HENRY ROOTES JACKSON

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Abstract

Henry Rootes Jackson. Lawyer, soldier, diplomat, poet. Born 1820, Athens, Ga. Died May 23, 1898. Jackson was Colonel of the Irish Jasper Greens during the Mexican War. In 1823 he was appointed United States District Attorney for the state of Georgia. President Pierce appointed him Minister to Austria in 1853. A delegate to the Charleston and Baltimore Conventions of 1860, he fought for the Confederate Army during the War of Secession. Afterwards he returned to Savannah to continue his association in the law firm of Jackson, Lawton & Basinger. Appointed Minister to Mexico by President Cleveland in 1885, he served until 1887. He was president of the Georgia Historical Society from 1875 until his death in 1898. Married first to Cornelia Augusta Davenport then to Florence Barclay King. His book of poems entitled Tallulah and Other Poems, was published in 1850.
Family Background and Early Years

Henry Rootes Jackson was born June 24, 1820 in Athens, Georgia. He died May 23, 1898 in Savannah, Georgia. "His father was Dr. Henry Jackson, a native of England, and his mother a Mrs. Rootes Jackson of Virginia, whence he derives his middle name."1 Dr. Jackson came to America in 1730. "There were three brothers, James, born 1757, Abraham, born 1767, and Henry, born 1778. The last three went to America in 1772, 1783, and 1790, married there, and died there in 1806, 1809, and 1840. They all settled in Georgia. . . . The youngest brother, Henry, came over to Paris in 1814 as secretary of legation under Crawford, the United States minister-plenipotentiary; and, when Crawford left, he stayed on as charge d'affaires till a new minister came."2 "He became secretary of legation at Paris, when William H. Crawford came home to accept a position in the cabinet."3 Dr. Jackson was also a professor at the University of Georgia. "Dr.

1The Savannah Morning News, Tuesday, May 24, 1898, p. 8, cols. 3 and 4.

2Torr, Cecil, Small Talk at Wrevland (Cambridge at the University Press, 1932) p. 118 par. 2. Taken from the Genealogy file at the Georgia Historical Society, Savannah, Georgia.

3The Savannah Morning News, May 24, 1898.
Jackson was younger brother of Gov. James Jackson of Georgia. "4 His mother was descended from a Virginia family which had rendered valuable service to the country in the Revolutionary period. "5

"Gen. Jackson's first wife was Miss Cornelia Augusta Davenport of Savannah. . . . had four children by his first wife, . . . Mr. Howell Cobb Jackson, Mrs. Pope Barrow, Davenport Jackson, and Harry Jackson."6 His second wife was Miss Florence Barclay King of St. Simons Island, Georgia. There are no children from his second marriage.

"General Jackson was educated under his father's eye in Athens up to the age of fifteen or sixteen, when he entered Yale University, graduating in the front rank with the class of 1839."7 Upon returning to Georgia, he read law and was admitted to the state bar at the age of twenty-one. Jackson located in Savannah and began his law practice in the same year.

_Military Career_

Henry R. Jackson's military career was one of pride and accomplishment. From his early service in the Mexican War to his service in the Confederate Army under President Jefferson

4Ibid.


6The Savannah Morning News, Tuesday, May 24, 1898, p. 8, cols. 3 and 4.

7Suttler, Bernard, p. 421.
Davis, Gen. Jackson was always willing to serve his country and fight for what he believed in.

Jackson's military career began in the Mexican War, where he was Colonel of the First Georgia Regiment of the Irish Jasper Greens. "He was elected Colonel of the First Georgia Regiment, serving in 1846 and 1847."8 It should be noted that at the time of his appointment, he was only twenty-six years old.

Jackson was appointed Judge of the Confederate Courts in Georgia when the Confederacy was formed. "In view of his previous military experience, the government tendered him commission as Brigadier-General, and he resigned his Judgeship to accept that commission, which bore the date of July 4, 1861."9 Henry Jackson had a close, personal relationship with Governor Joseph E. Brown, as evidenced by the repeated requests of Brown to Jefferson Davis, the President of the Confederacy, to fill vacated positions in the military.

