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A Son Of Liberty

The Life and Times of John Elliott Ward

by
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Armstrong State College
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ABSTRACT

John Elliott Ward was born in Sunbury, Georgia, in 1814. His parents were William Ward and Ann McIntosh, who was the daughter of Lachlan McIntosh, a very prominent Georgian. In 1835, Ward attended Amherst College but dropped out. Later that year, Ward became an attorney. Ward later became Solicitor General of the Eastern District Court, opened his own law practice in Savannah, became a member of the Georgia legislature, was selected as President of the Senate, became Mayor of Savannah, was selected as a Minister to China, and moved to New York City after the Civil War. Ward died in Dorchester, Georgia, on November 29, 1892.

Tension filled the air in the Senate chamber. Rarely in Georgia history had there been witnessed a more stubborn and heated contest in legislative walls than was fought throughout the Georgia legislative term of 1857. Georgia's leading men were debating the issue of what to do about the suspension of most of the state's banks, a suspension that Governor Joseph E. Brown saw as illegal and unnecessary.² A bill had been introduced, and after much debate, passed, suspending forfeiture proceedings against the suspended banks for one year. The act, which had passed both houses with a two-thirds majority, was sent to Governor Brown.³ He stunned everyone by sending back a sharp and unqualified veto of the act; the back-country Governor stated that "I feel it to be my duty to I owe the people of Georgia, to do all in my power to avert the evils which would follow the passage of an act legalizing the suspension of the banks."⁴

How would the pro-bank men in the General Assembly respond to Brown's veto? Their leader in the Senate, the Honorable John Elliott Ward of Savannah, was selected to respond to the veto. The bank-men had seen the veto coming from the "damned fool", as they called him, but Brown's veto had still caught them off guard. Now, the evening before his speech

² J. H. Avery, *The History of the State of Georgia From 1650 to 1881* (New York: Brown and Derby, 1881), 60.

³ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 60.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 63.

to the General Assembly, Ward stayed up all night preparing for the upcoming debate.⁵

The next day, Ward's speech caused a great sensation among the legislators and caused many supporters of Governor Brown to reconsider their stand, for the speech simply called for Brown to "leave the system alone". Ward's common sense discussion of the banking issue was supported by influential Senators Benjamin H. Hill and Randolph Spalding, who both moved to take up the vetoed bill. The resulting vote was an ominous sign for the anti-bank men, for they lost six votes. They tried to stall for time, but failed.⁶

After this attempt by Governor Brown's supporters to keep the debate alive failed, Ward once again came down to the Senate floor from the President's seat and addressed the legislators. His second speech of the day was a subtle attempt to put Brown in a position of hostility to the cities. He proceeded to defend the cities, blending indignation, towards those individuals who would interfere with Georgia's banking system, with a judicious poignancy. Ward painted a picture of the dire consequences of interference.⁷ He argued his case well, but he also made an appeal for conciliation. Ward closed his speech by moving for the passage of the vetoed bill and asking that the vote be made quickly and calmly. The vetoed bill was passed and became law. Pro-bank men credited Ward for

⁵ ibid.

⁶ ibid.

⁷ ibid.



The Ward-Jones house was originally located at Sunbury and owned by William Ward. Louisa V. Ward and John Elliott Ward were born in this house at Sunbury. At a later time the house was bought by a Mr. Jones and moved to Dorchester Village. William Anderson Jones and his family lived there, and later Mr. W. J. Martin purchased it and sold it to C. B. Jones. It was burned in 1978. The site is now owned by Kate Jones Martin.

Taken from Sweet Land of Liberty

its passage.⁸

While many state leaders commended Ward for his speech, rural townspeople condemned Ward and the pro-bank Senators. Public meetings were held on the subject, and the Governor was endorsed by several strong resolutions. In Wilkeson County, just east of Macon, Dr. R.J. Cochran offered a resolution that was passed without a dissenting voice, declaring the Governor's veto "elaborate, full, clear and unanswerable"; a resolution was also passed condemning John E. Ward for calling for an override of the veto and a quick vote to deprive the anti-bank men a chance to respond. These public meetings gave absolute and unanimous support to Governor Brown.⁹

John Elliott Ward may have lost some favor in the eyes of the public in this political battle, but all Georgians considered him one of the state's most powerful leaders. He was a very modest man, a fluent speaker, a staunch supporter of the United States' Constitution, and had a generous, courtly manner.¹⁰ But how did this modest man from old Liberty County on the Georgia coast rise to such great heights?¹¹

Ward was born on October 2, 1814 in Sunbury, Georgia, about 30 miles south of Savannah.¹² His father, William Ward, was a member of the famous Midway settlement, the only Puritan colony ever established in the

⁸ Ibid., 84.

⁹ Ibid., 86.

¹⁰ William Gabard, "Ward, John Elliott," in Dictionary of Georgia Biography, v. 2.

¹¹ Ibid., 1031.

¹² James Stacy, History of the Midway Congregational Church (Newnan, Ga.: S.W. Murray, 1951), 130.

South, which came originally from Massachusetts to Dorchester, South Carolina, and then some twenty years prior to the Revolutionary War moved to Liberty County, Georgia.¹³ His mother was William Ward's second wife, Sarah Ann McIntosh.¹⁴ She was the daughter of General Lachlan McIntosh, and sister of Commodore James McKay McIntosh.¹⁵ Ward was born into a family with strong roots in the Puritan and Presbyterian faiths, which stressed duty, morality, industry, and religious devotion.¹⁶

William Ward was an important landowner in the region, as well as a prosperous planter. In 1810, the elder Ward bought one hundred and fifty acres of land known as Belle-ville along the Midway River from another planter, John Lawson of Sunbury.¹⁷ The house that was built on this tract of land was the one in which John and Louisa V. Ward were born.¹⁸ In August of 1813, William Ward bought four lots of land in Sunbury from John Alexander Cutbert for one thousand and fifty dollars.¹⁹ He continued to amass land and a growing amount of wealth after John was born, buying three hundred acres in February of 1817 from

¹³ William J. Northern, ed., Men of Mark in Georgia (Spartanburg, S.C.: The Reprint Company, Publishers, 1974), 2: 421.

