bishop Stevens would again marry, this time to: "Anna Maria Conyngham, daughter of the Hon. John N. Conyngham and Ruth Ann (Butler) Conyngham of Wilkes Barra, Pa."⁽¹⁶⁾ From this marriage two children were born, a son, John Conyngham Stevens, who died in Philadelphia on July 10, 1938, leaving a widow and three daughters⁽¹⁷⁾; and a daughter, Anne C. Stevens Krumbhaar, born in Wilkes Barra, Pa. on August 6, 1870. She married in 1892 and died suddenly at her home in Cazenovia, New York on October 3rd, 1935. She is survived by her husband, and one son, Dr. George Douglas Krumbhaar, of Boston, Mass.⁽¹⁸⁾ Within the margins of Bishop Stevens autobiography (unpublished), is an address for Dr. G. Douglas Krumbhaar, 334 Hammond St., Chestnut Hill, Mass.⁽¹⁹⁾ In addition, a staff member from the New York State Office of

Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, at the Lorenzo State Historic Site indicated that both Louis and Anne Krumbhaar are buried in Evergreen Cemetery in Cazenovia, along with several other Krumbhaars.

Educational and Professional Information

Bishop Stevens' educational career began simply:

He went to good Marm Hope's "dame's school," where he became to his delight master of the sand-box, in which children printed letters with a pointed stick. At the Franklin School he recalled a kind teacher, Mr. Pierce. (20)

Following these educational experiences, Stevens entered the more prestigious Phillips Adademy at Andover, Mass. for a period of two years, 1830-1832, but did not graduate. Failing health now dictated that William Stevens follow medical advice and take a long ride through the west, in search of bodily vigor. (21) Upon arriving in Savannah, Ga. some time later, Mr. Stevens continued his quest for education with Dr. Copp'ee:

Stevens began the study of medicine under his tutelage. He continued until the fall when he went to Charleston, to pursue his studies in the Medical College of South Caroline. After a year here he returned to Savannah, and the next fall went north to complete his medical course at Dartmouth College. Receiving his degree there in November, 1837, he immediately set sail for Savannah. (22)

Once settled in Savannah, Dr. Stevens set about in avid pursuit of his profession, becoming an associate of Dr. Copp'ee within his practice. In addition:

he held posts of physician and surgeon for the Bethesda Orphan's Home and for the Central of Georgia Railway, and health officer for the port

of Savannah. He was soon elected secretary of the Georgia Medical Society and in 1840 attended as a delegate of that Society the National Medical Convention in Washington. (23)

While in many ways typically a New Englander, Dr. Stevens adapted well to Southern manners and more importantly, to Southern people. Of his many new friends, Israel K. Tefft would prove to be most significant. He was one of the influential people with whom Dr. Stevens would later form the Georgia Historical Society. In Dr. Stevens own words regarding a meeting with Mr. Tefft:

while sitting in his library with himself and Dr. Rich. D. Arnold, I suggested the formation of an Historical Society as a means of gathering up the material now dispersed in many of the old families and of making it a repository whence a good State History might subsequently originate. (24)

It was perhaps from this simple beginning that Dr. Stevens' life as a historian began in earnest and led to multiple efforts to bring to print a thorough work regarding the history of Georgia. In addition to numerous articles published in local journals and news print, Dr. Stevens produced his first book, A History of Georgia from its First Discovery by Europeans to the Adoption of the Present Constitution in MDCCXCVIII. This work was published in two volumes, one in 1847, and the last in 1859. While these works were recognized as significant and applauded by many, typical of comments offered in support of Dr. Stevens' books were those offered by one of the state's leading historians of the time:

This work, although taking the colony and state development only to the year 1798, was, in the words of Dr. E. M. Coulter, currently Georgia's leading historian, "a scholarly work, far beyond any other history which had ever appeared in Georgia or in the majority of other states, and has not yet been superseded."⁽²⁵⁾

