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ARMSTRONG STATE COLLEGE

JOHN YOUNG NOEL

A RESEARCH PAPER
FOR HISTORY 650

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

BY
DAVID N. MCCULLOUGH, JR.

SAVANNAH, GEORGIA
FALL. 1992

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JOHN YOUNG NOEL

"When weeping on a husbands much loved dust
Our tears become us and grief is just"

This is the beginning of the poem, which was inscribed on John Young Noel's tomb by his wife, Sarah C. Noel.¹

John Young Noel, a prominent attorney and Mayor of Savannah for four terms,² was born in the City of New York on June 18th., 1762 of parents illustrious for pity.³

He was practicing law in Elizabethtown, New Jersey where he married his wife, Sarah C. [Dennis] Stites, the widow of Richard Stites and the mother of Richard Montgomery Stites.⁴

The date of his arrival in Savannah is unknown, but Noel was appointed Judge of the Courts in Upper Georgia prior to 1789,⁵ and he is listed in both the 1790 Census (Reconstructed)⁶ and the 1790 Tax Digest for Chatham County.⁷ He was also noted to be the Solicitor General for Georgia in 1794.⁸

On February 19th., 1787, the Legislature of Georgia proposed an act which divided Savannah into seven wards, adding to the six already existing wards; Anson, Reynolds, Decker, Derby, Heathcote, and Percival another to be called Oglethorpe, and constituting the hamlets of Macacraw and Ewensburg.⁹

The second section of the resolution declared " that on the first Monday in March annually, and every year, the proprietors of lots or houses within the said wards, who shall be of the age of twenty-one and upwards, shall meet at the courthouse of the said town,; and the wardens so chosen, or a majority of them, shall meet on the Monday next following, and choose by ballot out of their own body a person to act as president of the board, and they shall also appoint a clerk"¹⁰

The act was signed on December 23rd., 1789, by Governoe Edwin Telfair, which granted Savannah a charter and set up the Mayor and Alderman form of government for the city. The act also stated that the first election was to take place on March 1st., 1790.¹¹

John Young Noel was elected to be an Alderman in 1796 and was then elected by his fellow Aldermen to be Mayor, March 14th., 1796 to July 10th., 1797; dates changed by Georgia Legislature.¹²

Eight months after taking his oath of office, a disastrous fire occurred which changed Savannah. On the evening of Saturday, 26th., of November 1796, between 6 and 7 o'clock, a fire started in Mr. Gromet's Bakehouse in City Market.¹³

"The season for two months previous to this incident had been dry; the night was cold, and a light breeze from N.N.W. was soon increased by the effect of the fire."¹⁴ With the buildings being mainly wooden structures and with the strong wind, the fire spread rapidly.¹⁵

"In a direction from the corner of Market Square along Bay to Abercorn Street, thence in a southeast direction, taking the whole wester of the city to the south and east commons, a few houses quite to the southeast part only excepted."¹⁶

The Columbian Museum and Savannah Advertiser, Tuesday, 29th. of November 1796, reported the following account. "During the conflagration on Saturday night last, in four hours, 229 houses, besides out, were burnt, amounting to One Million of Dollars, exclusive of the property - 375 chimneys are standing bare, and form a dismal appearance - 171 houses only, of the compact part of the city are standing - upwards of 400 families are destitute of houses - Charities solicited."¹⁷

Soon after the fire, Mayor Noel and Aldermens met and passed a resolution, which authorized the Mayor to write the United States Government, Legislature of Georgia, and other states for relief for sufferers.¹⁸

Savannah received aid from Pennsylvania, South Carolina, New York, and Georgia, which gave 15,000 Dollars. No aid was received from the United States Government.¹⁹

John Young Noel's first term as Mayor had not been a quiet and smooth term in office, because of the fire. He was elected to serve as an Alderman two more times, 1798 to 1799 and 1801 to 1802.²⁰

By 1800, Savannah was beginning a prosperity period, which would last until 1820. This new wealth was stimulating a taste for the finer things in life.²¹ The population was up to 6,500 inhabitants. The city had recovered from the fire of 1796 and began to emerge as an important export/import center.²²

On July 9th., 1804, John Young Noel was elected by his Aldermen to be Mayor.²³ Unfortunately, disaster would revisit Savannah during his term.