¹⁴ Robert Manson Meyers, ed., The Children of Eve (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1972), 1713; William Ward and Ann McIntosh were married on June 15, 1813, Liberty County, Georgia Courthouse. Marriage Record 1806-1896, A-Z.

¹⁵ Robert Long Groover, Sweet Land of Liberty (Roswell, Ga.: WH Wolfe Associates, 1985), 235.

¹⁶ William Gabard, "John Elliott Ward: A Georgia Elitist in the Celestial Empire, 1858-60," in Georgia's East Asian Connection: Into the Twenty-First Century, ed. Jonathan Goldstein (Carrollton, Ga.: West Georgia College, 1990), 74.

¹⁷ Liberty County, Georgia Courthouse. Deeds and Business Transactions, County Record G, 165.

¹⁸ Groover, 99.

¹⁹ Liberty County, Deeds, 255.

Nathaniel Bacon for nine hundred dollars and two hundred acres from John Broughton in March of that same year for eight hundred dollars.²⁰ William Ward would use his land and wealth to insure prosperity and success for his family.

The beauty and serenity of Coastal Georgia created a lasting bond between John Elliott Ward and Liberty County. Late in his life, sitting in his New York law office on Wall Street, Ward wrote his favorite niece, Elizabeth Olivia Winn Stevens, about "the dear old place where we passed our childhood."²¹ In one instance, Ward commented that "Nothing would give me so much pleasure as once more to see you all before I go hence to be no more and perfect time it would be once more to walk on the bank of that old River."²² Ward would travel throughout the world during his lifetime, but some of his happiest days were spent near Sunbury.²³

William Ward had four children: John Elliott, Louisa, William Wallace, and Georgia Elizabeth.²⁴ By 1820, the elder Ward had amassed forty-six slaves and several hundred acres of land.²⁵ He conducted business with many of the leading landowners in the area, such as William Maxwell, Matthew McAllister, Benjamin Kell, and Nathaniel Bacon.²⁶ It was also

²⁰ Liberty County, Deeds, County Record H, 62-65.

²¹ John Elliott Ward to Elizabeth Olivia Winn Stevens, 16 November 1891, Collection of Elizabeth Amason, Sunbury, Georgia.

²² Ward to Stevens, 29 September 1900, Collection of Elizabeth Amason.

²³ Gabard, Georgia Biography, 1033.

²⁴ Liberty County, Deeds, County Record K, 73.

²⁵ Federal Census Records, Fourth Census 1820 Population of Ga.-Liberty, 322, microfilm; Liberty County, Deeds, County Record K, 73.

²⁶ Liberty County, Deeds.

during this time frame that William Ward began preparing his son John for his own professional career. He had high hopes for John, and used his connections and wealth to obtain for his son the best education. It is unclear what formal education John received in his early years, but at the age of 14 he studied in New Haven, Connecticut under the famed Timothy Dwight.²⁷ Ward's stay in Connecticut was interrupted, however, by a tragedy at home that forced him to return to Georgia.

Records pertaining to William Ward's date and cause of death are difficult to locate,²⁸ but records indicate that he died sometime between 1829 and 1830,²⁹ possibly in May of 1830. At his time of death, William Ward's estate included forty-four slaves and was valued at well over thirteen thousand dollars.³⁰ At this time William Maxwell, a business partner with the elder Ward and friend of the family, was appointed to oversee the evaluation of the Ward estate and to become legal guardian of John and Louisa Ward.³¹ All of the property was divided up among the four children, with John and Louisa receiving, through Maxwell, nineteen slaves valued at four thousand-four hundred dollars, plus two hundred acres of land.³² Under the guardianship of Maxwell, John Elliott Ward was, at the

²⁷ Gabard, *Georgia Biography*, 1032.

²⁸ Many records, especially birth and death certificates, were lost when the Liberty County Courthouse was rebuilt in 1927.

²⁹ Federal Census Records, *Fifth Census 1830 Population of Ga. v. 4-Liberty*, 55, microfilm.

³⁰ Liberty County, Georgia Courthouse. *Will Record*, Book B, 1824-1850, 94.

³¹ Administration of the Will of William Ward, 3 May 1830, Recorded at Riceborough, Ga., Records of Liberty County, Georgia Courthouse, Hinesville.

³² Liberty County, *Deeds*, County Record K, 74.

age of sixteen, already a wealthy land and slave owner.

Possibly the death of his father caused John to look more inside himself, for he became deeply involved in a religious movement in the area in the summer of 1831. Ward was converted during a revival at Walthourville in Liberty County, then a branch of Midway Church, and his name entered on the roll of Midway Church, located about fourteen miles west of Sunbury, in August 1831.³³ In a letter to Pastor James Stacy some years later, Ward fondly remembered the "dear old church".³⁴ Midway Church was known throughout Coastal Georgia as a strong supporter of Calvinistic beliefs.³⁵

In the autumn of 1831, Ward entered Amherst College in Massachusetts, a school that was overcome with Calvinistic revivalism.³⁶ Amherst did not have many students from the rural South, but many of its students shared a deep fellowship with Massachusetts Puritanism, a feeling with which Ward could relate. However, Ward did not feel comfortable at the school and departed after one year, presumably because of hostility from New England classmates.³⁷ Many New Englanders

³³ Gabard, *Georgia Biography*, 1032.

³⁴ Stacy, *Midway Church*, 130.

