A Biography of
Francis J. Cercocky

by

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Abstract

Francis Juan Cerocophy was born on March 15, 1838 in St. Augustine, Florida, the son of Creole and Spanish immigrants. He came to Savannah while a young man and worked on the small barges and boats traveling along the Savannah River. He became a captain on the steamers "Idea" and "Beauregard", both of which played important roles in Savannah's history during the Civil War. He died on July 26, 1869 and was buried in Cathedral Cemetery in Savannah.
Francis J. Cercopoly, a first generation American and, at first glance, an ordinary man of simple means, was intriguing and quite adventurous upon closer examination. He came to Savannah from St. Augustine, Florida as a young man, worked as a cowboy on barges, and later became a captain on the steamers "Ida" and "Beauregard." More extraordinary aspects of his life included a heavy involvement in the siege of Fort Pulaski during the Civil War, a longtime acquaintance with Gen. Robert E. Lee, and an involvement in the Savannah City Government.

Francis Cercopoly was born March 15, 1806 and was baptized Francisco Juan on March 25, 1806 in St. Augustine, Florida. He was the son of Domingo R. Cercopoly, from Branc de Mayno, Greece, and Juan Hernandez Cercopoly, of San Felipe, Minorca. According to a page from what appears to be the 1787 Florida Census, Domingo Cercopoly was a carpenter who "desired more land," was married, and had no children. Later, the Cercopoly's had several children: Catalina, Domingo, Juan, Catalina Juana, and Francisco Juan. It could be possible that there were other children -- Peter, Felix, Margarita, and Maria -- but this information was provided by a genealogical record that was partially unverifiable.

Francis married Miss Agnes Clark of St. Augustine on August 15, 1825. She was born July 29, 1806 and baptized into Jacoba Catalina on August 9, 1806, the daughter of George and Antonia Maestro Clar, both natives of Florida. While living in St. Augustine, Francis and Agnes had four children: Juana Paula, born August 16, 1826; Juliana Dominga Jose, born April 12, 1828 and baptized December 14,
1823; 7 John F., born about 1827; and Anna L. It must be assumed that John F. and Anna L. were born in St. Augustine and that they were the children of Francis and Agnes. The assumption was made on the basis of several factors: there was a period of transition in the parish of St. Augustine during the assumed time of their births, which caused great confusion in the sacramental records; 8 there were no records of their baptisms in Savannah; it was established from Anna's marriage record that John F. was her brother; 9 both Julius and Francis were listed as sponsors in the baptismal records of Anna's and John's children; 10 and Anna and John were listed as Francis's children in the genealogical record previously mentioned. 11

Apparently, Margarita and Juan, Francis's siblings, moved to Savannah in the mid 1820's. There were references in the Savannah Georgian to both Margarita and Juan beginning in 1826. 12 Francis came to Savannah between 1829 and 1831. It can be deduced from the date of Julius's baptism that Francis was in St. Augustine in December 1828. He then was listed in The Georgian, a Savannah newspaper, on January 5, 1832, as having a letter at the Post Office for more than thirty days. 13 The attraction of Savannah remains a mystery, but according to Col. Charles Ginesteau, commander of Fort Pulaski during the Civil War, Francis worked as a coxswain on the barge that carried Lt. Robert E. Lee from Savannah to Fort Pulaski each day as the fort was being constructed. 14 Lieutenant Lee arrived in Savannah about November 1, 1829 to begin his tour of duty. 15