While statements such as these were common, Dr. Stevens did have his detractors, the most vocal of which was Mr. J. J. Flournoy. A resident of the Athens area, Mr. Flournoy wrote a very deliberate letter to the Georgia Historical Society in which he attempted to make several strong arguments against Dr. Stevens. Mr. Flournoy felt strongly that Dr. Stevens would never finish his history, "while encumbering himself with University duties." Additionally, Flournoy felt, "the task should have been entrusted to a native Georgian."⁽²⁶⁾ Another of Dr. Stevens detractors was George Wimberly Jones (later De Renne), who made the following comment:

Stevens wasted most of his book on the period before the history of Georgia really began, that his style was redundant, repetitious, and padded, and that there were many errors of dates, names, and statements of fact.⁽²⁷⁾

An additional negative comment about Dr. Stevens came from Thomas R. R. Cobb, who, intensely loyal to all things southern, made the following comments in a letter to his wife. Portions of his letter were included in an article entitled: William Bacon Stevens: Physician, Historian, Teacher, Preacher. This article appeared in the Georgia Historical Society Quarterly as follows:

It was difficult for the more intense Georgians to accept Stevens at his true worth.

As has appeared, some could never forgive him for having been born in New England and what was more, for having returned to the North after the signal honors paid him by Georgians. I hope we shall hear no more twaddle about him in Athens. If he was to come to Georgia I would be tempted to help him to a coat of tar and feathers. (28)

One of Dr. Stevens detractors was himself the object of some interest. John Jacobus Flournoy was once described as:

A unique figure, familiar in the fifties, was John Jacobus Flournoy. Of good birth and with a liberal education, improved by travel abroad, his associations were among the best people, but with the loss of hearing came poverty and affliction, and unbalanced in mind he drifted away to the lowest stratum of society. He was an inveterate contributor to the newspapers, and whole columns of exhortations to morality and complaints of the degeneracy of the times were published, until at last the editors refused to receive them. He was a believer in polygamy and had several wives. (29)

Dr. Stevens and his associates continued in their efforts to establish the Georgia Historical Society, culminating in the adoption of their constitution on June 4, 1839. This constitution named John MacPherson Barrien President, and Dr. Stevens was designated corresponding secretary and later appointed to the post of librarian. Later that same year, the Society applied to the State of Georgia for a charter which was granted on December 19, 1839. Dr. Stevens was named, along with many prominent citizens of Georgia, as incorporators. (30) The following year, Dr. Stevens found himself representing the Historical Society as a delegate. Dr. Stevens' trip is described as follows:

6 The Georgia Historical Society was not a year
7 old before it sent him as a delegate to Hartford,
8 Connecticut to participate in the celebration of the
9 two hundredth anniversary of the first Connecticut
10 constitution. He made a speech in which he found
11 room to pay tribute to Georgia. Going on to his
12 former home in Boston, he, a world-traveler in his
13 own right, took part in the celebration of the
14 arrival of the Unicorn, the first steamboat from
15 Liverpool, which inaugurated the Cunard line. (31)

After one of his very many addresses, this one given before
the Georgia Historical Society, a visitor, Bishop Steven Elliott
of the Episcopal Church, commented to Mr. Tefft: "I wish I
had that man in the pulpit." (32) It is from this small beginning
that Dr. Stevens began his journey which transformed his life
from physician to theologian. After studies under the tutelage
of Bishop Elliott, Dr. Stevens was ordained a Deacon on Sunday,
February 26, 1843 in a service at Christ Church. He was
presented by the Reverend Dr. John A. Vaughan. Dr. Stevens
was subsequently assigned as a missionary to Athens, Georgia. (33)
About Dr. Stevens arrival in Athens, Georgia, this text is
offered:

A month after his arrival Stevens was conducting
religious services in the town hall, and thus was
born the first Episcopal congregation in Athens,
Emmanuel Church. In January, 1844 he was advanced
to the priesthood. (34)

During that year, Dr. Stevens also took on an assignment
as Professor of Oratory and Belle Lettres, at the University
of Georgia. In this capacity he seems to have gone afoul of
the student body, as they would, following his resignation,
hang him in effigy on the tree named "Toombs" in front of the

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prior to that assignment, as Professor of English Literature at the University of Pennsylvania. (39)