³⁵ Gabard, *Georgia's Asian Connection*, 74.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Gabard, *Georgia Biography*, 1032.

were outraged by Georgia's Cherokee Indian removal policy.³⁸ Amherst College was also a hotbed of anti-slavery sentiment, for William Lloyd Garrison's abolition movement was very popular there. Ward left this hostile environment and returned to his rural plantation home in Georgia.³⁹

Despite the setback, Ward was determined to pursue a legal career. For the next two years, Ward became a pupil of Savannah lawyer Matthew Hall McAllister, who had also been an acquaintance of Ward's father.⁴⁰ *McAllister would introduce Ward to the Savannah bar members, as well as to the social elite and organizations of the city.*⁴¹ On November 22, 1834, a bill was passed by the Georgia Senate to admit John Elliott Ward to plead and practice law in the courts of laws and equity in the state.⁴² On January 9, 1835, after examination by the Superior Court of Chatham County, Ward was admitted to the bar.⁴³ At only twenty years of age, John Elliott Ward was an attorney of law in the state of Georgia.

Ward spent much of 1835 attending lectures at Harvard Law School.⁴⁴ During this time, William Maxwell, still Ward's legal guardian, conducted much of John's business while he was away, which included the

³⁸ Cherokee Indians were forcibly removed from areas in northeast Georgia. Two missionaries were imprisoned, tried, convicted, and sentenced, because they were influencing the Indians to rise up against their removal from Georgia. Late in 1831, the case was taken to the Supreme Court of the United States, which ruled that the State of Georgia could not make laws governing the Cherokee Nation. *Appleton's Cyclopaedia of American Biography* (New York, 1869) VI, 35-0.

³⁹ Gabard, *Georgia Biography*, 1032.

⁴⁰ *The Daily Georgian* (Savannah), 2, 7 February 1835.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Daily Georgian*, 2, 27 November 1834.

⁴³ *Georgian*, 2, 10 January 1835.

⁴⁴ Gabard, *Georgia Biography*, 1032.

selling of several slaves. After completing his successful stay in Massachusetts, Ward returned to Savannah in November 1835 to start his own legal practice.⁴⁶

In November, 1835, Ward and William H. Bulloch announced in the Daily Georgian that they had united their professional interests and would practice in all of the Courts of the Eastern District, including Savannah.⁴⁷ One member of the firm would also attend the United States Circuit Courts from time to time.⁴⁸

However, in January, 1836, Ward was appointed by the Governor of Georgia to be solicitor general for the Eastern District, replacing William Stiles.⁴⁹ Ward would attend the Superior Courts of Wayne, Camden, Glynn, and McIntosh counties, plus courts in Liberty, Bulloch, and Chatham counties.⁵⁰ In March, 1836, William Maxwell moved in the Liberty County Court of Ordinary to be dismissed from his guardianship of John and Louisa Ward.⁵¹ The dismissal was granted.⁵²

Besides building up a legal career, Ward, still only twenty-two years old, began to become well known in the military, political, and social organizations of Savannah. On May 2, 1836, Ward, then a private in the

⁴⁶ Georgian, 3, 3 April 1835.

⁴⁷ The Daily Georgian, 2, 25 November 1835.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*

⁴⁹ *ibid.*

⁵⁰ The Daily Georgian, 2, 11 January 1836.

⁵¹ The Daily Georgian, 2, 1 April 1836.

⁵² The Daily Georgian, 3, 10 March 1836.

⁵³ *ibid.*

Chatham Artillery, gave an address at the Unitarian Church in downtown Savannah.⁵³ The occasion was a parade of the Chatham Artillery to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the association.⁵⁴ The Phoenix Riflemen, the Savannah Republican Blues, and the Savannah Volunteer Guards also participated in the parade.⁵⁵ After the parade had made its way through the downtown to the Church, Ward walked to the pulpit to give his address. The Daily Georgian would describe Ward's speech as "an oration replete with patriotic sentiment and glowing with eloquent allusions."⁵⁶ The speech was also made "in the presence of a crowded auditory, composed of the Fair, the military, and the citizens generally."⁵⁷ It was well received, for "the plaudits with which the youthful orator was frequently interrupted evinced the pleasure which swelled the bosoms of his attentive auditors."⁵⁸ Ward also became involved in Savannah's political scene, for on July 4, 1836, Ward, a member of the Democratic Party, gave a speech and a toast at the Union and States Rights dinner.⁵⁹ His toast summed up his political beliefs at the time: "The Union of the States and the States of the Union: The sovereignty and independence of the one, identified with the preservation of the other."⁶⁰

⁵³ The Daily Georgian, 2, 2 May 1836.

⁵⁴ The Chatham Artillery was established in 1786 by Captain Edwin Lloyd, a Revolutionary War hero. It was the oldest volunteer association in the state. The Daily Georgian, 2, 3 May 1836.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Georgian, 2, 8 July 1836.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

Ward also began to build up wealth, evidenced by his purchase of shares in the Central Rail Road and Banking Company of Georgia in May 1836.⁶¹ Ward initially purchased only two shares of stock at thirty-five dollars a piece⁶², but he would continue to purchase stock in the railroad until the end of the Civil War.⁶³ In July, 1836, two weeks after his Chatham Artillery speech, Ward made the first of many business trips to New York.⁶⁴ On his first trip, Ward spent over three months in New York, not returning to Savannah until September 19.⁶⁵ Over the next few years, Ward would make several trips to New York, possibly making contacts that he could use in the future.⁶⁶

During all of this, Ward continued in his role as solicitor general. On March 9, 1836, the Georgia Senate issued a note of thanks to Ward for his taking over the position after Stiles' resignation.⁶⁷ For the next two years, Ward's role as solicitor general was to be a law officer to assist the United States' Attorney in the area and to keep records for the Georgia Attorney General pertaining to legal cases there.⁶⁸ Ward's conduct during the first year of his term gained a vote of thanks from jurors in Bulloch County in

⁶¹ The Daily Georgian, 3, 25 May 1836.

⁶² ibid.

⁶³ Savannah Morning News, 3:3, 16 January 1837.

⁶⁴ The Daily Georgian, 3, 16 July 1836.

⁶⁵ ibid.

⁶⁶ Savannah Morning News, 1:3, 1 December 1832; The Daily Georgian, 2, 22 April 1841; The Daily Morning News, 1, 2 June 1853.

