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JOSEPH L. MCALLISTER

JOHN KENNINGTON
HISTORY 300
DR. ROGER WARLICK

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Synopsis: Joseph L. McAllister

Joseph L. McAllister, son of George. W. McAllister, was a planter from Bryan County Georgia. After the death of his father in 1850, Joseph inherited Strathy Hall, a large plantation in South-East Bryan County, and entered the ranks of the "gentlemen-farmers." Then in 1861, the life of Joseph McAllister made a drastic change.

With the outbreak of the American Civil war, Joseph enlisted in Confederate Service. He allow the construction of an earth fortification at Strathy Hall with the condition that the fortress built there would be named for his father, George Washington McAllister.

From 1861 to 1864, Joseph participated in the defense of the city of Savannah, and in April 1862, Joseph mustered into service a company of mounted infantrymen called "The Hardwicke Rifles" to serve his state. Then in 1864, Joseph's command was transferred to the 7th Georgia Cavalry and ordered to Virginia. It was at Trevilian Station that Joseph gave his most for his beliefs. On the 12th of June, 1864, Joseph L. McAllister died in battle bravely fighting against overwhelming odds. He is buried at Louisa Courthouse, Virginia.

JOSEPH L. MCALLISTER

His Lineage

Joseph was descended from a long line of McAllisters. Archibald McAllister, Joseph's great-grandfather, was a planter from Pennsylvania. He immigrated from Scotland in 1733, with his wife, Jane McClure and their son Richard.(Gamble:5)

Richard, Joseph's grand-father played an important part in the birth of the new nation, later to be known as the United States of America. In 1745, Richard moved to York County, Pennsylvania, and in 1763, he founded the town of Hanover. (Gamble:5) In 1748, Richard married Mary Dill, daughter of Colonel Mathew Dill.(Gamble:5) Richard associated himself with the committee of Observation and Safety in York County. He attended both the Provincial Conference Meeting in 1775, and the Pennsylvania Constitutional Convention. (Gamble:5) As a colonel of the 4th Battalion of York County Militia, Richard marched in July 1776 to join the American forces in New Jersey under General Hugh Mercer, and was chosen colonel of the 2nd Pennsylvania Regiment. As such, Richard commanded his regiment at the Battle of Staten Island, and the Battle of New York. His men were part of the force captured at Fort Washington by the British. (Gamble:5) He was also present at the battles of Trenton and Princeton, Washington's only victories, but he and his men did not take part in the engagements. In 1777, Richard returned to York to become County Lieutenant, his task being to raise and train volunteer soldiers for Washington's army.(Gamble:5) After

the war, Richard settled into political life, becoming a member of the Supreme Executive Council of Pennsylvania, the executive governing body of Pennsylvania. Prior to his death in 1795, Richard sat as presiding justice in the Pennsylvania Court of Common Pleas. (Gamble:5)

Richard's sons, Richard, Archibald and Matthew, all went south after the war. Richard became ill and died in Baltimore, Maryland while visiting and was described as being from McIntosh County.(Gamble:5) Richard left the majority of his estate to his daughter, Louisa Caroline. George Washington McAllister, Joseph's father, and Richard's wife Louisa, were named executors of Richard's will.(Gamble:5)

George Washington McAllister was the son of Archibald McAllister, the brother of Richard and Matthew, and Elizabeth Carson. He was born on 21 December 1781 and in his adult life he became a "gentleman farmer" of the Old South.(Gamble:5) George worked Strathy Hall, the plantation on Genesis Point, Bryan County, and when he died on 18 March 1850,¹ Strathy Hall passed to his eldest son, Joseph L. McAllister.

His Early Life

The life of Joseph McAllister began quietly enough. As the son of a Bryan County, Georgia planter, he spent his youth learning the farming business. Upon the death of his father, Joseph inherited the rights to Strathy Hall, at Genesis Point,

1. There is an oral tradition among the black inhabitants of the Richmond Hill area that George McAllister was so mean, that when he died, they chained his coffin to the ground. It is an interesting story, but I have found no proof that this is the truth.

Bryan County, and a similar plantation in Pennsylvania.

Joseph does not appear in any records until the 1860 Census. He is listed as a planter, from Bryan county, age 34. This would place his birth date some time between 1825 and 1827, probably in 1826. (Census 1860:735) He, and his four sisters, Matilda, Emma, Rosella and Clementia, lived continuously in Bryan County until the outbreak of hostilities in the American Civil War.(Census 1860:735)

War! And Some Hard Choices.

