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ARMSTRONG STATE COLLEGE

A BIOGRAPHY OF SAMUEL BUTLER PALMER

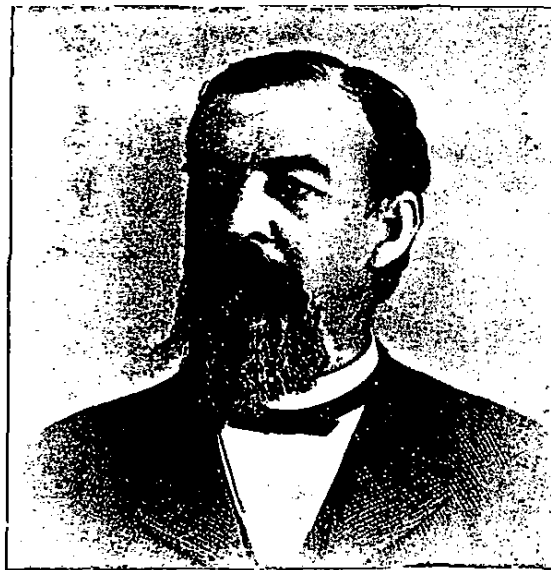
HISTORY 300

BY

MICHAEL EUGENE BOWMAN

SAVANNAH , GEORGIA

NOVEMBER 21 , 1990



Samuel B. Palmer

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Samuel Butler Palmer was both a wise and successful business man. He transformed a small neighborhood business started by him and his father into one of the Southeast's largest hardware wholesale outlets. He was a staunch successionist and served his state to the bitter end. He was a generous member of the Savannah Benevolence Association. He was a husband twice and a father twice, although sadly enough in the end he died a single man with no living offspring. He was a credit to the Palmer family.

The story of Samuel B. Palmer (1828-1913) is on the one hand an account of exemplary success while on the other hand one of ruthless misfortune. The tale of the ambitious man from the lowlands of Darien, Georgia who rose to be the president of one of the southeastern United States' leading hardware companies is to be deeply admired, but the youthful deaths of his first wife and two only children, all of whom died under twenty-six, and his patriotic, though futile, service to his state and the Confederacy during the War of Secession certainly require the most pronounced of sympathies. His story is certainly a tribute to the assertion that life will give and then take in endless crescendoes with little regard for those manipulated or the ensuing consequences. Samuel's feet no longer tread the face of this planet, and his feelings and memories have long since departed this earth, but hopefully the succeeding pages will portray an accurate picture of one of Savannah's most prominent 18th century businessmen.

On the twenty-second of December 1828 Caroline Palmer (1807-1871), wife of Samuel Palmer, gave birth to their first son, Samuel

Butler Palmer, in the south Georgia town of Darien in the county of McIntosh.¹ The birth increased the population of the Palmer household from three to four or eighteen to nineteen if one includes the slaves that Mr. Palmer possessed.² Caroline America (Dexter) Palmer was the daughter of a Mr. Dexter and Elizabeth Chareau Dexter (1789-1869) who was of South Carolina origins and who, as a widow, lived in the Palmer household at the time of the birth.³ Caroline was born in Brunswick, Georgia on July 27, 1807⁴ and was raised in the area though probably without the benefit of her father in her teenage years. Her husband, Samuel Palmer, was not a Georgian by birth and was of northern origins. He was born on July 30, 1800 in Providence, Rhode Island to Mary Briggs (or Bright) and Isaac Palmer (1776-).⁵ The Palmer family had deep roots in early America with one William Palmer who had arrived at the Plymouth Colony on the ship Fortune in 1621.⁶ Samuel immigrated to the Darien-McIntosh county area via Savannah around 1818 and established himself as a successful planter and served many