Two months later on the 8th. of September, 1804, Savannah was hit by a hurricane at nine o'clock in the morning until ten o'clock that night. There was wide spread destruction from the high winds and heavy rainfall. Several houses were destroyed, trees were blown down, and several rice plantations were flooded, which caused a hundred negroes to drown. Along the Riverfront, the wharves, several warehouses, and eighteen ships were destroyed. The Exchange, jail, courthouse, and silk factory were damaged. Falling chimneys caused the death of three people.²⁴

Noel was elected to serve as Mayor of Savannah for two more terms, July 9th., 1805 to July 14th., 1806 and for the final time, July 14th., 1806 to September 14th., 1807; date changed by Georgia Legislature.²⁵

In the Tuesday, October 13th., 1807, issue of the Republican and Savannah Evening Ledger, it stated "John Young Noel had received and accepted an appointment of Judge of the Superior Courmy for the Eastern District of Georgia."²⁶

By 1808, the United States was in a state of unrest, which caused Georgia to be in turmoil, especially Savannah, because of its port. The city began to prepare itself for the imminent war with England. War was declared by the United States on the 18th. of June, 1812, and would last

until February, 1815.²⁷

Since 1740, when Yellow Fever was reported in Charleston, Savannah had been on the lookout for this danderous disease. By 1804, Savannah reported a number of deaths from fever.²⁸

On the 1st. of November 1817, Judge John Young Noel at the age of 55 years old, died from the fever at his home located at the corner of President and Lincoln Street.²⁹

The members of the Bar of the Eastern District met on the 4th. of November 1817. They passed a resolution, which atated that they would all attend the funeral of John Young Noel that afternoon.³⁰

Judge John Young Noel was laid to rest in the Old Cemetery; now known as Colonial Cemetery. On the 2nd. of May 1854, Judge Noel's remains were removed to Laurel Grove Cemetery, Lot # 175.

FOOTNOTES

¹John Young Noel's Toomb in Laurel Grove Cemetery, Savannah, Georgia. Lot no. 175.

²John Young Noel Papers, 1796-1797. Manuscript Collection no. 588. Georgia Historical Society, Savannah, Georgia.

³John Young Noel's Toomb in Laurel Grove Cemetery, Savannah, Georgia. Lot no. 175.

⁴John Young Noel Papers, 1796-1797. Manuscript Collection no. 588. Georgia Historical Society, Savannah, Georgia.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Mare de Lamar and Elisabeth Rothstein. 1790 Census (Reconstructed). (Baltimore: Geneological Publishing Company, 1985).

⁷1790 Tax Digest: Earliest Surviving Tax Digest of Chatham County. Noel, Jno.Y. . p.50.

⁸John Young Noel Papers, 1794. Manuscript Collection no. 549. Georgia Historical Society, Savannah, Georgia.

⁹William Harden. A History of Savannah and South Georgia (Chicago: Lewis Publishing, 1913 ; repr., Atlanta: Cherokee Publishing, 1969), 255-256.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Thomas Gamble. A History of the City Government of Savannah, Georgia from 1790 - 1901: Compiled from Official Records (Savannah, 1900). 3.

¹²Ibid.

¹³William Harden. A History of Savannah and South Georgia (Chicago: Lewis Publishing, 1913; repr., Atlant: Cherokee Publishing, 1969), 264-265.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid.

- ¹⁷Columbia Museum and Savannah Advertiser. "Fire of 1796". Tuesday, 29 November 1796. Volume 1, no.78.
- ¹⁸John Young Noel Papers, 1796-1797. Manuscript Collection no.588. Georgia Historical Society, Savannah, Georgia.
- ¹⁹Ibid.
- ²⁰Thomas Gamble. A History of the City Government of Savannah, Georgia from 1790-1901 : Compiled from Official Records (Savannah, 1900). 3.
- ²¹Mills Lane. Savannah Revisited: A Pictorial History (Savannah: Beehive Press, 1973).
- ²²Charles C. Jones. History of Savannah, Georgia.(Syracuse: D.Mason and Company, 1890). 331-332.
- ²³City Council Minutes of Savannah, Georgia, 9 July 1804. Microfilm no.5600CL-05-02, (1790-1796; 1800-1804).
- ²⁴Charles C.Jones. A History of Savannah, Georgia (Syracuse: D.Mason and Company, 1890). 331-332.
- ²⁵Thomas Gamble. A History of the City Government of Savannah, Georgia from 1790-1901: Compiled from Official Records (Savannah, 1900). 3.
- ²⁶Republican and Savannah Evening Ledger. "Judge John Y. Noel". 13 October 1807. Volume 5, no.113. p.3. c.3.
- ²⁷William Harden. A History of Savannah and South Georgia (Chicago: Lewis Publishing, 1913; repr., Atlanta: cherokee Publishing, 1969),272-281.
- ²⁸Ibid.,290.
- ²⁹Death Certificate for John Y.Noel. Chatham County Health Department, Savannah,Georgia.
- ³⁰Noel Family,1817. Walter Hartridge Manuscript Collection, no.1349, Box no. 130-2356. Georgia Historical Society, Savannah, Georgia.
- ³¹Register of Deaths in Savannah, Georgia; August 1811- August 1818. Compiled by Geneological Committee (Georgia Historical Society,1986), Volume III, p.196.
- ³²Register of Deaths in Savannah, Georgia; 1833-1847. Compiled by Geneological Committee (Georgia Historical Society, 1989), Volume V, p.81.