Bishop Stevens as World Traveler

Bishop Stevens leaves a legacy of a world traveler, one who traversed the Cape of South America, through the icy waters into the Pacific Ocean. This journey began on the 1st of July, 1834, and lasted until he landed in the Sandwich Islands on the 12th of January, 1835. While visiting there, Bishop Stevens made passage to the rim of the great Volcano, Kirayea, and camped at it's rim for several days and nights. Bishop Stevens' observations of this visit lend to its powerful impact:

In the part of the crater farther out from us was a lake of liquid fire two miles in circumference tossing and swirling its waves of fire as they beat against the hot sides of the fiery pit. It was the most wierd and startling sight I had ever seen. I could scarcely believe my own eyes. It realized to me the Inferno of Dante with its burning-hissing-restless horrors. The fascination of the scene at night was such that I would scarcely sleep. (40)

While staying in the Sandwich Islands, Bishop Stevens undertook a trip that required a voyage from Mani to Hawaii. During this trip, Bishop Stevens was the guest of the Queen, Napoilani, and makes mention of the very special treatment he received. (41) Bishop Stevens departed from Honolulu on the 27th of June, 1835, sailing aboard the Hellespent, under the leadership of Capt. Henry of Boston. On her passage towards China, the crew made visits to the northern part of New Guinea, taking on fresh fruits. Later he would visit both Java, and

Batavia Roads, and finally reach China on the 29th of October, 1835. From his visit to China, Bishop Stevens makes this observation:

To say that my visit to China was interesting would be a tame way of expressing the intense and constant pleasure which my sojourn in the Celestial Empire created. (42)

Bishop Stevens finally departed from China in February, 1836, and sailed for the Philippine Islands. After a brief stay, Bishop Stevens departed aboard the Morrison, bound for home. This voyage lasted 110 days culminating with the arrival and anchor into quarantine off the New York Harbor on the 6th of July, 1836.

In 1857, Bishop Stevens achieved one of his most sacred desires, a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Leaving aboard the steamship City of Baltimore, his immediate destination was Liverpool, England. During this pilgrimage, Bishop Stevens would visit England, France, Italy, Greece, Asia Minor, Egypt, Palestine, and Scotland, arriving back in New York on Monday, August 24th, 1857. (43)

Bishop Stevens' experience abroad cast him strongly into the public's eye as noted in this offering written following his return from China:

This second Magellan was now in great demand to make speeches before churches, Sunday-schools, and woman's clubs, and tell how the missionaries were getting along. (44)

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Bishop Stevens was laid to rest in the churchyard of St. James the Less, along with his fellow Bishops Onderdonk and Perry. (45)

Summation

Bishop Stevens was beyond question an extremely pious and devoutly sincere person. From the beginning his life seemed destined to serve the Lord. In attempting to bring his life into some measure of objectivity, I have chosen a portion of his obituary, as it appeared in the New York Times, on June 12th, 1887:

He was personally a man of the utmost dignity and refinement, in appearance as in manner. His grave but gentle face, his beautifully modulated voice, the singular purity of his style and the ease and grace of his delivery gave to his conversation, no less that to his sermons and addresses, an irresistible charm. He was an exceedingly well read man, if not in a deeper sense a scholar, and knew familiarly the contents of his superb ecclesiastical library. He was quite learned in the history of liturgies and ritual, and although not a ritualist in the modern sense he had a deep feeling for the beauty and poetry associated with the ancient traditions of the church. Theoretically he held to a moderate view of Low Church Anglicanism, believing in the Prayer Book, but teaching its doctrines with a cautious reserve that avoided offense to either extreme of interpretation. His administration of the diocese was gracious, kindly, and tolerant. The church has prospered under it, and he himself was universally esteemed, and loved, and will be universally lamented. (46)