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terms as mayor of Darien throughout his residence there.⁷ It was here that he met young Caroline and married her on February 21, 1826.⁸ The small plantation environment of McIntosh County would be the setting of Samuel Butler's upbringing along with the company of his parents, his grandmother, and his father's slaves. On the thirteenth of November 1833 the second in the long line of Palmer children was born in the form of Herbert Armin Palmer (1833-1917).⁹ Samuel Butler was Herbert's five year elder brother, but no doubt the two developed an amicable relationship togetherⁱⁿ the woods and and rivers of Darien. In 1836 their mother presented them with a little sister, Aurelia E. Palmer (1836-),¹⁰ and by 1840 the Palmer family household had increased to six along with twenty-two slaves of varying ages.¹¹ In 1841 Caroline gave birth to her second daughter and fourth child, Caroline America Palmer (1841-1878),¹² and three years later she gave birth to Edwin F. Palmer (1844-).¹³ Samuel and Caroline's sixth child, Laura J. Palmer,¹⁴ was born in 1846, and the 1850 Georgia Census showed the Palmer household with nine

members.¹⁵ By this time Samuel had begun a business in Darien with the help and labor of Samuel Butler and Herbert, and his real estate wealth was measured at six-thousand dollars.¹⁶ The Palmers had obviously reached a high level of prosperity especially if the attending of school by their children Aurelia, Caroline, and Edwin is any indicator.¹⁷

Possibly seeking independence, Samuel Butler moved from Darien to Savannah sometime in his early twenties. In 1842 his father Samuel joined him in Savannah and the two established the firm of Samuel Palmer and Son at 148 Congress Street.¹⁸ Herbert also moved to Savannah where he acquired employment at the hardware firm of Henry D. Weed where he worked until 1866.¹⁹ Meanwhile, back in Darien, the thirteenth of July 1852 marked the birth of the Palmer's youngest child Henry Waring Palmer (1852-1901).²⁰ Sometime during the early 1850's Samuel Butler joined the Soloman's Lodge No. 1 of F. and A.M., and on the night of December 28, 1855 at the Zerubbaber Lodge of the Soloman's Lodge he was installed as a senior warden in the organization.²¹

Samuel Butler Palmer became a married man on February 5, 1855 when he wed the spinster Mary F. Lewis (1833-1858) of Savannah.²² A year later she gave birth to their first and only child Mary Palmer (1856-1875). Tragically, two years later on the eighteenth of September 1858, Mary Lewis Palmer would die of an illness at the tender age of twenty-five.²³

Herbert Palmer provided Samuel Butler with a sister-in-law on March 11, 1857 when he married Laura Cornelia Winkler (1834-1925) of Savannah.²⁴ A year later on November 17, 1858, they would have a son Herbert W. Palmer (1858-1884)²⁵ who would be Samuel Butler's first nephew. Samuel Butler would reside with his daughter at 118 Jones Street in Savannah²⁶ until shortly after the death of his wife at which time in 1854 they would move to the corner of York St.²⁷ and, despite the dark spot of his wife's death he would enjoy a number of successes during the late 1850's. In the summer of 1847 he would be involved in the proposals for the building of the Protestant Episcopal Free Church in Calhoun Ward²⁸ and in the fall of the same year he attended the Cornerstone laying ceremony of the Soloman's New Masonic Hall.²⁹ In 1858 Samuel Palmer and Son were fortunate enough

to expand their store to 67 St. Julian Street.³⁰ Unfortunately for the Palmers and other wealthy southerners the slavery issue was beginning to heat up and by 1859 Samuel Butler would find himself deeply involved in the turmoil.

In March of 1859 Samuel Butler payed \$850.00 for the purchase of a negro slave by the name of Robert.³¹ Obviously, Samuel Butler and the other slaveholders of his day had no way of conceiving that the slaves would be free in some six years distant, but one cannot help but be moved by the eerie letter to the editor of the Daily Morning News on May 12, 1859 submitted by Samuel Butler and others sitting on a Federal Grand Jury:

"We citizens of Chatham County and men of the Sixth Circuit Court of the Southern District of Georgia having discharged our legal obligations to carry out existing enactments without questioning their justice, feel bound to protest their continuance. We advocate the repeal of all laws which condemn the institution of slavery, and those who have inheirited

to admit or maintain it: and think it the duty of the Southern people to require their legislators to unite their efforts for the accomplishment of this object."³²

Later, in December of 1859 Samuel Butler would involve himself in the organizing of a Vigilance Association "for the preservation of southern rights and institutions."³³ Despite the bright spots of 1859-60, such as his participation in the grand opening ceremony of the new Masonic Hall on Broughton street,³⁴ and the birth of his brother Herbert's second son, Armin Butler Palmer (1860-1927) on July 7, 1860,³⁵ Samuel Butler would still have to face the prospect of imminent war between North and South.

