Armstrong State College

Jane Starr Basinger
A Lady of Leisure, a Woman of Strength

Department of History

by
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Jane Starr Basinger, born in 1804, lived through the most turbulent times of our history to see the shape of the 20th century looming in the not so far distance. Though she lived in the heyday of the swooning Southern Belle, she was nobody's charge. Considered a "lady of leisure" (1860 Census), Jane conducted business and ran her household with the authority and effectiveness of any man.

Jane's father, William Starr (1765-1858), is shown throughout the Chatham County deed books as the acting power of attorney for numerous transactions (1). He was Inspector for the Port of Savannah. William Starr first appears in the 1790 Tax Digest: Earliest Surviving Tax Digest of Chatham County as a resident of Chatham County. William Starr is listed in An Index to Georgia Tax Digests: 1809-1811 as a resident of Clarke County, but was also conducting business in Savannah. By 1816 William Starr is, once again, listed as a resident of Chatham County in the tax digests (2). Mr. William Starr was married to Jane's mother, Ann Hoopes Starr (1774-1855). Jane was born on October 11th.

The marine intelligence journals from the newspapers of that time show that William Starr traveled often between Savannah and Augusta, usually by steamboat. Occasionally, his family would accompany him on these trips. Perhaps there were family connections in the Augusta area; Jane's son would be born in Richmond County (3). Augusta could have possibly been a layover before continuing on to Clarke County, where Mr. Starr had business connections. Jane would eventually live out her last
years in Athens.

Jane was, more than likely, educated in a fashion similar to the other women of her time. Graciousness and charm, coupled with the necessary practical skills to run an elegant household, were the foundations of that curriculum. In 1826, when Jane was 22 years old, she married Lt. Thomas Basinger of Savannah, Georgia. Thomas's father, Peter Basinger, was a business associate of William Starr (4). Perhaps the young couple was encouraged by their fathers to combine business with family. The marriage was conducted by the Reverend Mr. Samuel Howe, of the Independent Presbyterian Church. The ceremony took place on Saturday, November 25th (Index to Marriages: 1806-1851). The young couple resided at 134 Liberty Street, or what would now be the faded remains of "Jack Donkar Motors, Inc." on West Liberty (5). Shortly after Jane's marriage, Thomas Basinger enters into some sort of business arrangement with William Starr. The two gentlemen are frequently listed together in the marine journals returning from Augusta and Charleston, South Carolina. Jane gave birth to her son, William Starr Basinger, on August 26, 1827, exactly ten months and one day after her marriage. William was born in Richmond County. Jane returned to Savannah with her son and a servant in May of 1828. The young mother and her son made several trips back toward north Georgia, by way of Augusta, always with at least one servant in tow (6). In 1830, Jane gave birth to a daughter, Elizabeth Georgia. The young, growing family continued to reside at the Liberty Street Address. Mrs. Jane Basinger's travels were...
greatly reduced at this point, but her husband continued to travel. During the absences of her husband, Jane must have learned how to cope with raising and disciplining her children as a single mother (undoubtedly with the help of servants). This time as a "practicing" single mother would come in handy, for Jane would be widowed at a young age. In April of 1836, Thomas Basinger returned from his last trip. On June 26, 1836, at the age of 33, Jane's husband died. According to the sexton's report, "Delirium Tremens" was the cause of death. This cause (as listed) may have been a mere manifestation of a greater, fatal illness. Perhaps, though, the young Thomas Basinger suffered from some form of alcoholic poisoning which the term (delirium tremens) is more commonly associated with (7). However, there is no other evidence that leads to signs of the abuse of alcohol.

Widowed, with two small children, Jane never remarried. She handled all of her own business affairs and firmly took charge as "head" of her household. As a woman of her era, she fulfilled the obligations of her social standing. Her father and her brother were both successful men of their time. Jane's brother, also named William Starr, was a "Commission Merchant" on Bay Street (8). Jane's family's council must have been helpful to her as a newly widowed woman. Aside from a few business transactions and trips, Jane's life appears to have taken on a comfortable order: running her house and caring for her children. She was active in her church the Independent Presbyterian Church (9). In the 1850 Census, Jane's household
consisted of her son, William Starr Basinger; her daughter, Elizabeth Georgia; George Anderson, and George D. Smith. William Starr Basinger is practicing law by this time. George Anderson, age 24, is a clerk from England. George D. Smith, age 11, appeared to be living with the Basinger family regularly. They all lived at the Liberty Street address.

In the 1860 Census, George D. Smith is listed as a "Law student". William Starr Basinger was at this time a partner in the law firm of Lawton & Basinger. This law firm was fairly prominent in the Savannah business community. The law offices were, for a short time, located at a Liberty Street address next to the residence of the Basingers. The offices were moved to 153 Bay Street (10). William Starr Basinger was a Savannah City Alderman, an active member of the Chatham County Democratic Party, and a member in the Savannah Volunteer Guard (11). The Savannah Volunteer Guard was the unit William Starr Basinger served with during the Civil War. He would later write an account of the experiences of the unit in a book entitled The Savannah Volunteer Guards, 1858-1862. He also was a co-designer of the Georgia state flag (12).