³³General Index to Keeper's Record Book: 1852-1938. Laurel Grove Cemetery, Savannah, Georgia. W.P.A. Official Project, 1939.

³⁴Will of Sarah C. Noel. Probate Office, Chatham County Courthouse, Savannah, Georgia. File no. 33.

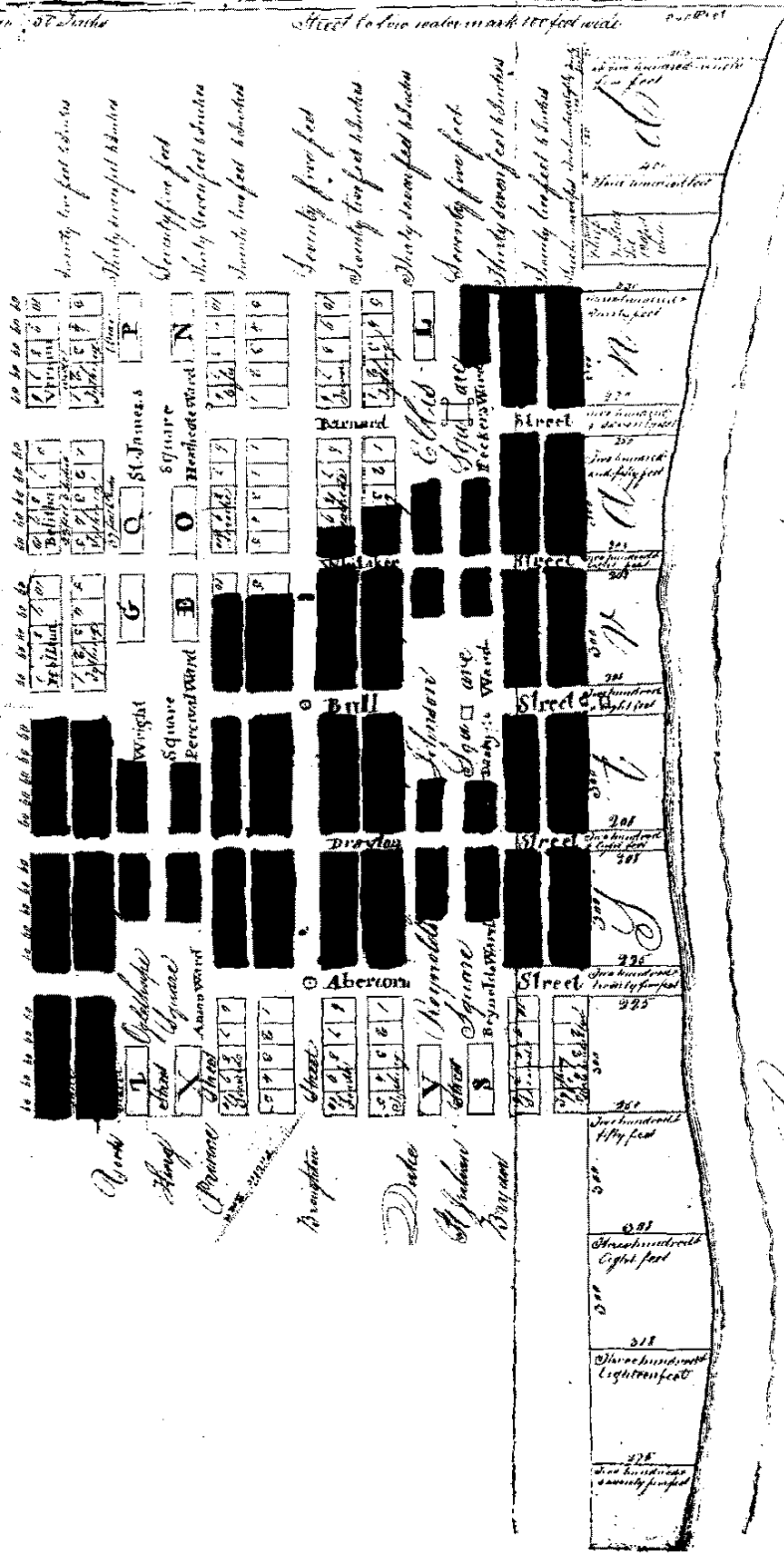
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- John Young Noel's Tomb. Laurel Grove Cemetery, Savannah, Georgia.
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12.35