Samuel Butler Palmer did not wait until the eruption at Fort Sumter to take action in the defense of Southern values. In January of 1861 he enlisted in the service of the state of Georgia and was appointed to the rank of Lance Corporal.³⁶ By November 29 of the same year he was sworn-in as a second lieutenant in the Chatham Artillery of the State of Georgia in the Confederate States' Army at Camp Claghorn by Captain Claghorn.³⁷ Herbert Palmer also showed his patriotism by joining the confederate Army and was assigned to the Quartermaster's Dept.³⁸ Both were fortunate in being posted close to the Savannah

area, and in 1862 the operation of the hardware store was discontinued. ^{of the year} 1862 was undoubtedly a happy one for the two Confederate brothers with Confederate victories in Virginia, the birth of Herbert's third son, William Knapp Palmer (1862-1888),⁴⁰ on April 25, and Samuel Butler's promotion to First lieutenant on December 12.⁴¹ The Palmer family suffered a heavy blow in 1863 when their father, Samuel Palmer, suffered a stroke of paralysis which would eventually place him in the care of his daughter, Caroline America Palmer Stacy in Liberty County.⁴² The death forced Butler and Herbert to place a request in the paper for the payment of all debts to Samuel Palmer and Son,⁴³ and they subsequently sold all of their stock of hardware to their future business partner John H. Deppish (1838-1876).⁴⁴ The war drug on through 1864 with the only bright spot being the birth of Herbert's fourth son, Edwin V.R. Palmer (1864-1876),⁴⁵ on September 5. After Sherman's rampage through Georgia / South Carolina and Lee's surrender in Virginia the Chatham Artillery surrendered to Sherman on May 1, 1865. Samuel Butler and Herbert returned home as defeated soldiers.

Samuel Butler submitted an article in the January 3, 1866 issue of the Savannah Daily Herald pertaining to the co-partnership of he, Herbert Palmer and John Deppish in the establishment of

Palmer and Deppish Hardware.⁴⁶ The Palmer brothers were back in business with the re-establishment of their stores at 76 St. Julian and 148 Congress Streets.⁴⁷ Samuel Butler acquired a residence on the north side of Hull between Barnard and Whitaker Streets in 1867,⁴⁸ and unfortunately in that same year his long suffering father, Samuel Palmer, died at the house of his sister Caroline (Palmer) Stacy at Flemington, Georgia in Liberty county.⁴⁹ Mr. Palmer was buried in Laurel Grove Cemetary, Savannah on July 30,⁵⁰ and his widowed wife Caroline, stayed with both her sons, Samuel Butler and Herbert, in Savannah for a few years after the death.⁵¹

After the death of Herbert Palmer's father-in-law, Z. M. Winkler, Samuel Butler, who henceforth will be referred to as Samuel, acquired Mr. Winkler's lots 29 and 31 north of Duffy St. and east of Whitaker St. for \$1,220.00.⁵² Samuel must have certainly been in strong financial shape to have made this hefty purchase so shortly after the war. Two years latter in May of 1870 he purchased more lots in the Forsyth Ward on Drayton St. for \$1500.00,⁵³ and he changed his place of residence to Taylor St. between Barnard and Whitaker St.⁵⁴. The biggest event of Samuel's life in 1870 was his marriage

to Helen A. wheaton (1838-1907), the sister of his commander in the Chatham Artillery, Captain John F. Wheaton.⁵⁵ The two were married on January 20 by Reverend S. Benedict of Savannah.⁵⁶ By the end of the year Helen had given birth to Samuel's first and only son, John Frances Wheaton Palmer(1870-1877) on October 6.⁵⁷

By 1871 Palmer and Deppish Hardware had expanded once more to the extent of one store on 150-152 Congress Street and another store^{behind it} at 148-151 St. Julian Street.⁵⁸ Samuel's youngest brother, Henry Waring Palmer, had just begun to work for the company,⁵⁹ and the prosperity of the company continued. Unfortunately for Samuel and his brothers thier mother, Caroline A. Palmer, died in that same year on August 18 at the home of their sister, Caroline (Palmer) Stacy, in Brunswick.⁶⁰ The Palmer brothers endured the grief of her death and continued to build their business. Their efforts were not in vain, and in 1873 at the Fair of the Agricultural and Mechanical Association of Georgia the Palmer and Deppish recieved a number of awards including a \$50.00 diploma for the best display of plantation farm implements by a dealer; best display of a set of shovels, hoes, and rakes for which they won a bronze medal, and the best display of hardware for which they received

