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**Charles Augustus Lafayette Lamar: Southern
Gentleman and Owner of the Slave Ship Wanderer**

**Ana Lee Prieto
History 650
May 29, 1992**

ABSTRACT

Charles A. L. Lamar was not only a prominent Southern gentleman, but a capable businessman. He gained notoriety in Savannah not only because of his connection with the slave ship Wanderer, but because of his fiery and passionate disposition, which oftentimes got him into difficult situations. He was a Colonel in the Confederate Army and was one of the last casualties of the tragic war.

HIS LIFE LONG ACHIEVEMENTS

Charles Augustus Lafayette Lamar was born in 1825 to Gazaway Bugg Lamar and his wife in Savannah, Georgia. Charles grew up to be of medium build, had red hair, a full beard, blue eyes, and a somewhat ruddy complexion.¹

He married Caroline A. Nicoll, daughter of Judge John C. Nicoll on February 11, 1846. They had five daughters: Eliza, Jane, Carol, Georgia, and Mary.² All six of his sons died and he also lost one daughter, Caroline A. Lamar. Caroline was buried at Laurel Grove Cemetery on May 7, 1855. She was twenty-one months old and died on Little Ogeechee. Also buried at Laurel Grove Cemetery is George W. A. Lamar who was eleven days old when he died. He was buried on August 29, 1858. Two other nameless Lamar children are buried at Laurel Grove. These children were originally buried at Old Colonial Cemetery, removed and subsequently buried at Laurel Grove on March 6, 1856.³

Charles was listed in the city directories of 1859 and 1860 as a cotton merchant, proprietor of a cotton press, and agent for Lamar Fire Insurance Company of New York. His residence was located at 44 Broughton Street (between the northeast corner of Habersham Street and Broughton), and his office was located at Drayton Street between Bay and Bryan Streets.⁴

In January of 1859 Charles was elected President of the Chatham and Effingham Agriculture Club, and was named one of the Board of Directors of the Savannah, Albany, and Gulf Railroad

Company. Later that same month (January 27, 1859), he and John W. Anderson were named among the directors of the National Steamship Company. The line carried mail between the United States and Great Britain.⁵

The following year 1860, Charles began advertising Peruvian Guano which he hoped to provide for Southern planters through the American Guano Company located in New York. He was elected President and Secretary of the Jockey Club for the new year and was once again named one of the directors of the Savannah, Albany, and Gulf Railroad. He continued to be re-elected for the latter post in 1861 and 1862.⁶

On October 28, 1861, the Savannah Newspaper printed an article announcing that Gazaway B. Lamar would be attending to his son's business while he was absent from the city. Captain C. A. L. Lamar had been made Commander of the Mounted Rifles.

On October 12, 1862, Charles was made Colonel of the Twenty-fifth Regiment of the Georgia Volunteers upon the orders of the Secretary of War, who wanted Lamar to organize an infantry regiment. It was believed at the time that Charles received this assignment because of his courage and bravery.⁷

Charles was killed in a battle near Columbus, Georgia a few days after General Lee's surrender at Appomattox. He was buried in Laurel Grove Cemetery on June 3, 1866 after being removed from Columbus, Georgia.⁸

Charles Augustus Lafayette Lamar was described by his great-granddaughter, Mrs. Bette McIntire of Bluffton, South Carolina,

as being a "hot headed, red-headed devil." Upon a further look into his life, personality, and achievements we can understand, perhaps with some fondness, why he was described in such a manner.

Charles or "Cal," as he was called by his friends and family, was born in 1825 in Savannah, Georgia to Gazaway Bugg Lamar and his wife. Gazaway, who had been born on October 2, 1798 to Basil and Rebecca Lamar, in Richmond County, Georgia, was a descendent of Thomas Lamar who had immigrated to Maryland from France before 1663. Gazaway rose to be a very wealthy and well to do ship owner, cotton merchant, banker, and businessman in both Georgia and New York. He ran in the most prominent circles of Savannah and Augusta and even had the Marquis de Lafayette cradle baby Cal in his arms during the child's christening in Johnson Square. Thus young Charles gained the middle name Lafayette.⁹

Gazaway fathered quite a few children. As a matter of fact Mayes Genealogical Notes credits him with eleven children total: Martha, Cal, William S., Rebecca, Thomas, Lucius, Caroline, Anthony C., Annie G. de Rossette, Charlotte, and Harriett. There seems to be some contradiction, however, from Rev. Charles R. LeMar who credits him with just three offspring: Charles, Derisette, and Cazineau. It was certain, however, that he had a son Charles, Anthony, G. de Rossette or Derisette, and daughters Harriett, Annie, and Charlotte.¹⁰