The job as coxswain was probably Francis's first job in Savannah. It could probably be assumed that Francis worked on small barges and boats all of his adult life, since he was given this job right away upon his arrival in Savannah. The barge and later the dredge boat.
on which Francis worked were owned by the federal government as he was in its employ some thirty-one years, until the ownership of such vessels was transferred to the state of Georgia in 1861. At that time, Francis was employed by the state and attached to the Confederate Navy. It is uncertain when Francis became a captain on these vessels; however, there was a reference to him as Captain Corephuly in the 1859 Savannah City Directory, while he was listed just as Francis Corephuly in the 1858 directory. Francis did not own the vessels on which he was captain. In 1859, he was listed in the directory as being captain on the steamer "Ida" but the "Ida" had other captains, and he was the captain on at least one other vessel, the steamer "Herculean." After Francis and Agnes came to Savannah, they had a fifth child, Jorge Marcus, on April 25, 1834. He was baptized on May 30, 1834 by Father J.F. O'Neil at the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist in Savannah. The family apparently boarded with others for many years after coming to Savannah because Francis did not appear in any of the census records until 1850. This would indicate that he was boarding with someone else who was considered "head of household" by the census taker. His earliest appearance in the city directory was in 1853 where he listed his address as Abercorn and Jones Streets. The next year his address was listed as Liberty Street Barracks and then in 1860 as Liberty Street between Bryan and Bull. At the time of his death he lived at the corner of Jones and Price Streets. He probably did not own any of his residences or other land as he recorded no deeds at the Probate Court in Savannah. It would also be unlikely that he would have
bought and sold property at such a rate even if he did not record the deeds.

From the time that Francis and Agnes came to Savannah until the beginning of the Civil War, their lives were very quiet from the standpoint of public record. There were only three newspaper references to Francis for that entire period of time: one in 1852, when he was listed as having a letter at the Post Office for more than thirty days; \(^\text{29}\) one in 1858, when he was appointed by the Democratic Committee to help keep peace at the polls; \(^\text{20}\) and one in 1859, when he was reappointed to the same position. \(^\text{31}\) From the perspective of private life, however, this period was quite eventful. It was during this period that their four children grew up and were married, and that they became grandparents several times over.

Juana Paula Carcopulo apparently died while the family still lived in St. Augustine. There were no traces of her in Savannah as far as marriage, death, newspaper notices, census records, or city directories were concerned. Since the family moved to Savannah when Juana would have been about three years old, it would not have been likely that she stayed behind. For these reasons it was assumed that she died and was buried in St. Augustine, although there were no documents found to substantiate the assumption.

Julius Carcopulo married Miss Anna Frederica Thomas on April 5, 1849 at the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist. Witnesses were Francis Carcopulo, father of the groom, and Mary Hernandez. \(^\text{32}\) Julius and Anna had four children: Narciscus (called Bryan) \(^\text{33}\) born January 19, 1852; Agnes Ilenene (called Niza) \(^\text{34}\) born January 16, 1854; Juliana Jane, born June 14, 1861; and Julius Eliseus, born.
December 1, 1864, Julius, apparently interested in local politics, ran for Receiver of Tax Returns in 1856. He was not elected. He was a clerk and collector as well as a captain of the "166." He apparently owned no property because he recorded no deeds at the Probate Court of Chatham County. He listed his personal worth as four hundred dollars in the 1860 census. According to the Daily Morning News, he had worked with his father for many years but in 1865 had become a printer for the Republican. He worked late at this job many nights and on February 28, 1866, while walking home from work, he fell in the street with an apoplectic fit (a brain hemorrhage). He was taken to his father's house on Liberty Street where he was pronounced dead a few hours later. The newspaper speculated that his sudden demise was caused by overwork. He was buried in the "free ground" portion of Cathedral Cemetery, a section for parishioners who could not afford lots.

John F. Ceneopoly married Miss Thamasa Leonardy of St. Augustine, Florida in St. Augustine on November 3, 1856. They had three children: Robert, born May 6, 1856; John Felix, born November 20, 1859, and Catherine. John bought his house on the northwest corner of Liberty and Lincoln Streets from E.D. Thomas on January 10, 1859. He, like Julius, was interested in local politics and served on the board of health in 1856 and 1857. He died suddenly, from congestive fever, at his residence on November 3, 1859, and was buried in section E, lot 13, in Cathedral Cemetery. John apparently provided well for his family. In 1860, his widow was listed in the census as a "lady of leisure" with a personal wealth of one thousand five hundred dollars and real estate valued at eight thousand dollars. It could probably be assumed that eight thousand
dollar was the value of his house, since the purchase of his house is the only deed recorded at the Probate Court. John left a will, probated in 1860, providing for John E. and Catherine. From this one might assume that Robert died before the will was written. Robert also was not listed in the 1860 census.