Shortly after the Civil War, William Starr Basinger married Miss Margaret Garnett. He was sixteen years her senior. Miss Elizabeth Georgia Basinger never married. In November of 1868, Jane's first grandchild was born to William and Margaret. The baby was named Elizabeth. Tragically, the baby was to die only eleven months after her birth. Jane had three more grandchildren: William Starr Basinger Jr. (b. 1872), Leslie Jane Starr Basinger Page 4
It seems as if Jane's granddaughter, Leslie, married into the family of her father's law partner (13). Jane married into the family of one of her father's business associates, too.

Life continued on at the Liberty Street home consistently until 1890. In 1890, William Starr Basinger left the Savannah area and moved to Athens, Georgia (14). Perhaps William Starr Basinger was returning to family land and business in that area. For the next three years Jane and her daughter, Elizabeth, remained at the Liberty Street address. In 1893, Jane moved up to Athens (15). The Liberty Street property stayed in the Starr/Basinger family until 1949 (Savannah Cadastral Survey, Brown Ward).

Jane Starr Basinger died on March 23, 1896. She was 93 years old. Her death, as reported by her physician, was as follows (16):

To whom it may concern:

Mrs. J.S. Basinger Sr., mother of Major W.S. Basinger formerly of Savannah, Ga, died here this morning, at 93 yrs of age. The cause of the death was only "old age" having nothing an infection or contagious nature connected with it.

Respectfully,

Saml. C. Benedict, M.D.

Athens, Ga

[sic.]

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Jane Starr Basinger's body was returned to Savannah from Athens by train. Her body is now resting in the Bonaventure Cemetery, Section "G", Lot 8. Also located in this same burial lot: the graves of her daughter, Elizabeth; her granddaughter, Elizabeth; and a stone set "in memoriam" for her parents (17). Members of Jane's husband's family are also interred here.

William Starr Basinger, his wife, and other members of his family are buried in Bonaventure, in Section "K", Lot 565. William Starr Basinger's family lot lies directly across a shady dirt road from where his mother is buried.

Jane must have come from rather resilient stock. Her father lived to be 93, her mother 82. Both of her children lived to see their 80's! Perhaps this longevity can be attributed to a Presbyterian restraint. Even though Jane Starr Basinger lived during a time when women were cared for, she took care of herself. Forced into independence by the early death of her husband, she rallied on, giving her children a good base on which to build long, healthy lives.
1. For example, William Starr granted power of attorney in 1808. *Chatham County Deed Book*, vol. 2B, folio 333.

2. Information from *An Index to Georgia Tax Digests (1814-1817)*, vol. 5, R.J. Taylor Foundation.


4. Peter Basinger signed as a witness to the transfer of power of attorney to William Starr. *1808 Chatham County Deed Book*, vol. 2B, folio 333.

5. Savannah Cadastral Survey. Brown Ward file, Lot 62, 12 W. Liberty St. First name shown in 1939 is W.S. Basinger (Jane's grandson). Property changed over to Josephine S. Saay, she then sold it to Jack Donkar.

6. "...arrived...Mrs. Basinger, child & servant...Steamboat 'George Washington' from Augusta." This is an example of numerous Marine Journal entries found throughout the Savannah Georgian at the time.

7. Delirium Tremors as defined by *Webster's Third New International Dictionary*:

   "A violent delirium induced by excessive and prolonged use of alcoholic liquors and characterized by terrifying hallucinations, mental confusion, restlessness, sweating and tremor."

8. William Starr, Jr. listed in the 1859 Savannah City Directory, as a "Commission Merchant" at 76 Bay Street.


0. Lawton & Basinger, William S. Basinger. *1860 Savannah City Directory*.
NOTES

1. Information from the "Vertical File" at the Georgia Historical Society, under the name of William Basinger.

2. Ibid.

3. I made this deduction after reading her name, Leslie Basinger Lawton, on her tombstone in her family burial lot. I feel it is an obvious deduction. (Empires are built on cleverly arranged marriages.)

4. William Starr Basinger disappears from the Savannah City Directory at this time.

5. Jane Starr Basinger and her daughter disappear from the Savannah City Directory at this time.

6. Quoted from a small, handwritten note from the 1896 Chatham County Death Records, from the Chatham County Vital Records Office.

7. See Photographs.

Basinger, William Starr. *The Savannah Volunteer Guards from 1858-1882*. 298p. Typewritten copy of the original manuscript in the library of the University of Georgia.


Chatham County Board of Tax Assessors. Savannah Cadastral Files, Brown Ward File. p. 50. Chatham County Superior Court Records Room. Chatham County Court House. Savannah, Georgia.


Chatham County Index to Marriages 1806-1851. p.36. Certificate #1135. Chatham County Probate Court Records Room. Chatham County Court House. Savannah, Georgia.

Chatham County Deed Book, (1808) vol. 2B. Folio 333. Chatham County Superior Court Records Room. Chatham County Court House. Savannah, Georgia.


Directory of the City of Savannah for the Year 1858. Compiled and Published by David H. Galloway. Georgia Historical Society.


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United States Census-- Georgia, 1850. Microfilm # M432-64. Georgia Historical Society. Savannah, Georgia.