⁶⁷ The Daily Georgian, 2, 28 March 1836.

⁶⁸ Appleton's, 350.

March, 1837.⁶⁹ He handled a variety of cases, many of which he played a key role in winning. One example was a manslaughter case in the Superior Court of Chatham County in May, 1837, a case in which Ward, on behalf of the state, won a verdict of guilty.⁷⁰ On November 11, 1837, Ward was elected to a two year term of his own as solicitor by the Georgia Senate.⁷¹ In February, 1838, Ward dealt with a case concerning larceny (in this case the stealing of a slave), inducing a slave to run away from his owner, carrying a slave out of the state, and harboring a runaway slave.⁷² Ward won the case for the prosecution, which was just one of many he dealt with during his new term as solicitor general.⁷³

Ward continued to play an ever increasing role in Savannah politics.⁷⁴ Matthew Hall McAllister, who had helped tutor Ward in law three years earlier, was chairman of the Union and States Rights Party in Chatham County in 1837.⁷⁵ Through this political party, Ward met many prominent Savannah leaders, such as William Gordon, Isaac Russell, and Dr. Richard D. Arnold.⁷⁶ He also became a supporter of Democrat William Schley, the man who had appointed Ward solicitor general, in his bid for

⁶⁹ *Georgian*, 2, 30 March 1837.

⁷⁰ *The Daily Georgian*, 2, 23 May 1837.

⁷¹ Voting in Georgia General Assembly for Solicitor General of the Eastern Circuit: For Ward, 135; for Edward J. Hardin, 113. *The Daily Georgian*, 2, 15 November 1837.

⁷² *The Daily Georgian*, 2, 8 February 1838.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Georgian*, 2, 22 June 1837.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

re-election as Governor.⁷⁷ Ward delivered speeches at many party meetings, which helped spread his name.⁷⁸

In March, 1839, Ward was appointed by President Martin Van Buren, with the consent of the Senate, to be Attorney of the United States for the District of Georgia.⁷⁹ Oddly enough, Ward replaced the same man he had replaced in the position of solicitor general, William H. Stiles.⁸⁰ Ward would spend much of his term dealing with a voluntary manslaughter case in Brunswick.⁸¹

The year 1839 was an important one in the life of John Elliott Ward, for in August he married Olivia Buckminster Sullivan, daughter of William Sullivan, a wealthy Boston lawyer and writer.⁸² She was the younger sister of Dr. James Swan Sullivan of Savannah, who introduced the couple.⁸³ They were married on August 11, 1839 in Boston by the Reverend Jonathan Sargent.⁸⁴ Their marriage would last fifty-one years.⁸⁵ In September, 1839, Ward's political career began to move forward, for he was selected as *Secretary of the Chatham County Democratic Party*.⁸⁶ That same month, Ward was selected to run on the Democratic Ticket for State

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *The Daily Georgian*, 2, 19 March 1838.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *The Daily Georgian*, 2, 16 April 1839.

⁸² *The Georgian*, 3, 26 August 1839.

⁸³ Meyers, *Children of Pride*, 1714.

⁸⁴ *Georgian*, 3, 26 August 1839.

⁸⁵ Meyers, *Children of Pride*, 1714.

⁸⁶ *The Daily Georgian*, 3, 24 September 1839.

Representative from Chatham.⁸⁷ Ward won by a narrow margin and entered the Georgia House of Representatives in November, 1839.⁸⁸ On December 2, 1839, he officially resigned as United States Attorney General; Savannah judge R.M. Charlton took his place.⁸⁹

By 1840, Ward was a legislator, as well as a wealthy property and slave owner. He kept five slaves as house servants, and owned another eight to look after property in Liberty County.⁹⁰ He was also about to become a father, for his wife Olivia went to Boston to have their first child so that her mother could look after her.⁹¹ John and Olivia Ward would have eight children born to them, but only three, James Montford, Ann Louisa, and Olivia would live to reach adulthood.⁹²

After Robert M. Charlton retired from the bench in July, 1840, he joined Ward to form a law firm.⁹³ The offices of Charlton and Ward were located in downtown Savannah on Bay Street, between the Central Railroad Bank and the offices of the Georgian newspaper.⁹⁴ Ward decided not to run for re-election to the Georgia House of Representatives in November, 1840. However, he remained in touch with many of Georgia's prominent

⁸⁷ Ward ran against William Law, William B. Fleming, Joseph Jackson, James Bulloch, John Anderson, George Harrison, and R.G. Gerard; *ibid.*

⁸⁸ Gabard, Georgia Biography, 1032.

⁸⁹ The Daily Georgian, 2, 3 December 1839.

⁹⁰ Federal Census Records, Sixth Census 1840 Population of Georgia-Chatham, 25, microfilm; Chatham County, Georgia Courthouse, Deeds and Transactions, County Record 2-V, 1.

⁹¹ George Jones to George J. Kollock, 14 September 1840, Georgia Historical Quarterly, vol XXXI, no 3, 231-232.

⁹² Meyers, Children of Pride, 1714.

⁹³ The Daily Georgian, 2, 4 July 1840.

⁹⁴ *ibid.*

Democratic leaders, which included Howell Cobb, Herschel V. Johnson, Henry R. Jackson, and John H. Lumpkin.⁹⁵

John Elliott Ward was one of the leading citizens in Savannah during the 1840's.⁹⁶ Charlton and Ward was one of Savannah's most prominent law firms, for they were known to rarely lose a case.⁹⁷ In May 1841, Ward was chosen to be a delegate from Chatham County to the State Democratic Convention in Milledgeville.⁹⁸ He decided to make a return to the Georgia House, but lost the Democratic nomination in November, 1841 in a very close race.⁹⁹ Meanwhile, Ward's partner became Mayor of Savannah.¹⁰⁰

During Charlton's term as Mayor, Peter Massie, a citizen of Glynn County, Georgia, left the city of Savannah five thousand dollars for the education of poor children in the city.¹⁰¹ However, the executors of the Massie estate refused to pay the money. The Savannah City Council did not take any direct action to obtain the money until January, 1845, when they passed a resolution to require the payment of the amount to the city.¹⁰² On April 17, 1845, Ward and the newest addition to the Charlton

⁹⁵ Gabard, *Georgia Biography*, 1032.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ In the case of *State vs. Meekin*, Ward won an acquittal for Captain John Meekin on the charge of forgery. *The Daily Georgian*, 2, 30 January 1840. In the case of *State vs. Frederick Hendricks*, Ward won an indictment of Hendricks for breaking and entering. *The Daily Georgian*, 2, 10 February 1841.