Gazaway introduced the first iron steamship in American waters in 1834 and it was called the John Randolph. By 1835, he was a partner in the Iron Steamboat Company of Augusta which established a steamship line on the Savannah River. He also was said to have financially assisted the Republic of Texas when his cousin, Mirabeau Bonaparte Lamar was President, and his ship the Mary Summers served as an American transport during the Mexican War.¹¹

In 1845, Gazaway moved back North to Brooklyn, New York, and became President of the Bank of the Republic where he worked for several years. During the winter of 1860-1861, he shipped large quantities of arms to Georgia and acted as a financial agent for the Confederacy. Soon after the Civil War began he returned to his native Georgia where he became involved in cotton speculating and blockade running. Following Savannah's occupation, he was arrested and jailed in Washington. He was tried before a military commission for attempted bribery of government officials and was sentenced to several years imprisonment and a very large fine. It ended well for Gazaway, however, since his sentence was remitted by President Johnson.¹²

It's no wonder that with a prosperous and astute businessman for a father Cal grew up to be endowed with a great amount of business savvy. The Lamars owned a six story rice mill on the Savannah River and the complex included a cotton press, various warehouses, and wharves located on the southbanks. They also

owned several plantations, shares in several banks, railroads, and an insurance company based out of New York City.¹³

Charles, perhaps became Savannah's best known citizen when he was arrested for violating slave trading laws. Characterized as a fiery, articulate, outspoken, opinionated man, he loved politics and regularly attended state conventions and local meetings, in order to voice his views. He often embarrassed his more conservative relatives such as his uncle Lucius Quintus Cincinnatus Lamar (U.S. Senator and later Superior Court Justice), and Mirabeau B. Lamar (President of Texas). His family was very disturbed by his desire to reopen slave trade in the U.S. His father, Gazaway, wrote in regards to Charles' fascination with slavery, "I have repeatedly told him of his errors, but he is so impulsive and so crazy on that Negro question, that I can make no impression on him." Gazaway and Charles were very close, especially because of the sinking of the Pulaski off the North Carolina coast in which Cal's mother and six siblings were lost, but on this slavery issue they could not agree!¹⁴

Charles was constantly in and out of trouble with the authorities because of his slave trading vessels the E. A. Rawlins and the Richard Cobden, in 1858, and it seemed he preferred spending his time at the racetrack instead of church. He felt he had a right to make a profit and was willing to use any means to do so. He also viewed slave trading as a way in

which to be a thorn in the side of the Northern states. Charles was a foremost champion of Southern rights.

In the spring of 1858 Charles and three other very prominent businessmen and planters: Richard Dickerson, A. C. McGehee, and Benjamin Davis decided to purchase a ship and go into the slave trading business. Cal had become agitated over all the legal difficulties and notoriety surrounding the E. A. Rawlins and the Richard Cobden. He was determined he needed to better organize and plan his operation, but to do so he needed better men and equipment. Therefore, he went in on purchasing the Wanderer with Davis, Dickerson, and McGehee, and set her up in a port which was known for corruption.¹⁵

The Wanderer had been built by James G. Baylis at Port Jefferson, Long Island in 1857 for a wealthy Louisiana Sugar Cane Plantation owner, Colonel John D. Johnson. She was a striking vessel at a length of 104 feet and a weight of 243 tons. The Wanderer had a 15,000 gallon fresh water capacity and when specially equipped, as she was under Charles' ownership, she provided 2,550 square feet in which to store slaves.¹⁶

It was not too long before the Wanderer changed hands and was bought by William C. Corry, who it was proven later by the Court was acting as a front for the real buyer - Charles A. L. Lamar.

As soon as the Wanderer was sold to Corry, drastic changes were made to the interior of the ship. Enormous galvanized water tanks were installed and "slave pens" were constructed. Trips

were made to the mouth of the Congo River where 750 Africans were bought at one to three dollars per head. These soon to be slaves were then transported to the Lamar Plantation where they remained until they could be transported to New Orleans and sold. Slaves could be sold on the open market for six or seven hundred dollars a piece.¹⁷

After a particularly successful trip to Africa the Wanderer's luck ran out. On the night of November 28, 1858, the vessel made port on Cumberland Island. Here two men off the Wanderer found a pilot who was able to guide the ship into the area right off Jekyll Island. Later this same pilot, Horatio Harris, would testify in court against the owners of the Wanderer.

It was not very long before the vessel's ex-crew began to talk about their latest exploit and the U. S. Marshall in Darien began an investigation. The ship was immediately seized by the government and her skipper, Captain Brown and two crew members were placed in jail. The scandal caused such a stir that even President Buchanan called for a Congressional inquiry.¹⁸

In December of 1858, Charles A. L. Lamar was arrested for being involved in slave trading along the Atlantic Coast. It seems that Cal was implicated by Mr. James Clubb and Mr. Luke Christie, Captain of the steamship Lamar. Charles was allowed bail since he was not charged with piracy.¹⁹

During the preliminary hearing, Captain Christie took the stand and admitted that he had transported about three-hundred

Africans from Jekyll Island up the Savannah River (about fourteen miles total) and laid anchor off the South Carolina side. He also admitted to the fact that some white men were with the Africans. These men were: Captain John F. Tucker, Mr. Nelson Trawbridge, Mr. Henry DuBignon, and Mr. Charles A. L. Lamar.