a silver medal.⁶¹

Samuel began to be appointed to a number of positions outside the company beginning in May of 1873 when he was elected as a director of the Citizens Mutual Loan Association, and he was elected to this position every year until 1887.⁶² In May of 1876 he was also elected as a director of the Arkwright Cotton Factory Company.⁶³ Samuel changed his place of residence to 99 Jones Street in 1874, and in 1875 tragedy struck him again. His daughter, Mary Palmer, had died a hedious death on March 10 in Clarksville, Georgia. She had been standing too close to a fire when one of the sparks landed on her dress which ignited instantly, thus setting her afire.⁶⁴ No doubt this nightmarish death of his daughter stayed with him all of his life, and may also explain his catching of the steamship Cleopatra on July 15 for New York,⁶⁵ perhaps to get away from it all.

During the Epidemic of 1878 in Savannah John H. Deppish died (December 12),⁶⁶ and Herbert Palmer's son Edwin had also died on October 15^{of this year}.⁶⁷ The next year on April 28, 1877 Samuel's last child and only son, John Wheaton Palmer, died of an illness in Savannah at age seven.⁶⁸ We can certainly feel for

the inestimable grief that Samuel Palmer must have felt. The death of Deppish resulted in Samuel and Herbert becoming co-partners in their newly reorganized store under the name of Palmer Brothers hardware.⁶⁹ In 1878 Samuel moved to 77 Gaston Street⁷⁰ to possibly get away from the memory of his son at his former residence.

In November of 1878, Samuel joined the Metropolitan Benevolent Association and helped to organize a sailing excursion to the ocean for disadvantaged citizens.⁷¹ This is but one example of the charitable side of Samuel Palmer. He also contributed to the Irish Relief Fund of February 22, 1880,⁷² and he was appointed by the mayor along with other members of the Savannah Benevolent Association in November of 1883 to help in the relief of suffering people.⁷³ In addition to aforementioned he was also elected a vestryman for the St. Johns Episcopal Church for the years of 1879,81,82,84,87, and 88.⁷⁴ He was also a delegate for St. John's Parrish to the Diocesan Conference in Columbus, Georgia in 1880.⁷⁵ The mayor also appointed him along with others to a committee which prepared the commemoration

of the centennial of the . . . the seige of Savannah
in 1879. ⁷⁶

The Southern Bank of the State of Georgia
elected Samuel as a director in January of 1881
and reelected him again in the years 1883, 86, 89,
and 91. ⁷⁷ He was elected president of the White
Manufacturing^{COMPANY} of which he was a stock holder in 1882, ⁷⁸
and in the same year he was member of the Citizens
Sanitary Association. ⁷⁹ Samuel received one of his
most ditinguished offices in March of 1884 when he
was elected as member of the board of trade. ⁸⁰
Samuel sold his house at 77 Gaston St. to Joseph
Rosenheim for \$11,000.00 on November 11, 1883, ⁸¹
and he moved in 1884 to 88 Taylor St.. ⁸²
Following the death of his nephew Herbert W. Palmer
in July of 1884. ⁸³ He changed his address to 137
Gordon St. where he lived until the end of 1885. ⁸⁴
Samuel resided in numerous places in Savannah such
as the DeSoto Hotel ⁸⁵ during the next 28 years of his
life. He spent most of his time . in the years of
1899-1908 as a semi-resident of Bridgeport Connecticut, ⁸⁶
and he spent last few summers of his life in Freehold,
New Jersey. ⁸⁷

Armin B. Palmer began to work for Palmer Brothers
in 1889, ⁸⁸ and was made secretary of the company

after it was incorporated in March of 1890.⁸⁹

The company was incorporated with a capital stock of \$100,000.00 and the name was changed to Palmer Hardware Company with Samuel as president, Herbert as vice president, and Henry Palmer as treasurer.⁹⁰