"Since I saw you I have met Judge H. R. Jackson, and have mentioned to him our conversation in reference to his appointment as brigadier-general, and he is much delighted at the prospect. If I could receive a commission at Milledgeville in a few days for him it would be a source of highest gratification, and I know that Jackson would highly appreciate and gratefully remember the compliment. He is a gallant man, and would, in my opinion, exert all his powers to serve you and the common cause with ability and fidelity."10

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8Ibid.
9Ibid.
Jackson's first duty came after the death of General Robert S. Garnett in West Virginia. "He gathered together at Monterey the defeated and disorganized forces of Garnett, and in a short while had restored their morale and got the brigade into a fine state of readiness for a new campaign, with the soldiers eager for advance."11 When September of 1861 arrived, and General Lee made his advance upon Cheat Mountain, Jackson's troops were ready. "On October 3, 1861, the Federal forces from Cheat Mountain led an attack upon Jackson's camp at Greenbrier River, but were repulsed after a combat of four hours."12 A telegram from Governor Brown, asking him to accept command of a division of State troops, caused his resignation later that autumn.

While in command of the State troops, by virtue of his quick and decisive movements, Jackson was instrumental in preventing a threatened attack on the city of Savannah.13

With the passage of the Conscription Act, Jackson was left without a command. In a letter to George W. Randolph; Secretary of War, Gov. Brown again speaks of his friend Jackson with very high regard:

The transfer leaves General Jackson without a command. There is a great dissatisfaction among the troops; some are almost mutinous. I will remain here for a time and do all I can to produce quiet. Jackson's appointment by the

11Suttler Bernard, p. 422.

12Ibid.

13Ibid.
President to the command of the division as it was, would have a most happy effect at a most critical moment. The city is in great peril.  

It was not until later that the request of Brown was fulfilled. At the time of the Conscription Act, Jackson offered to enlist as a private in the Irish Jasper Greens. This idea was rejected when General W. H. T. Walker was reappointed to the army. General Jackson became a volunteer aide upon his staff.

I feel that it is a tremendous testimony to Jackson's commitment to the cause that he would, after losing his command, enlist as a Private in the Irish Jasper Greens, the same company which he was in command of in the Mexican War. Throughout Jackson's career, he was a most unselfish person. A person with his military experience and education could very easily have had his ego crushed and refused to contribute any further.

After the fall of Atlanta in 1864, Jackson was reappointed Brigadier-General of the Confederate Army and placed in command of a brigade under Hood, who was preparing for his march into Tennessee. Jackson's military career came to an end when he was captured at Nashville. "... Jackson's brigade held its ground with signal valor, repulsing and holding at bay the enemy in its immediate front, while the Confederate line was being broken on each side of it, and maintained their position until

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14 The Confederate Records of the State of Georgia p. 189 and 190.

15 Suttler, Bernard, p. 423.

16 Ibid.
entirely surrounded and captured."¹⁷ Jackson also fought in the battles of Jonesboro and Franklin. After being captured, Jackson was taken to Johnson's Island and then to Fort Warren until the end of the war.¹⁸

Some years after the war ended, Henry Jackson made a speech at Macon, Georgia to a group of Confederate War veterans. The speech was made in October of 1887.¹⁹ In this, a published letter, Henry R. Jackson responds to the attacks made against him by Ex-Senator Allen G. Thurman in regards to his speech made on Confederate Veterans Day.

THURMAN'S ATTACK

[Associated Press Dispatch]

Columbus, Ohio, November 6, 1887

Judge Thurman, late last night, in an address to the Thurman Club, at which only members and invited guests were present, used the following words in speaking of Judge Jackson’s recent speech at Macon, Georgia. He said:

"An old crank down in Georgia, by the name of Jackson-God forgive him for bearing that name—a disappointed politician, a man who Grover Cleveland recalled from his mission to Mexico, some say because he got too drunk there to be of any use. I do not know how that is, I am not accustomed to making personal charges, but what I do know is that the president recalled him, and, from the day he was

¹⁷Ibid.


¹⁹Jackson, Henry R., Letter to Ex-Senator Allen G. Thurman, November 1887. Letter from Henry R. Jackson of Georgia to Ex-Senator Allen G. Thurman with explanatory papers. V.P. Sisson, Printer, Atlanta, Ga. 1887.
recalled to this day, it is said that the president of the
democratic party have no more malignant enemy in the United
States than he. [Applause.] This old fool, at a meeting at
Macon, a month ago, of something like that, saw fit to make
a speech, and declare that the doctrine of secession was not
dead. Why, my friends, if a man can make such a declaration
as that, and not be an idiot, or what is worse, a mischief-
maker, then I don't what idiocy and mischief-making are.
The doctrine of secession not dead! Why, whatever life it
had was killed stone dead by the civil war. Everybody who
has the least honesty himself must acknowledge that. Where
is it that it is alive? Where is the necessity of blowing
trumpets, and beating drums, and sounding bugles in the
North to put down the doctrine of secession, when the South
itself, in the most emphatic and binding manner in which men
can speak, have put it under their feet?"  