Charles' father-in-law, Judge John C. Nicoll was chosen to preside as Court of the Admiralty in the case. There was no jury selected, only written depositions of testimonies. It proved to be a somewhat simple and uncontested case. It was, however, rumored that Cal offered Clubb and Harris, the lighthouse keeper off Jekyll Island, five thousand dollars each, if they would refrain from testifying against him. Unfortunately, for Charles, the government beat him to it with the offer of a larger sum of money. It is also interesting, if not surprising, to note that only William C. Corry's ownership could be proven, since his name appeared in the Charleston ship registry as "owner."²⁰

On February 25, 1859, Judge John C. Nicoll ordered that the ship, the Wanderer, be sold at a public auction, under the auspices of the U. S. government, within fifteen days time. Charles, however, was not content to sit around and let the Wanderer be sold out from under his nose. So on March 14, 1859, he went down to the public sale to bid on the ship. Lamar's friends had already made it clear that anyone bidding against Charles would be made to regret his actions. Charles' only opponent at the bidding was a jailer by the name of Charles Van Horn. Van Horn bid four-thousand dollars and Charles out bid him

with four-thousand and one dollars. Lamar was sold the Wanderer and immediately turned around and knocked Van Horn out.

Satisfied with his accomplishments Charles left the steps of the Custom House. Later that day Charles paid a visit to the County Jail where he offered Van Horn a terse apology. Thus, the whole matter was forever dropped.²¹

Shortly afterwards Charles showed his fiery temper once more when a slanderous letter, written by a Northern visitor, was leaked to a Rhode Island newspaper. News of the offending letter, which made mention of the spectacle which took place on the Custom House steps, reached Savannah rather quickly. Charles wasted no time in finding Mr. Hazzard, author of the letter, and slapping him sharply on the face and challenging him to a duel. Fortunately Hazzard was able to pacify Charles with the explanation that the letter had been written with the full intention of being private, and was matter was dropped.²²

Word of the incident reached the Northern press which immediately took advantage of the sensationalism. An anonymous letter was written to the editor of the New York Times vouching for Lamar's conduct and stating that he was a very popular, well thought of man around Savannah. The letter, perhaps written by Gazaway Lamar, did a great deal to calm the troubled waters, but Charles did adamantly challenge Horace Greeley and William Raymond to duels.²³

On April 15, 1859, the Grand Jury found enough evidence to indict Charles A. L. Lamar, John F. Tucker, Randolph L. Mott, and

Richardson Aiken. The following week John and Henry DuBignon, of Jekyll Island, and Nelson Trawbridge were also indicted for slave trading. Charles was charged with holding an African boy named Corrie, two African men named Gumbo and Cuffee, and he and Richardson Aiken were both charged with holding thirty-six Africans in Telfair County, Georgia. The indictments were made on the basis of the violation of Section Six, of the April 20, 1818 Act.²⁴

Charles' trial was held on May 28, 1860, but no witnesses were able to tie him closely with the Wanderer. The testimonies presented during the trial failed to connect Charles and the Wanderer, this Hamilton Couper asked for a "Nolle Prosequi" in the case, United States v. C.A.L. Lamar. Similar motions were made in the cases of R. L. Mott, Henry DuBignon, Richardson F. Aiken, and John F. Tucker.²⁵

Charles had another scrape with the law shortly after his trial was concluded when he, William Hone, Mott Middleton, and Carey Styles broke J. Egbert Farnum out of jail. (Farnum had been charged with Piracy). After Farnum's trial Lamar, Middleton, Styles, and Hone were indicted for their reckless prank and were sentenced to a fine of two-hundred and fifty dollars and thirty days in jail. The thirty days were spent above Lamar's office since the county jail was considered too unsavory for the likes of the local aristocrats.²⁶

In December of 1860, after the Wanderer had been kidnapped by David Martin and eventually returned, Charles sold the ship in

Cuba for \$15,000, but secretly remained part owner. Charles' new partner was Mr. Thomas J. Smith.²⁷

Shortly before the Civil War began the Wanderer was seized by the Union Navy in efforts to prevent her from being used in Confederate privateering.