⁹⁸ *The Daily Georgian*, 2, 5 April 1841.

⁹⁹ *The Daily Georgian*, 2, 12 November 1841.

¹⁰⁰ Thomas Gamble, Jr. *A History of the City Government of Savannah, Ga. from 1790 to 1901* (Savannah: Official Records, 1900), 228.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

and Ward firm, George W. Owens, were appointed counsel for the city of Savannah to prosecute the claim.¹⁰³ During the April term of the Superior Court of Glynn County, a decree was obtained in favor of Savannah, directing the executors of the Massie estate to pay over to the Mayor and City Council the sum of five thousand dollars, plus interest.¹⁰⁴ Ward and Owens had not only won a major legal victory, but a victory for education in Savannah, for the Massie School would become the corner stone of Savannah's free public school system.¹⁰⁵

During the 1840's, John Elliott Ward was also active in the business community. Besides making many Negro slave transactions, Ward also bought and sold several lots of land in Savannah.¹⁰⁶ In one particular transaction, Ward sold seven Negro slaves to Mathew Hall McAllister for three thousand dollars; he also received a lot of land in Jasper Ward from McAllister for one thousand one hundred dollars.¹⁰⁷ Just one year later, January, 1846, Ward sold the Jasper Ward lot to John W. Anderson for five thousand dollars.¹⁰⁸ This shows Ward had a good business sense to go along with his strong character.

Ward's reputation in Savannah was impeccable. He was considered a very agreeable gentleman-exceedingly companionable, ready to answer

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ Chatham County, Georgia Courthouse, Deeds and Transactions, County Record 2-T, 549; 3-C, 5; 3-C, 101; 3-D, 19; 3-D, 282; 3-E, 343.

¹⁰⁷ Chatham County, Deeds, 3-C, 101.

¹⁰⁸ Chatham County, Deeds, 3-D, 19.

and satisfy" all who came to him for advice.¹⁰⁹ Ward was "well read in the principles of law, and admirably informed as to the statute law and contract of court" in Georgia.¹¹⁰ He was considered one of the ablest lawyers and "best equipped public men in the country", as well as one of Savannah's wealthiest citizens.¹¹¹

Ward continued his affiliation with the Chatham Artillery, and, in 1843, became the first Captain of the Irish Jasper Greens in Savannah.¹¹² He also made several speeches in support of the Georgia Historical Society, an organization he helped found in 1839, for he was interested in insuring that the history of Georgia and Savannah would be kept alive for future generations.¹¹³ Despite the failure of his legislative bid in 1841, John Elliott Ward remained active in politics. In 1845, Ward was again elected to the Georgia House of Representatives.¹¹⁴ He campaigned vigorously for his friend and fellow Democrat Senator Matthew Hall McAllister in his bid to become Governor of Georgia. However, in the November, 1845 election, McAllister lost to the Whig Party candidate, George W. Crawford.¹¹⁵ After serving a one year term, Ward returned to his law practice, which

¹⁰⁹ M. Foster Farley, "John Elliott Ward, Mayor of Savannah, 1853-1854", Georgia Historical Quarterly, Vol LIII, no 1, 68-77, citing C.C. Jones, Jr. to C.C. Jones, 27 January 1854, in Jones Papers Tulane University, New Orleans, La.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ Savannah Morning News, 1 December 1902.

¹¹² Farley, "Ward Mayor", 68.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ Gabard, Georgia Biography, 1032.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

demanding a great deal of his time.¹¹⁶

During the late 1840's and early 50's, Savannah grew at a steady pace.¹¹⁷ Ward's residence on 35 Liberty Street was a place for Ward to relax and spend time with Olivia and the children.¹¹⁸ By 1850, Ward had a nine year old son named William, a three year old son named Gordon, and a baby daughter named Olivia.¹¹⁹ Only Olivia, however, would reach adulthood, with the other two dying during the yellow fever epidemic of 1854.¹²⁰ The thirty-five year old Ward was listed as having assets worth at least six thousand dollars, a rather large amount for the time.¹²¹

In October, 1850, Ward attended a convention in Milledgeville that debated how Georgia should respond to the admission of California to the Union as a free state.¹²² The convention announced that it was in favor of acquiescing to the legislation of Congress and to see whether the Compromise (of 1850) made by Congress would be observed in good faith by all parties.¹²³ But they also announced that if Congress undertook legislation that was aggressive to the South's rights in any way, the people of Georgia would resist, even if it meant dissolution of the Union.¹²⁴ For

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ Kenneth Coleman. *Sojourn in Savannah* (Savannah: Historic Savannah Foundation, Inc., 1990), 10.

¹¹⁸ *Directory of the City of Savannah for 1849*, 39.

¹¹⁹ Federal Census Records, *Seventh Census 1850 Population of Ga.: Chatham*, 1613, microfilm.

¹²⁰ Meyers, *Children of Pride*, 1714.

¹²¹ *Federal Census, 1850-Ga.*, 1613.