Anna L. Cercopoly and Francis Reberer of Savannah were married on June 23, 1847 at the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist, by Father J.F. O'Neil. Witnesses were John Cercopoly (brother of the bride) and Mary Ann Saddard. Anna and Francis had five children: Francis Edwin, born December 9, 1848; Ella Agnes, born January 14, 1850; Ruth Raphael, born January 31, 1855; Owen Augusta, born February 17, 1856; and George Lee, born January 10, 1859. Anna became a widow some time after the baptismal of their last child; however, Francis's death certificate could not be located. She remarried Mr. Charles H. Bailey on June 1, 1868. Anna apparently did not die in Chatham County because her death certificate was not recorded at the Department of Vital Records, nor was she listed as having been buried in Cathedral Cemetery, as was the rest of her family.

Jorges Marcus, or George M., married Miss Helen J. Hodges of Macon, Georgia in Macon on June 12, 1856. They had three children: Veronika, born December 24, 1856; Helen, born January 1870; and George Mark John, born in 1870. George was a private in the Confederate Army, serving with Captain Gordon's Company, 1st (Glascock) Regiment, Georgia Infantry from April 9, 1862 until December 1862, when he was transferred to Company F, 53rd Regiment, Georgia Infantry. He served with them until he was transferred to the Regimental Band on February 1, 1863, where he was a musician. During his time in the Army, Helen apparently moved to Macon, since Veronika's
death certificate on June 19, 1862, gave her residence and place of death as Macon, Georgia. George Mark John died on June 22, 1872 and was buried in Francis Cercepulcy's lot in Cathedral Cemetery. Helen was apparently their only child to live to adulthood. George died on December 7, 1877 from "suppression of urine" at his residence on Congress and Habersham streets. He was buried in Cathedral Cemetery but the exact section and lot number was not recorded in the cemetery record book. He apparently owned no property and left no will. After George's death, Helen apparently moved to Pennsylvania. In the Index to Death Records for Chatham County, she was listed as having died in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania on June 23, 1902. The actual certificate was not filed in Chatham County.

During the period of the Civil War, Francis Cercepulcy became somewhat of a local hero and his life was quite eventful. As captain of the "Ida," he made many trips down the Savannah River to Cockspur Island, where he supplied the Confederate soldiers at Fort Pulaski and kept the town abreast of enemy activity on the river. Several of these trips were made under enemy fire and he barely escaped with his life. After one trip to Fort Pulaski, he reported, "six vessels, supposed to be transports arrived yesterday noon and could be seen outside the Bar -- making eleven vessels in all in sight of Fort Pulaski." On January 29, 1862, on a return trip from the fort, the steamer was fired upon 154 times by Federal vessels in Tall's Cut and Freeborn's Creek.

The last run of the "Ida" was perhaps Captain Cercepulcy's finest hour. The account, as told by Col. Charles H. Gilmore.
commander of Fort Pulaski and a witness to the event, was quite
moving. According to Colonel Olmstead, when enemy gunboats began
to fire, the firing was so intense that it "... brought us all to
the walls of the fort from where we looked with grave concern upon
the cockle shell or a steamer as she came flying down the river with
shot and shell churning up the water around her." The Ida was forced
to dock over night at the fort but was able to escape the next day
only because Captain Cercopoly was so familiar with all the inlets
and waterways leading back to the river. The escape route took
the "Ida" well into range of the Union ships off Tybee Point.
Colonel Olmstead felt that the only reason those ships did not open
fire on the "Ida" was that "the audacity of Cercopoly's actions took
them by surprise and they were unable to make out what he was after."