Jackson responded, in a letter to the, "Atlanta Constitution" on
November 7, 1887, "The statement, which Judge Thurman is reported
to have made about me . . . are utterly false and destitute of
the slightest foundation in fact." He further replies, "I have
too high respect for Judge Thurman's character to doubt that he
will be quick to correct these gross misrepresentations, which,
if he made at all, I cannot believe he knowingly made." 

The controversy arose over the language in Jackson's speech
at Macon where he declared that the issue of secession was not
dead. Jackson believed solemnly in the sovereign rights of
states and not in a centralized government. "Was it not right to
say was it not my duty to say, if I believed it to be true . . .
the right to govern themselves . . ." He expounds further by

\[20\text{Ibid.}\]
\[21\text{Ibid.}\]
\[22\text{Ibid.}\]
\[23\text{Ibid.}\]
defending himself and his service in Mexico and the South's rights to speak about their past without fear of being, "crushed to the dust by the cruel consciousness." Henry Jackson fought hard for what he believed in. Even in defeat he recognized man's right to speak for what he believed in.

Diplomatic and Political Career

Although Henry Jackson never ran for a political office, he was very involved in politics. At the age of twenty-four, he was appointed the United States district attorney for the State of Georgia, a position which, as a young man, he filled with marked ability.25

In 1853, Jackson was appointed United States Minister to Austria.26 At the time of his appointment he was only thirty-three. Jackson resigned in 1859. Upon his return from Austria, he was offered the Chancellorship of the State University, which he declined.27

"He never cared for office holding, and never sought public place; but his capacity was such that he was called upon from time to time to serve in important positions."28 As a delegate

24Ibid.
26Suttler, Bernard, p. 421.
27Ibid.
28Suttler, Bernard. p. 423.
to both the Charleston and Baltimore Conventions in 1860, Henry Jackson became involved in the politics of the South in the very early years.

During his tenure as United States District Attorney, Henry Jackson helped in the unsuccessful prosecution of the owners of the slave ship, "Wanderer." This case was an early indication of the greatness that was to follow Henry Jackson throughout his career. "His effort in the famous Wanderer case, . . . is to this day a living memory of the highest eloquence, . . . gained some of the heaviest litigations in the South, and earned the highest fees known in that section, realizing a fortune from them." The Wanderer was a fugitive slave ship that had used the Savannah port for importing African slaves after slavery had been abolished.

At odds with the main factions of the Charleston Convention, Jackson and others "bolted" from the convention and Jackson became an elector on the Breckenridge ticket. This sectional split, was the first and only time in the history of American politics that a major party adjourned its convention and moved it to another city. Jackson was a delegate to both the Charleston and Baltimore Conventions in 1860. After leaving the Charleston Convention early, they were re-seated at the Baltimore Convention.

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29The Savannah Morning News, p. 8.


31Ibid.
Convention later that same year. Although slavery was a key issue, the main difference between the Breckenridge faction and the rest of the delegates was the issue of sovereign rights of states. As stated in Jackson's letter to Thurman, he was a strong advocate of the state's rights to govern themselves.

From 1885 to 1887, Jackson, who was appointed by President Cleveland, was minister to Mexico. He resigned in 1887 due to a difference in opinion over the incident involving the ship, Rebecca, a schooner seized by Mexico on the charge of smuggling.

Prior to his appointment in Mexico, Jackson was elected President of the Georgia Historical Society, a position he held until his death in 1898. "For nearly a quarter of a century he was president of the Georgia Historical Society and deeply interested in the preservation of the materials for the history of the state." A resolution passed by the Historical Society upon his death said, "For more than two decades he continued to

32 Ibid.

35 Ibid.
fill this high and useful office with unabated fidelity and zeal."36

LITERARY WORKS

Although not known primarily for his literary eloquence, Henry Jackson was an accomplished public speaker and poet. Published works of Henry Jackson abound, although most are speeches, he did have a volume of poems entitled, Tallulan and Other Poems that was published in 1850. This book includes the poems, "The Old Red Hills of Georgia," "My Wife and Child", and others. "These poems are exquisite in style. We doubt whether finer specimens of pure and chaste English, . . . can anywhere be found."37 In his book of poems which were written approximately during the years of the Mexican War, Jackson writes of his wife and child as he describes the surroundings and landscape about him.38 Perhaps the best way to illustrate his literary talents is to offer a brief selection for reading:

THE RED OLD HILLS OF GEORGIA

The red old hills of Georgia!
So bald, and bare, and bleak—


37 Cooper, John M. "Tallulan and Other Poems," The Savannah Morning News, Friday, February 14, 1851. p. 2, col. 4

38 Reference to lines in the poem "Wife and Child" where Jackson mentions the Rio Grande River. Written during his tenure in the Irish Jasper Greens.
Their memory fills my spirit
With thoughts I cannot speak.
They have no rose of verdure,
Strict naked to the blast;
And yet, of all the varied earth,
I love them best at last.