They established a New York office in the late 1880's at 100 Chambers Street and in the late 1890's at 33 Chambers Street which they used to order directly from New York manufacturers.⁹¹ In the new 1890's the American Journal of Commerce described the company as follows; "the leading retail dealers throughout Georgia, South Carolina, Florida and part of Alabama were regular patrons of this company, and^{it} employed a large corps of traveling salesmen."⁹² The company purchased in 1893, the lots of Bay and Jefferson Streets where they constructed the magnificent building as illustrated in this biography. They used this building as a wholesale house and sold their other lots except for the 148 Congress Street stand which they used as a retail house.⁹³ On February 8, 1901 Henry Waring Palmer died⁹⁴ and was replaced by W. G. Thompson as treasurer in 1905.⁹⁵ Samuel B. Palmer sold the business and retired in 1907.⁹⁶ Shortly after the death of his beloved wife Helen A. Palmer who died on March 22 and

was buried at Bonaventure Cemetary on March 24.⁹⁷

Samuel worked as an insurance agent for Palmer and Cay in 1912, the year before he died.⁹⁸ He spent the ^{last} year of his life as a resident in room 115 of a West 37th Street address.⁹⁹ He died on the morning of Saturday, December 20, 1913 at St. Joseph's Hospital after being treated for his illness for three weeks prior to his death.¹⁰⁰ His cause of death was cited as "Chronic Neplerites-Uracucia".¹⁰¹ His funeral services were held at 3:00 on Sunday December 21, at St. Johns Church, followed by his burial afterwards at Bonaventure with a C. S. A. cross.¹⁰² The Soloman's Lodge also gathered on that day to pay its respects to Samuel, the past master,¹⁰³ and the Confederate Veterans Association, Camp 756 U.C.V. also payed tribute to him that day.¹⁰⁴

Whoever can claim relationship ^{to} Samuel Butler Palmer should look back upon this man with both wonder and respect. He was truly the great Georgian and a credit to the Palmer family. I feel confident in stating that anyone who has taken the time to read this story of this man from the 'past cannot leave it without being deeply impressed with all that he ^{accomplished} and all sorrows and tragedys that he experienced are sure to strike the deepest sympathys from the reader. The researching of this man has been an interesting enterprise to say the least, and I hope that the finished product does justice to its subject: Samuel Butler Palmer.

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57a , page 316 .
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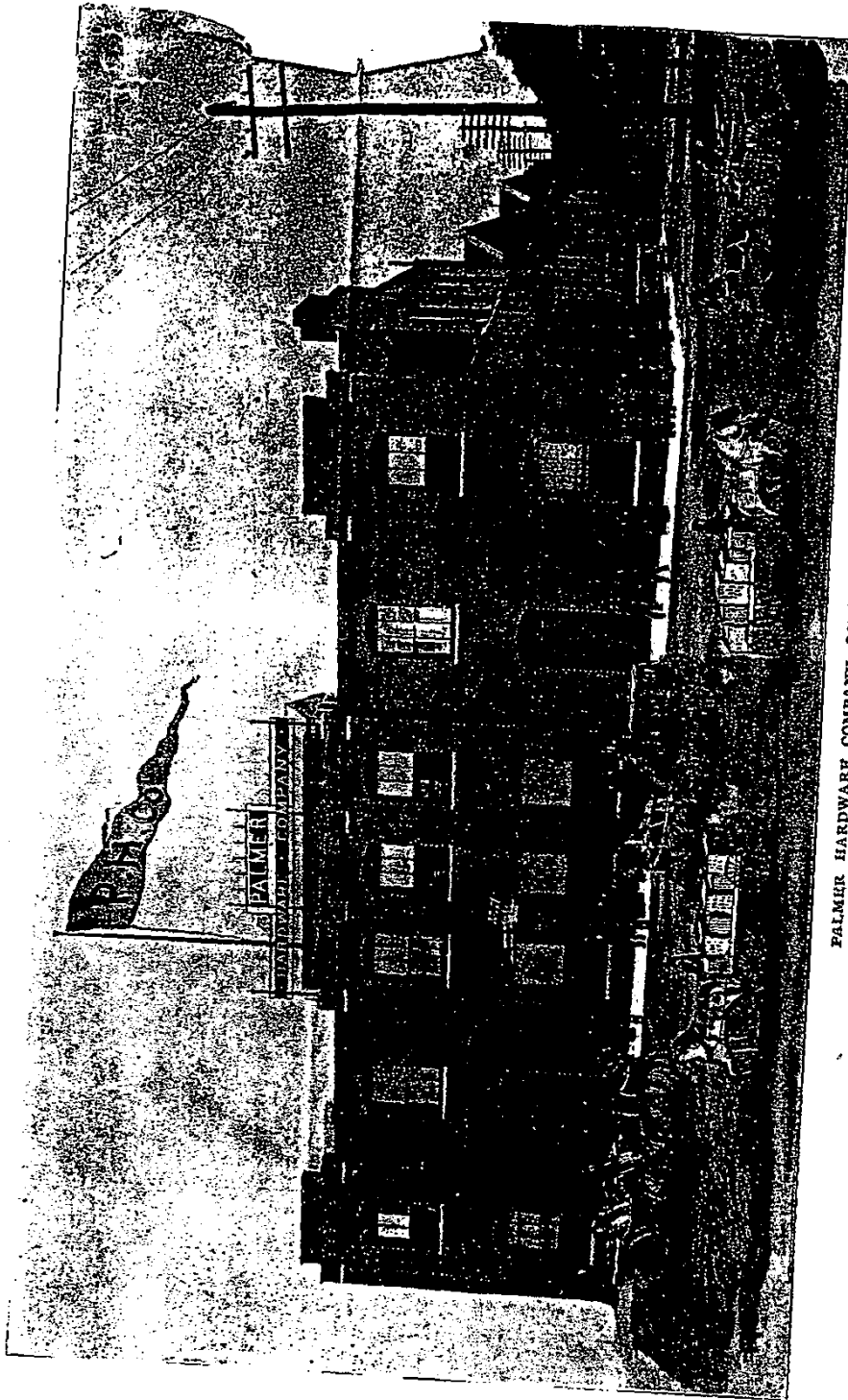
1. Herbert Armin Palmer