He goes on to describe the daring escape saying,

We stood with hearts in our mouths as the little boat
drew nearer and nearer the guns that might destroy her
by a single shot. Straight as an arrow she kept her
course toward them, then there was a sudden turn, at
right angles it seemed, a burst of speed, and in two
minutes the "Ida" was safely in Lazaretto, hidden from
the fleet and well on her way to safety.

Colonel Olmstead held Captain Cercopoly in the highest regard. In
his memoirs he said,

None but a brave and determined man could have managed that
escape and that Captain Cercopoly did it gave him the right
to be so considered. He was a fine old fellow for whose
memory I cherish a warm regard."
The "Ira" was captured in the Gulf Stream while taking out a load of cotton for the Confederacy in the summer of 1861, under the command of Captain Postell. Captain Cercopuly then continued working as a captain on the steamer "Beadogde." While captain on that steamer, Francis had the privilege of carrying Confederate President Jefferson Davis down the river to inspect the fortifications in November of 1863.

Colonel Olmstead recalled a story told to him by Captain Cercopuly about his acquaintance with Gen. Robert E. Lee. According to Captain Cercopuly, when General Lee visited Fort Pulaski prior to its capture by Union Forces, the Captain "took his stand by the outer bridge of the demi-lune, and stood there at the attention with his right hand raised in salute." When the procession was about to cross the bridge into the fort, General Lee spotted him and "came forward with both hands extended, a bright smile on his face and the exclamation 'Why Francis! Is that you?' Just like I (Captain Cercopuly) was one of his best friends." General Lee had remembered him from his first tour of duty in Savannah, when he had been the engineer at Fort Pulaski in the early 1830's. Colonel Olmstead asked Francis if he would tell this to his children. He replied, "Yes, and to my great-grand children, too."

Perhaps Captain Cercopuly's zeal and daring could be attributed to the fact that he suffered a personal misfortune during the war. According to the Daily Morning News, Captain Cercopuly's family has gone to St. Augustine for a visit in 1861 and was detained for more than a year by Union forces there. They were finally able to return to Savannah on January 15, 1863.
After the war, Francis was well known and, though he never ran for public office, he was elected by the City Council to be Messenger to the Council in 1864. He was unanimously re-elected to that position in 1866. He was obviously a faithful supporter of his church. Aside from having his children married there, one child and at least fifteen grand children baptized there, he faithfully paid pew rent for several years. There was reason to believe that Francis was a member of the Masons, due to a notice in the *Daily Morning News* that listed him as manager of a Men's Complimentary Ball held in 1867 at the Masonic Hall. At that time there were several Masonic orders in Savannah, all of which used the same Masonic Hall. Unfortunately, the records of these lodges are not open to the public, with the exception of Solomon's Lodge. Although Francis did not appear in the minutes of Solomon's Lodge, his membership with the other lodges could not be verified.

Francis Cereopaly died on July 26, 1869 from dysentery. The newspaper reported that he had complained of ill health and had been confined to his house for over a month. He was buried in Cathedral Cemetery, section 8, lot 6. He was a man of modest means, listing his personal wealth as one thousand dollars in the 1860 census. He obviously had very little when he died, for he left no will and there was no stone marker on his grave. Agnes died on July 2, 1895 at St. John's Infirmary from "old age." She was buried beside Francis in Cathedral Cemetery and she, too, had no stone marker on her grave.

Unfortunately a living descendant of Francis could not be located. Of Julius's children, only Bryan married. However,
Bryan died at a rather young age, 34, and his wife, Sally Sutton, apparently moved with the children to another town, as there were no references to her in the Savannah City Directory after 1835. Of John’s children, Catherine’s marriage record, if there was a marriage, could not be located. Without knowledge of who she married, it would be impossible to trace her descendants. John Felix married but no record of children could be found. George had only one child, Helen, who lived to adulthood. She and her mother apparently moved to Philadelphia at some point after George’s death, and there was no record of Helen having been married in Savannah. Of Anna’s children, Francis and Ella Agnes were the only two for whom marriage records could be found. Ella Agnes died on November 15, 1923 in Abrants Home, from senility. The death certificate noted that she had no family and was a widow. Francis and his wife Frances L. McLoughlin were married April 19, 1872 by a justice of the peace, which is highly unorthodox for a Catholic. They apparently moved away shortly after the marriage, as there were no references to them in the city directories. Perhaps their family did not approve of their marriage, explaining why they got married by a justice of the peace and why they moved away.