¹²² *Daily Morning News* (Savannah), 2, 24 October 1850.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

Ward, who was a leading Unionist at the Convention, the dissolution of the Union must be avoided, but not at the cost of rights he considered guaranteed by the United States' Constitution.¹²⁵

In April, 1852, at a meeting of the Constitutional Union Party at the Exchange in Savannah, Ward was appointed as a delegate once again. This time it was a convention to select delegates for the 1852 Democratic National Convention in Baltimore, Maryland.¹²⁶ The Union Democratic Convention in Milledgeville selected Ward as a delegate and declared its support for Franklin Pierce for President of the United States.¹²⁷ In Baltimore, Pierce would be nominated on the 49th ballot.¹²⁸ Upon return to Savannah, Governor Howell Cobb made an offer to Ward to make him a United States' Senator when John MacPherson Berrien resigned from the position, but Ward, not willing to leave his large law practice in Savannah, declined the invitation.¹²⁹

But John Elliott Ward would not stay out of politics for long. On August 11, 1853, the Chatham County Democratic Party leadership met at Oglethorpe House to unveil their candidates for the latest General Assembly; the candidates were John W. Anderson for the Senate, and John E. Ward and George Paul Harrison for the House.¹³⁰ In October, Chatham

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

¹²⁶ *Daily Morning News*, 2, 9 April 1852.

¹²⁷ *Daily Morning News*, 2, 27 April 1852.

¹²⁸ *Daily Morning News*, 2, 10 August 1852.

¹²⁹ *Savannah Morning News*, 1 December 1902.

¹³⁰ *Daily Morning News*, 2, 12 August 1853.

County for the third time chose Ward as its representative.¹³¹ Upon beginning his term in November, Ward was overwhelmingly elected by his peers to be Speaker of the House.¹³² Ward was an exceptional statesman, for he did more to "break down the powerful sectional prejudice that a long time existed among the up-country Georgians against the people of the seacoast" than any other person.¹³³

His load of duties increased on November 27, 1853, when he was nominated by the Savannah Democrats to run for Mayor of the city.¹³⁴ On December 5, Ward won over seventy percent of the vote to defeat Whig Party challenger R. A. Lewis and Independent R. W. Pooler.¹³⁵ In fact, the entire Democratic ticket was elected as Aldermen.¹³⁶ Judge Edward G. Wilson administered the oath of office to Mayor Ward and the new Aldermen, making them the 64th City Council Administration.¹³⁷

John Elliott Ward would serve a one year term at a salary of two thousand-five hundred dollars.¹³⁸ During his term of office, Ward made many improvements in the city, such as the completion of a new

¹³¹ The vote for Representatives was as follows: John E. Ward (dem.), 814; George P. Harrison (dem.), 757; R.W. Pooler (ind.), 601. *Daily Morning News*, 3, 4 October 1853.

¹³² On November 7, 1853, the Legislature voted on officers. The vote for Speaker of the House was John E. Ward, 142; A. McDougald, 26; Black, 2. *Daily Morning News*, 2, 8 November 1853.

¹³³ Avery, *History of Georgia*, 51.

¹³⁴ The Democratic Ticket for Council: Mayor, John E. Ward; Aldermen, Isaac Brunner, Solomon Cohen, Montgomery Cumming, Dr. Charles Ganahl, Edwin E. Hertz, Alexander R. Lawton, John N. Lewis, John Mallery, Dominick O'Byrne, James P. Screvan, Samuel Solomons, Robert D. Walker. *Daily Morning News*, 2, 28 November 1853.

¹³⁵ Ward received 728 votes, Lewis received 328 votes, Pooler received 22. *Daily Morning News*, 2, 6 December 1853.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ *Daily Morning News*, 1, 13 December 1853.

¹³⁸ Farley, "Ward, Mayor", 70.



HON. JOHN E. WARD.

Taken from the History of the Midway Congregational Church

waterworks system, a better system of cleaning the city streets, a new police force, and a project to set aside more land for schools. But his term was marred by a major hurricane and the worst yellow fever epidemic in Savannah's history.¹³⁹

Probably the biggest bright spot in Mayor Ward's term was the visit of former President Millard Fillmore to the city in April, 1854. (On March 15, 1853, Savannah had extended an invitation to Fillmore to visit the city, an invitation which he accepted.¹⁴⁰ However, his actual visit did not take place until a year later, when he arrived at the Central of Georgia Railroad depot late in the afternoon of April 21, 1854.¹⁴¹ Mayor Ward and a large crowd greeted Fillmore to the city.¹⁴² After a thirty-one gun salute, the Mayor welcomed the former President with words of praise, for he stated that Savannah welcomes "you within her limits, as the representative of her people we welcome you to her hospitalities, we welcome you to our homes and to our hearts."¹⁴³ Fillmore's tour of the city lasted four days, during which he kept up a busy schedule. Fillmore stayed at the Palaski House during his visit. On the second day of his tour he visited Bonaventure Cemetery, and on the third day he attended church three times, first at Christ Church, then at Independent Presbyterian, and

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ Savannah, Ga., Minutes of the City Council, 15 March 1853, 14, microfilm.

¹⁴¹ E. Merton Couffer, "Presidential Visits to Georgia During Antebellum Times," *Georgia Historical Quarterly*, vol LV, no 2, 357.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

¹⁴³ *Daily Morning News*, 1, 22 April 1854.

finally at the Unitarian Church.¹⁴⁴ On his last day in Savannah, Fillmore followed a reception at the Pulaski House with a sail aboard the *Seminole* down the Savannah River. After a large public ball that evening, Fillmore left for Charleston the next day, completing a successful trip to Savannah.¹⁴⁵

During Ward's tenure of office the city waterworks were finished and put into operation on March 1, 1854. A waterworks committee purchased land on Franklin Square to set up a distributing reservoir and bonds were directed issued to pay for the project. The total cost, outside of the mains and land, came close to \$122,000.¹⁴⁶ On June 1, 1854, an ordinance was passed placing the waterworks under the care of a Board of Commissioners composed of two aldermen and three citizens, who would provide "for the care and management" of the new system.¹⁴⁷ They had the power to make rules and regulations concerning "the government of the waterworks" and had to make an annual report to the Mayor.¹⁴⁸ On June 22, the council passed another ordinance regulating rates and methods of payment, with the rates being based on the cost of the property. Though the water that came through the system was sometimes filthy, it remained in service until 1892.¹⁴⁹

Another change in Savannah Ward was responsible for was th

¹⁴⁴ *Daily Morning News*, 2, 25 April 1854.