2. Henry Waring Palmer



3. Armin Butler Palmer



4. Palmer Hardware Company at the corner of Bay and Jefferson streets in Savannah, c.1900.

PALMER HARDWARE COMPANY, SAVANNAH, GA.

ALMER HARDWARE CO

148 and 150 Congress Street,
149 and 151 St. Julian Street

DEALERS IN

HARDWARE

Small Guns, Rifles,

Ammunition, Railroad & Mill Supplies,

Rubber Belting and Packing,

Tools, Trawl, Fishing Tackle, &c., &c.

SAVANNAH, GA.

Office 100 Chambers Street

ALMER HARDWARE CO

148 and 150
CONGRESS STREET,
149 and 151

St. JULIAN STREET

Dealers in

HARDWARE

Small Guns, Rifles,

Ammunition, + + +

Railroad and Mill Supplies,

Rubber Belting and Packing

Tools, Trawl, Fishing Tackle, &c.

SAVANNAH, GA.

NEW YORK OFFICE 100 CHAMBERS ST

5. Palmer Hardware Company advertisement 1893 .

6. Palmer Hardware Company advertisement 1892 .

PALMER HARDWARE CO.

RETAIL HOUSE, 148 Congress Street,
WHOLESALE HOUSE, 10 to 9 North Jefferson St., Boston, Conn., Bay

DEALERS IN

HARDWARE

CUTLERY

Guns, Rifles, Ammunition

Railroad and Mill Supplies

Rubber Belting and Packing

Rope, Tinware, Fishing Tackle, etc.

* SAVANNAH, GA.

NEW YORK OFFICE, 100 Broadway

MANAGER: H. A. PALMER, Vice Pres.
 A. D. PALMER, Secy.

Palmer Hardware Co.

RAILROAD AND MILL SUPPLIES,
 RUBBER BELTING AND PACKING,
 HARDWARE, SPORTING GOODS,
 ROPE, TINWARE, STOVES, FARM-
 ING IMPLEMENTS, ETC.

Write for
 The Standard Scales. 9-13 Jefferson St., North.

8. Palmer Hardware Company advertisement 1901 .

7. Palmer Hardware Company advertisement 1894 .

W.B. PALMER, Pres.
PALMER, Vice Pres.

H.W. PALMER, Treas
A.E. PALMER, Sec'y

PALMER HARDWARE COMPANY

Bay & Jefferson Streets.



RAILROAD & MILLS SUPPLIES, RUBBER BELTING & PACKING
HARDWARE, CUTLERY, GUNS, RIFLES, AMMUNITION,
ROPE, TINWARE, STOVES, CROCKERY, FISHING TACKLE & C



SAVANNAH, GA.

NEW YORK OFFICE: 53 Chambers St.

9. Palmer Hardware company Advertisement 1900 .

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