From all evidence, it would appear that Francis Cardouley’s family left the Savannah area in the 1930’s. Perhaps some went back to St. Augustine where other branches of the family were, or perhaps they moved northward, up the East Coast, looking for more opportunities,
17 Daily Morning News, 19 March 1861, p. 2 c. 2.
18 Savannah City Directory, 1859, p. 69.
19 Savannah City Directory, 1858, p. 42.
20 Savannah City Directory, 1859, p. 55.
21 Daily Morning News, 10 August 1864, p. 2 c. 1.
22 Daily Morning News, 2 November 1864, p. 2 c. 1 and 2.
24 Federal Census of Georgia, 1860, 1711-1717.
25 Savannah City Directory, 1858, p. 42.
26 Savannah City Directory, 1859, p. 55.
27 Savannah City Directory, 1860, p. 73.
28 Chatham County, Georgia, Chatham County Health Department, Vital Records, death certificate card file, 1869-93 (hereafter referred to as Vital Records, death certificate card file).
29 The Georgian, 2 January 1832, p. 3 c. 1.
30 Daily Morning News, 2 September 1855, p. 2 c. 1.
31 Daily Morning News, 3 September 1856, p. 2 c. 2.
32 Sacramental Register of the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist, Marriage Records, April 5, 1849.
34 Federal Census of Georgia, 1860, 2687-2665.
36 Daily Morning News, 12 August 1856, p. 2 c. 1.
37 Federal Census of Georgia, 1860, 2687-2665.
38 Savannah City Directory, 1859, p. 55.
40 Daily News and Herald, 1 March 1866, p. 3 c. 2.
Notes


2A typed page entitled "Census 1787, p. 19, n. 16" is contained in Eleanor Phillips Barnes, "Marianna Hamilton and Elizabeth Blissfilllet Floyd Papers," Box 97, Folder 10, Georgia Historical Society, Savannah, Georgia (hereafter referred to as Barnes, "Floyd Papers").


4A genealogical record of the Cerbury family is contained in Barnes, "Floyd Papers," Box 55, Folder 10.

5Cathedral of St. Augustine Parish Records, White Marriages, 1764-1832, p. 248, n. 367.


9Sacramental Register of Marriages from 1834, Cathedral of St. John the Baptist, Savannah, Georgia, June 23, 1847.


11Barnes, "Floyd Papers," Box 55, Folder 10.

12Savannah Georgian, 3 October 1826, p. 3 c. 2; 2 May 1826, p. 3 c. 2; 3 May 1826, p. 3 c. 3; 4 May 1826, p. 3 c. 3; 5 May 1826, p. 3 c. 3; 6 May 1826, p. 3 c. 3; 8 May 1826, p. 3 c. 2; 2 February 1827, p. 3 c. 3.

13The Georgian, 2 January 1832, p. 3 c. 1.


16Daily Morning News, 11 January 1861, p. 2 c. 2.

Priscilla Brown, archivist, Diocese Archives of the Savannah Diocese, November 1985.

Daily Morning News, 21 November 1856, p. 2 c. 4.


Although there was no baptismal record for Catherine, she was listed as one of his children in his will, recorded in Chatham County, Georgia, Superior Court, Will of John L. Corelpy, 1860, file no. 239.

Chatham County, Georgia, Probate Court, Will Book, B-1, file no. 129.

Vital Records, death certificate card file, 1859-0.

Cathedral Cemetery Records, Book I.

Daily Morning News, 7 April 1856, p. 2 c. 2. 4 April 1857, p. 2 c. 1.

Federal Census of Georgia, 1860, 2700-2756.