¹⁴⁵ Farley, "Ward, Mayor", 71.

¹⁴⁶ Gamble, *City Government*, 216.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁸ Farley, "Ward, Mayor", 71.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

policy of more efficient street cleaning of the city. On December 29, 1853, the council passed an ordinance which changed the "manner of keeping the streets and lanes" clean as well as creating the "duties of the Superintendent of streets."¹⁵⁰ The city would take bids from various individuals. The person awarded the contract had to "execute a bond to the city" the sum which would "exceed the amount of the bid."¹⁵¹ The individual selected to be Superintendent had to "furnish the necessary horses, carts and men" to keep Savannah clean. They were required to be on the job six days a week, with time off on Sundays and holidays.¹⁵² Along with the legislation concerning street cleaning, Ward added a suggestion that some streets in the downtown area be paved, which first occurred in late 1854.¹⁵³

Ward's Puritan background came to the forefront in a debate over the creation of a new police force in June, 1854. Ward made a serious attempt to regulate shopkeepers in the city and, for the first time, to enforce the longstanding Sunday blue laws. These laws forbade whites to work on the Sabbath and prohibited most forms of recreation. Except for medicine, ice, and milk, no goods were to be sold.¹⁵⁴ To help enforce these new policies, Ward introduced mounted patrolmen into the city's police

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

¹⁵³ *Savannah Morning News*, 1 December 1902.

¹⁵⁴ Richard H. Haunton, "Law and Order in Savannah, 1850-1860", *Georgia Historical Quarterly*, vol. no 1, 13.

system. Many shopkeepers claimed that the new ordinance was unfair and would hurt their business, but Ward felt his new system was based on correct principles.¹⁵⁵

Along those same lines, Ward and his administration moved to overhaul the entire law enforcement system in Savannah, establishing a new police force in June, 1854.¹⁵⁶ An ordinance was enacted to "preserve the peace" of the city. If a white person disturbed the peace he was subject to *either a one hundred dollar fine or thirty days in jail, or even both. If a Negro, free or slave, did the same thing, he faced the same penalties, but he could also face corporal punishment.*¹⁵⁷ At the same time, Captain Joseph Bryan was appointed as Chief of Police.¹⁵⁸ Savannah's new force had an annual budget of \$37,000 and was composed of fifty watchmen, twenty mounted men, a captain of the watch, two lieutenants, and four sergeants.¹⁵⁹ Arrangements were made with the Federal government to temporarily accommodate the police at the Oglethorpe barracks.¹⁶⁰

June, 1854 was also a busy month for other improvements in Savannah. On June 1, an ordinance was passed which set aside lots 34 and 35 in Calhoun Ward for educational purposes, for on these lots was to be built a "schoolhouse to be designated the Massie Common School."¹⁶¹ Ward's

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁶ Minutes of Council, 1 June 1854, 254.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁸ Minutes of Council, 22 June 1854, 270.

¹⁵⁹ *Gamble, City Government*, 239.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁶¹ Farley, "Ward, Mayor", 72.

affiliation with the Georgia Historical Society continued, for he pushed through an ordinance that allowed that property owned by the Society would be tax exempt.¹⁶² An ordinance on June 15 set aside the "triangular space of ground in the portion of the city known as Crawford Ward east bounded by Thunderbolt road and Perry Street" for a new jail.¹⁶³ The City Council also made a move to improve fire protection in the city. A ordinance passed on June 29 stipulated that no wooden house that bordered on a street could "be altered or changed in any manner whatsoever."¹⁶⁴ The city could also have a structure torn down if it presented a legitimate fire hazard.¹⁶⁵

Despite all of the progress made in Savannah during Ward's term his tenure of office would also see much tragedy. A yellow fever epidemic hit Savannah in August and continued on until October.¹⁶⁶ In his official report concerning the epidemic, Ward stated: "After an exemption from epidemics unknown in any other city, and the enjoyment of unexampled health for almost half a century, in the month of August our citizens were startled with the announcement that the yellow fever had made its appearance as an epidemic. The first case occurred on August 5, in a house situated at the southwest corner of Lincoln and Broughton Streets. Regarded merely as a sporadic case it was not reported as yellow fever

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁴ *Gamble, City Government*, 237.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁶ Farley, "Ward Mayor", 72.

between that date and the middle of the month a few more cases occurred, but nothing to excite any alarm or create any apprehension of an epidemic among us. About that date it manifested itself in an epidemic form and swept with a fearful desolation over the city.¹⁶⁷

By August 21, the yellow fever had become a serious threat to the survival of the city. The fever spread rapidly until all sections of the city were infected.¹⁶⁸ The City Council of Augusta appropriated one thousand dollars and many donations of supplies to aid Savannah. Dr. Richard Arnold reported on September 2 that Savannah was a panic-stricken city and was almost deserted.¹⁶⁹ Governor H. V. Johnson offered Ward his unfeigned sympathy for the suffering of the city of Savannah.¹⁷⁰ At the height of the epidemic, a severe hurricane struck Savannah on September 3 and 9, costing many lives and causing Hutchinson Island to be flooded under completely. Ward himself became a victim of the disease, along with two of his children, both of whom died. When the epidemic was over, over one thousand lives had been claimed by the plague.¹⁷¹

After completing his difficult term as mayor, Ward directed his attention to advancing the goals of the Union Democrats, for he became a leader of the party on both the state and national levels.¹⁷² Ward was