With the coming of war, Joseph had some hard decisions to make. Julian McAllister, a cousin and childhood friend of Joseph, had decided to remain in federal service. Julian had graduated from West Point 1 July 1847, fourth in his class of thirty-seven. Upon graduation, he fought in the Mexican-American war, and in 1848, he was transferred to the Ordnance Department of the United States Army, where he remained throughout his military career. For the four years of the American Civil War, he was the chief ordnance officer in the United States Department of the Pacific, and upon his death on 3 January 1887, had attained the rank of Colonel of Ordnance and commanded the New York Arsenal. Joseph, though, chose to follow the call to Confederate service.(Gamble:2)

Land was acquired by the Confederate Government from Joseph McAllister at Genesis Point for the construction of Fort George Washington McAllister. Joseph, volunteering for service, was commissioned a captain of artillery, and sent to Fort McAllister where he participated in the first attack by the United States

Navy on that fortification.(Anderson 1862:215, Porter 1984:371)
In all, three attacks were made, all three were unsuccessful,
although in the last attack the CSS NASHVILLE was destroyed.
These attacks were a test to determine the effect of the new
naval ordnance on earth type fortifications. Because of the
inability of the federal ironclads to reduce Fort McAllister, the
nature of American fortifications would be forever
changed.(McCrary 1863:221)

On 3 April 1862, Captain Joseph McAllister had the honor of
mustered into Confederate service a company of mounted
infantrymen that he had organized.(Dubose 1863) The Hardwick
Mounted Rifles, named for the now "lost town" of Hardwicke,
became part of the Savannah defenses. On 10 September 1862, the
newly organized Hardwicke Rifles fought their first skirmish at
Kilkenny Station, South Carolina and received the praise of
General Hugh Mercer, Military Commander of the District of
Georgia. (Waddy 1862: 120) The company remained garrisoned at
Genesis Point for two years until they were reorganized into the
7th Georgia Regiment, Company H. and called to Virginia to become
part of Lieutenant General J. E. B. Stuart's Corps. (Gamble:4)
Upon the death of J.E.B. Stewart in May of 1864, command of the
cavalry corps went to Major General Wade Hampton. It would be
General Hampton who would lead the 7th Georgia Cavalry and Joseph
L. McAllister into destiny.(Gamble:4)

Company H of the 7th Georgia had been on the march for two
days before they finally encountered their objective. General
Hampton had been ordered to halt the invasion of Major General
Philip Sheridan's column into the Shenandoah valley of Virginia.

(Hampton 1864:1095) Sheridan's cavalry had evaded Major General Wade Hampton's division thus far, and, it looked as though they might escape. On 11 June 1864, the two opposing forces met. For Company H, 7th Georgia Cavalry, this was what they had been waiting for and, at Trevilian Station, Virginia, the 7th Georgia, and Joseph L. McAllister met the federal cavalry of Sheridan. (Gamble:3, Hampton 1864:1095, Sheridan 1864:784)

On the morning of 12 June 1864, word came that Butler's South Carolina regiment was having problems, and that the 7th must go to their aid. (Gamble:4) Company H soon found that the federal cavalry outnumbered them. In one of the greatest cavalry engagements of the American Civil War, the 7th Georgia Cavalry distinguished the name of the "Hardwicke Rifles." (Sheridan 1864:785, Faust 1986:763) The 7th had come up against four brigades of Sheridan's cavalry. (Gamble:3) The two brigades of the 7th attacked and drove the federal cavalry back, but, upon learning that their flank had been turned, the 7th retreated to a fence line. A soldier of the 7th then relayed what happened:

We took position behind a fence, determined to make a desperate stand, but we soon found that the Yankees knew of our strong, formidable position and refused to advance. During our last charge our brave Lieutenant Colonel McAllister fell, pierced by four balls. He was too invincible to surrender to his foes until he became a lifeless corpse. (Gamble:3)

The 7th Georgia started the engagement with six-hundred men. By the evening of 12 June 1864, half of these were left on the field. (Gamble:4) Lieutenant Colonel Joseph L. McAllister was one of the fallen and he was buried in the Confederate cemetery at Louisa Courthouse, Virginia. Upon the passing of Joseph, the property at Strathy Hall was to pass to the

decendents of Joseph and his sister Matilda Clay.

The Problem

Any study of Bryan county residents that occur before 1865 presents an insurmountable obstacle. In 1865 the county probate records were destroyed by fire. Any records that would help the researcher no longer exist. There may be records in the Georgia Historical Society, but at this time, the Society is closed and not available to researchers. A thorough search of materials at the National and State Archives is also advised, although information received by this author from the State Archives was minimal and already available at the local public library.

Conversation with William Walker, a local McAllister family genealogist, confirmed the scarcity of material for Joseph, although adequate amounts of material exist for others of the McAllister family.

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