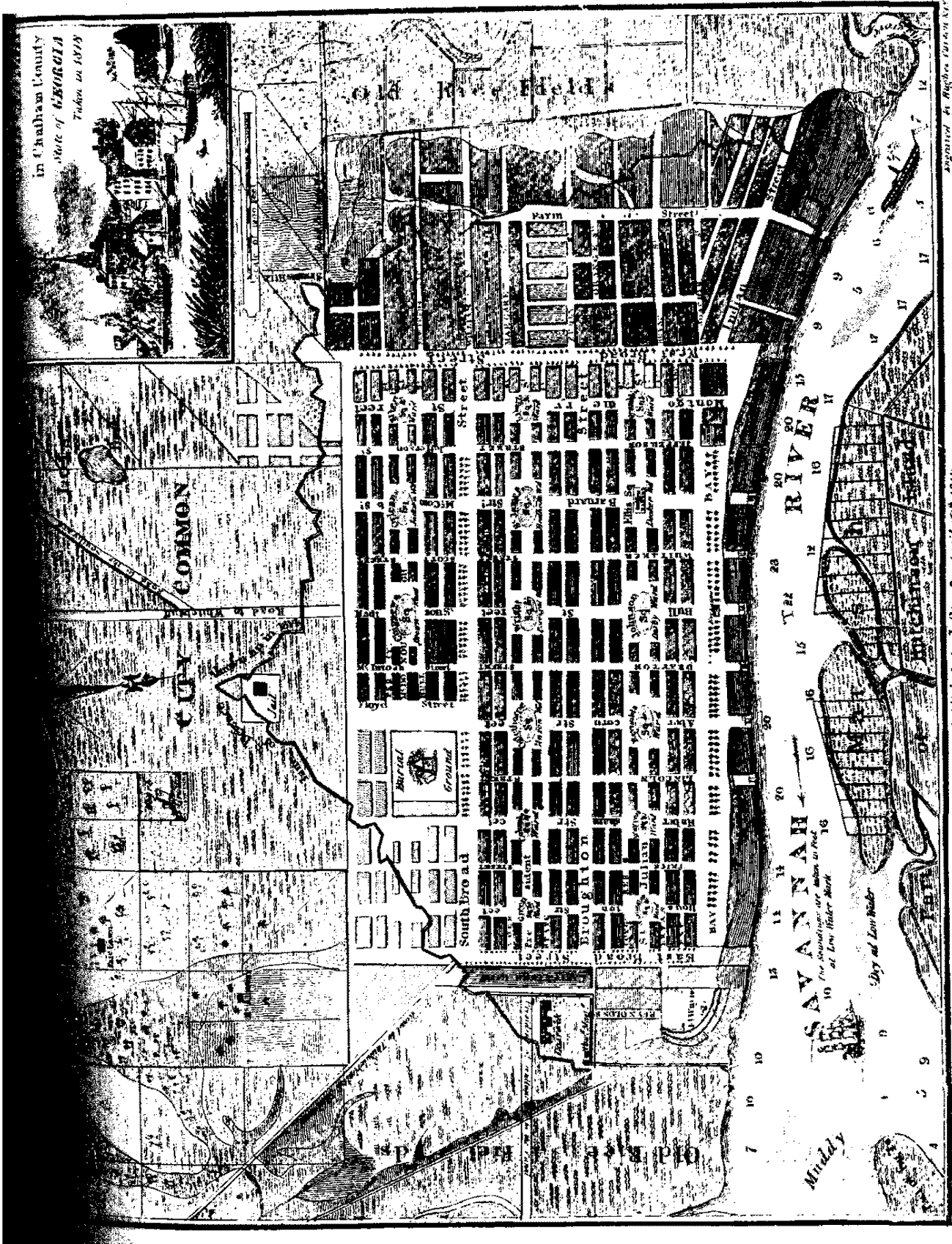
Western Base N 10 32 W

Church Street



Savannah Georgia

The dark area shows the effects of the 1796 fire on Savannah.



Savannah, Georgia in 1818, Five months after the death of John Y. Noel.

CONTINUM

In doing this research, I was surprised to find so little information about a prominent lawyer and civic leader.

Noel had no Will recorded in the Probate Office at the Chatham County Courthouse, which may have been because of his sudden death with the fever. I thought that he may have left everything to his wife, Sarah C. Noel, who was buried on the 17th. of January 1838, at the age of 79, from an affection of lungs.³² She was buried in Old Cemetery and removed to Laurel Grove Cemetery, Lot #175, on the 2nd. of May 1854.³³ According to her will, she left everything to her niece, Cornelia M. Millen or Miller.³⁴

I found very little information about John Y. Noel at the Georgia Historical Society. With more time, I would have checked the Savannah Manuscript Collections at both Duke University and the University of Georgia.