¹⁶⁷ Gamble, *City Government*, 232.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁹ Farley, "Ward, Mayor", 73.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁷¹ Gabard, *Georgia Biography*, 1032.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*

elected the Chairman of the Democratic National Convention at Cincinnati, Ohio, which nominated James Buchanan for President and John Breckinridge for Vice President. Ward not only made a stirring keynote address at the convention, but he also came close to becoming Vice President of the United States. The Pennsylvania delegation desired the nomination of Ward, but the Virginia delegation, which held the deciding votes in the matter, was split between Ward and Breckinridge. However, on the second ballot, Virginia chose Breckinridge. In his keynote address, Ward attacked the Republican Party as "a faction with liberty on their tongues, but with treason festering in their hearts."¹⁷³

Following his return to Georgia after the convention, Ward was elected to the Georgia Senate and was elected President in 1857. He played a key role in the Senate, on many occasions challenging Governor Joseph E. Brown.¹⁷⁴ During this time, Ward continued his law practice in Savannah, which by 1859 had been joined by Henry Jackson and Charles Jones, Jr.¹⁷⁵ Their office was located on the northwest corner of Bull and South Broad.¹⁷⁶

In 1858, President James Buchanan appointed Ward Minister Plenipotentiary to China, a position which gave him the authority to sign a

¹⁷³ *Savannah Morning News*, 12, 29 June 1924.

¹⁷⁴ Gabard, *Georgia Biography*, 1032.

¹⁷⁵ *Directory of the City of Savannah*, 1859.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

document in the name of the President.¹⁷⁷ Ward's chief mission was to take to China the Treaty of Tientsin between the United States and China. The treaty, just recently ratified by the United States' Senate, was a trade agreement between the two nations. In July, 1859, Ward arrived in Peking but was not received by the Emperor because of his refusal to perform the "kowtow", a ritual that required the visitor to bow to the Emperor. Ward stated that "I only bow to God and women".¹⁷⁸ Ratifications of the treaty were exchanged at Pehtang, after which Ward returned to Shanghai. There he worked to improve trade relations between the two nations. Afterwards, he traveled to Japan, where he was presented to the shogun.¹⁷⁹ Meanwhile, events in the United States forced Ward to return home.

On December 15, 1860, Ward was granted a leave of absence from his mission in China to return to the United States. He first went to Italy, where his wife had stayed while he was in China. In April, 1861, Ward left Italy and returned to the United States. Ward was split in his loyalty to the Union but his devotion to the South. He resigned his commission as envoy to China, returned to Savannah, and resumed the practice of law.¹⁸⁰ But he was not content, for Olivia and the children, James, Olivia, and

¹⁷⁷ Earl Swisher, China's Management of the American Barbarians (New York: Octagon Books, 1972), 853.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁹ Gabors, Georgia Biography, 1032.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

Louisa, remained in Italy.¹⁸¹

Ward had remained an outsider as the Southern states left the Union. Alexander H. Stephens maintained that Ward's presence in Georgia in late 1860 and early 1861 "could have saved the state from seceding."¹⁸² As Ward arrived in Savannah from Europe, he met "a train of cars conveying the first company of Georgia troops going on to Virginia." Ward's Unionism was overcome by Southern patriotism, for he made a stirring speech to the troops.¹⁸³ Ward would use his influence to procure arms from Britain and France for the Confederacy. In Europe, Ward visited his family, which had remained in Italy.¹⁸⁴

One oddity of Ward's Civil War experience was the fact that he appeared on the face of a Confederate ten dollar bill. Even though he did make an effort to buy arms for the Confederacy, he was still considered a staunch Unionist.¹⁸⁵ He also stayed in touch with several Confederate leaders, including Benjamin H. Hill, who he wrote in April 1863 about *Captain George W. Anderson*.¹⁸⁶

After the Civil War, Ward was reunited with his family, after which he moved to New York. In 1866, Ward was reunited with his old law partner, Charles C. Jones. Ward remained a senior partner in their 61 Wall

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸² William Gabard, "The Confederate Career of John Elliott Ward", *Georgia Historical Quarterly*, vol LV, no 2, 177.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁵ Georgia Historical Society Manuscript Collection, *Hughes-Folsom Papers*, coll. no. 406, 4:69.

¹⁸⁶ Georgia Historical Society Manuscript Collection, *George Wayne Anderson Papers*, coll. no.7.

Street firm for several years.¹⁸⁷ Ward and his family became prominent members of New York's social life, with Ward becoming President of the prestigious Hancock and English Club in 1880.¹⁸⁸ In March, 1881, his son James was admitted to plead and practice in the courts of Georgia.¹⁸⁹

After the death of his wife in 1890, John Elliott Ward spent the last years of his life in the seclusion of his New York law office. About five weeks before his death, Ward came home to the Liberty County he so dearly missed. He stayed at the home of his nephew, W.M. Stevens, at Springfield Plantation. He spent his last few days confined to bed, with many of his dearest relatives at his side. The day before his death, he asked to be buried in Old Midway Cemetery. On November 29, 1902, John Elliott Ward died peacefully in his sleep, presumably of old age. By that time, his son James was a corporate lawyer in New York. His two daughters, Olivia and Louisa, resided in Elizabethtown, New Jersey. A descendent of Ward's, Mrs. Elizabeth Amason, still resides in Liberty County, not far from Ward's boyhood home.¹⁹⁰

In the obituary that appeared in the Savannah Morning News on December 1, 1902, the paper paid tribute to Ward. It quoted a speech he gave to the Chatham Artillery on the occasion of its one hundredth anniversary: "As the lengthening shadows of the declining sun warn him

¹⁸⁷ Gabard, Georgia Biography, 1033.

¹⁸⁸ Savannah Morning News, 3:3, 9 October 1880.

¹⁸⁹ Savannah Morning News, 3:2, 8 March 1881.

¹⁹⁰ Savannah Morning News, 1 December 1902.

that the day is far spent, and the night at hand, and he returns to address you, whom he addressed fifty years ago, all things seem changed, save in his love for the city of Savannah, which time can never lessen, and his deep devotion to her people, which distance can not change. The strongest feeling which can animate man in later life is that which links him to the scenes of his earlier years, to the home of his youth, to the play-place of his childhood."¹⁹¹

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*

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