Chatham County, Georgia, Superior Court, Will of John L. Corelpy, 1860, file no. 239.

Saccenental Register of Marriages from 1845, Cathedral of St. John the Baptist, June 23, 1847.


Saccenental Register of Marriages from 1834, June 4, 1833.

Sibby County, Georgia, Probate Court, Book of Marriage Licenses, B, folio 36.


It must be assumed that George Mark John was the son of George M. and Helen. There was no baptismal record; however, George M. was the only man in Francis's family who was alive in 1870; the birth year listed on the death certificate. The child was also buried in Francis's lot in Cathedral Cemetery. That would indicate he was a member of the immediate family. Vital Records, death certificate card file, 1872-C. Cathedral Cemetery Records, Book I.

60 Ibid.
61 Cathedral Cemetery Records, Book I.
63 The name, date of death and burial is given, but there is no section and lot number in Cathedral Cemetery Records, Book I.
64 Vital Records Index of Death Certificates from 1850, Vol. C.
68 Daily Morning News, 2 November 1863, p. 2 c. 1 and 2.
70 Ibid.
72 Savannah Morning News, 16 November 1866, p. 3 c. 2.
73 Savannah Morning News, 7 January 1869, p. 3 c. 2.
74 Administrators' Accounts for the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist, 1860-1863, p. 32; Accounts of Nason for the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist, 1865-1867, p. 73. Church and Cemetery Accounts, 1854-1860, randomly listed each year.
75 Daily Morning News, 5 May 1863, adv., p. 2 c. 5.
76 Vital Records, death certificate card file, 1863-c.
77 Savannah Morning News, 29 July 1869, p. 3 c. 2.
78 Federal Census of Georgia, 1860, 1711-1717.
79 Cathedral Cemetery, Section B, Lot 6, Savannah Georgia.
80 Vital Records, death certificate of Agnes Carropuly, 1895, vol. 11
81 Cathedral Cemetery Records, Book I.
82 Cathedral Cemetery, Section B, Lot 6.
83 Vital Records, death certificate card file, 1886-83.
84 Index of Chatham County Marriages, p. 44.
86 Tombstone has "My Husband" engraved on the top center in Cathedral Cemetery, Section B, Lot 13.

87 Vital Records, Death Certificates Index from 1880, Vol. 6.

88 Index of Chatham County Marriages, p. 43, v. 9, n. 1163.

89 Index of Chatham County Marriages, p. 45.
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Hibb County, Georgia. Probate Court. Book of Marriages, Index. B. Macon, Georgia.

Cathedral Cemetery Records, Books I and II. Georgia Historical Society, Savannah, Georgia.

Cathedral Parish Records, Vols. II and III. St. Augustine Historical Society, St. Augustine, Florida.


Church and Cemetery Accounts for the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist, 1864-1869. Savannah, Georgia.

Daily Morning News, 2 September 1855, p. 2 c. 1; 9 April 1856, p. 2 c. 1; 4 August 1856, p. 2 c. 1; 3 September 1856, p. 2 c. 2; 11 November 1856, p. 2 c. 1; 9 March 1861, p. 2 c. 1; 26 November 1861, p. 2 c. 1; 5 February 1862 p. 2 c. 1; 14 January 1863, p. 2 c. 1; 2 November 1863, p. 2 c. 1; 2 November 1863, p. 2 c. 1 and 2; 10 August 1864, p. 2 c. 1.

Daily News and Herald, 1 March 1866, p. 2 c. 2.


Sacramental Register of the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist, Vols. I and II. Savannah, Georgia.
Savannah City Directory, 1856.
Savannah City Directory, 1857.
Savannah City Directory, 1860.

Savannah Georgian, 5 October 1865, p. 3 c. 2; 2 February 1867, c. 2, c. 2
21 May 1869, p. 1 c. 2.

Savannah Morning News, 16 November 1868, p. 3 c. 2; 7 January 1869,
7 July 1869, p. 3 c. 2.