ESTATE RECORDS

When Charles A. L. Lamar was killed, his wife Caroline A. Lamar was named Administratrix of his estate, and his heirs were: Eliza Cunningham, Janie Cunningham, Carol (Caroline) DuBignon, Georgia L. Malone, and Mary L. Huper.²⁸

Since Charles died without the benefit of a will, Caroline was required to apply for the Court of Ordinary's permission to sell lands from the Lamar Estate to pay off any outstanding debts. She was fully authorized as Charles' administratrix to sell or dispose of any of the property for the purpose of paying debts due by said estate. The original estate appraisers were: Solomon Cohen, Julian Hartridge, J. R. Saussy, William R. Fleming, and Robert D. Walker. Charles' estate was left insolvent according to the best interest of those parties involved who at the time were Caroline A. Lamar and her under-age daughters Mary and Georgia.²⁹

In reviewing the Inventory and Appraisement of the C. A. L. Lamar Estate I was able to note all of Charles' major property holdings which included: The Wharf and Cotton press warehouse and lands lying east of Savannah, the 62 6/11 acre Race Course Track, the tract of land lying on the southside of the Race Course (57 acres), the Goodall Tract, north of the Race Course (59 acres), Cold Spring Plantation in Merriweather County, half interest in 1,590 acres of land in Baker and Lowndes counties, three-fourths interest in a Savannah flour mill, two houses and

Lot 29 in Warren Ward (Savannah), half of nineteen bales of cotton, one share of Savannah Theater stock, Lot 3, Section 5 at Bonaventure Cemetery and Lots 171, 172, 173, 174, and 202 at Laurel Grove Cemetery, six-hundred dollars in specie, thirty-two shares in the Savannah, Albany, Gulf Railroad, six shares in Savannah Steamship Navigation Company, five shares in Park Mining Company, and 19 shares in the Ogeechee Plant Road Company. His estate was worth \$108,035.00 (this figure appeared in Document 176 of the Inventory and Appraisement Estate).³⁰

Caroline A. Lamar under the careful guidance of her attorney, Mr. George A. Mercer, saw to it that no debts were left unpaid. On July 24, 1865, Charles' cotton presses located on the eastern wharves were sold to Captain F. W. Lapham and were reported to be operating successfully.³¹ Only fifty shares of the capitol stock of Importing and Exporting Company of Georgia were left at an estimated worth of five hundred dollars.³²

ENDNOTES

¹Thomas Fleming Day. "The Rudder," Volume XV, Number Two, February 1904.

²"Chatham County Marriages 1805-1852." Chatham County Records of Marriage Licenses, Number 2823.

³Laurel Grove Cemetery, Savannah, Georgia. General Index to Keeper's Record Books, Vol. II G-M, 1852-1939.

⁴Savannah City Directories of 1859 and 1860, 113 and 104, (#1386:1 and 1387:1) and 1860 Census of Chatham County, Georgia.

⁵Annals of Savannah Newspaper Digest, Vol. 10, Part I, 1859 and Vol. II, 1860.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Savannah Newspaper Digest, Vol. I, 1861.

⁸Harold D. LeMar. The Lamar of LeMar Family History. Omaha, Nebraska: Cockle Printing Company, 1941. 93 & 112.

⁹Dumas Malone. Dictionary of American Biography, Vol. V. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1961. 549-550.

¹⁰LeMar, The Lamar on LeMar Family History, 93 & 112.

¹¹Malone, Dictionary of American Biography, Vol. V. 549-550.

¹²James Grant Wilson and John Fiske. Appleton's Encyclopedia of American Biography, Vol. III. (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1888).

¹³Tom Henderson Wells, The Slave Ship Wanderer (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1967), 3.

¹⁴Ibid., 4-5.

¹⁵W. C. Woodall, "The Story of the Slave Ship Wanderer," (Columbus, Georgia: Industrial Index Newspaper).

¹⁶Charles H. Jenrich, "The Renegade," The Rudder Magazine, September 1955. (Located in the Wanderer file at Georgia Historical Society), 7-8.

¹⁷Ibid., 8.

¹⁸Jenrich, "The Renegade." 10.

¹⁹Wells, The Slave Ship Wanderer, 39.

²⁰Ibid., 39.

²¹Annals of Savannah Newspaper Digest, Vol. 10, Part. I, 1859 (March 14, 1859).

²²Ibid., March 30, 1859.

²³Wells, The Slave Ship Wanderer, 47-48.

²⁴Ibid., 57-58.

²⁵Ibid., 58-59.

²⁶Annals of Savannah Newspaper Digest, Vol. II, 1860. (May 26, 1860 and June 1, 1860).

²⁷Ibid., (June 1860).

²⁸Charles A. L. Lamar Estate Records, (Chatham County Court House), Document 191 of file 155.

²⁹Ibid., Document 206.

³⁰Ibid., Document 176.

³¹Annals of Savannah Newspaper Digest, Vol. 16, Part I, 1865. (July 24, 1865).

³²Charles A. L. Lamar Estate Records. (Document 287-D).

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