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- (1) William Bacon Stevens, An Autobiography of Wm. Bacon Stevens, D. D., LL. D. from the Special Collections, Linderman Library, Lehigh University, Bethlehem, Pa. Page 1.
- (2) Ibid., 2.
- (3) Rev. S. F. Hotchkin, A Memoir of the Right Reverend William Bacon Stevens, D.D., LL.D. (Philadelphia: George W. Jacobs & Co, 1899), Page 19.
- (4) Rossiter Johnson, Ph.D., LL.D., ed., The Twentieth Century Biographical Dictionary of Notable Americans (Boston: The Biographical Society, 1904)
- (5) George T. Little, A.M., Litt.D., ed., Genealogical and Family History of the State of Maine (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Co., 1909) Page 1205.
- (6) Parker M. Reed, History of Bath and Environs, Sagadahoc County, Maine (Portland: Lakeside Press, 1894) Pages 110-111.
- (7) Rev S. F. Hotchkin, A Memoir of the Right Reverend William Bacon Stevens, D.D., LL.D., (Philadelphia: George W. Jacobs & Co., 1899) Page 4.
- (8) William Bacon Stevens, An Autobiography of Wm Bacon Stevens, D.D., LL.D. from the Special Collections, Linderman Library, Lehigh University, Bethlehem, Pa. Page 17.
- (9) Ibid., 9
- (10) Ibid., 20
- (11) Ibid., 37
- (12) 1840 Chatham County, Georgia Census showing Dr. William Bacon Stevens, wife and young daughter, Page 36, (Micro-film M704-47-50)

(13) William Bacon Stevens, An Autobiography of Wm. Bacon Stevens, D.D., LL.D. from the Special Collections, Linderman Library, Lehigh University, Bethlehem, Pa. Pages 42-62.

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(16) Ibid.,

(17) Obituary John C. Stevens, New York Times, 11 July 1938, Page 17 column 4.

(18) Obituary Anne C. Stevens Krumbhaar, Cazenovia Republican, 3 October 1935.

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(20) Rev S. F. Hotchkin, A Memoir of the Right Reverend William Bacon Stevens, D.D., LL.D. (Philadelphia: George W. Jacobs & Co., 1909) Page 4.

(21) E. Merton Coulter, The Georgia Historical Society Quarterly, Vol XXXIII, William Bacon Stevens: Physician, Historian, Teacher, Preacher (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1949) Page 91

(22) Ibid., 92.

(23) Ibid., 93.

(24) William Bacon Stevens, An Autobiography of Wm. Bacon Stevens, D.D., LL.D. from the Special Collections, Linderman Library, Lehigh University, Bethlehem, Pa., Page 39.

(25) Henry Thompson Malone, The Episcopal Church in Georgia 1733-1957 (Atlanta: The Protestant Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Atlanta, 1960) Page 75.

(26) MS "Flournoy, to the Georgia Historical Society", Collection #256, Item #1.

(27) E. Merton Coulter, The Georgia Historical Society Quarterly, Vol XXXI I I, William Bacon Stevens: Physician, Historian, Teacher, Preacher (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1949) Page 103.

(28) Ibid., 107

(29) Augustus L. Hull, Annals of Athens, Georgia 1861-1901 (Athens: Banner Job Office, 1906)

(30) E. Merton Coulter, The Georgia Historical Society Quarterly Vol XXXI I I, William Bacon Stevens: Physician, Historian, Teacher, Preacher (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1949) Page 96.

(31) Ibid., 98.

(32) Rev S. F. Hotchkin, A Memoir of the Right Reverend William Bacon Stevens, D.D., LL.D. (Philadelphia: George W. Jacobs & Co., 1909) Page 8

(33) Ibid., 8

(34) E. Merton Coulter, The Georgia Historical Society Quarterly Vol XXXI I I, William Bacon Stevens: Physician, Historian, Teacher, Preacher (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1949) Page 101.

(35) Ibid., 104.

(36) Ibid., 105.

(37) Obituary Right Reverend William Bacon Stevens, New York Times, 12 June 1887, Page 5 column 2.

(38) E. Merton Coulter, The Georgia Historical Society Quarterly Vol XXXI I I, William Bacon Stevens: Physician, Historian, Teacher, Preacher (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1949) Page 106.

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(40) Ibid., 26.

(41) Ibid., 27.

(42) Ibid., 28-32

(43) Ibid., 33-34.

(44) E. Merton Coulter, The Georgia Historical Society Quarterly Vol XXXIII, William Bacon Stevens: Physician, Historian, Teacher, Preacher (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1949) Page 92.

(45) Rev S. F. Hotchkin, A Memoir of the Right Reverend William Bacon Stevens, D.D., LL.D. (Philadelphia: George W. Jacobs & Co., 1899) Page 19

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