I love them for the pleasure
With which my life was blest,
When erst I left, in boyhood,
My footsteps on their breast.
When in the rains had perished
Those steps from plain and knoll,
Then vanished, with the storm of grief,
Joy's foot-prints from my soul!

The red old hills of Georgia!
My heart is on them now;
Where, fed from golden streamlets,
Oconee's waters flow!
I love them with devotion,
Though washed so bleak and bare;—
Oh! can my spirit e'er forget
The warm hearts dwelling there?

I love them for the living,—
The generous, kind, and gay;
And for the dead who slumber
Within their breasts of clay.

I love them for the bounty,
Which cheers the social hearth;
I love them for their rosy girls—
The fairest on the earth!

The red old hills of Georgia!
Oh! where, upon the face
Of earth is freedom's spirit
More bright in any race?—
In Switzerland and Scotland
Each patriot breast it fills,
But oh! is blaze brighter yet
Among our Georgia hills!

And where, upon their surface,
Is heart to feeling dead?—
Oh! when has needy stranger
Gone from those hills unfed?
There bravery and kindness,
For aye, go hand in hand,
Upon your washed and naked hills,
"My own, my native land!"
The red old hills of Georgia
I can never forget;
Amid life's joys and sorrows,
My heart is on them yet;—
And when my course is ended,
When life her web has wove,
Oh! may I then, beneath those hills,
Lie close to them I love!

I think that this poem illustrates how Henry Jackson felt about his state and those around him. Other poems are included in the appendix, also included are other published works that may be of interest.

**Personal Affairs**

At the time of his death, Henry Rootes Jackson had accumulated a great wealth. Most of which, he accumulated through his business dealings. Several pieces of property that he had were acquired through foreclosures and payment for legal services. Of the property owned, his primary residence was at the corner of Bull and Gaston St., which is now the Oglethorpe club. At the time of his death this property was valued at thirty-thousand dollars. A considerable portion of his wealth was paper notes in which he loaned money to various individuals and foundations. Of the notes due, he loaned money to the Historical Society as well as the Second Baptist Church Colored  

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39Chatham County Probate Court, Last will and testament of Henry Rootes Jackson, file no. 259, Will book Q, folios 417 and 418, with inventory and appraisement.
of Savannah.\footnote{Ibid.} Henry Rootes Jackson's financial holdings were as
diverse as his accomplishments were great. Among others,
Jackson at the time of his death, had interests in the following
companies: Jasperville Land & Improvement Company, Central of
Georgia Railway, Brunswick Savings and Trust, Atlanta Home
Insurance Co., and Savannah Gas Light Co.\footnote{Ibid.}

Henry Jackson had a genuine interest in many things, perhaps
nothing exceeded his loving interest for his family. His first
wife, Cornelia Augusta Davenport, died at the age of twenty-nine
from what I believe to be complications of a pregnancy.\footnote{Vital Records, Chatham County, Georgia. Cornelia Jackson, remarks: child dead. July 15, 1853.} Although I cannot be certain of her true cause of death. They
had four children born of their marriage. At the time of Henry
Jackson's death only Howell C. Jackson and Cornelia J. Barrow
were alive. The majority of his estate was left in the hands of
his second wife, Miss Florence Barclay King. His will left Mrs.
Jackson with a yearly income of more than ten-thousand dollars.
Henry Jackson's worth at the time of his death was estimated at
over four-hundred thousand dollars.\footnote{Chatham Co. Probate, inventory and appraisement.}
will long be remembered as one of the great citizens of Savannah as well as the State and South.
Bibliography

1. Cooper, John M. *The Savannah Morning News*, review of *Tallulah and Other Poems*, Friday, February 14, 1851.


5. *Dictionary of American Biography*, vol. IX.


11. Chatham County Probate Court, Last will and testament of Henry R. Jackson. File no. 259, Savannah, Georgia.


Enilogue

There are many interesting facts that I was unable to investigate fully. Of particular interest, that I had difficulty obtaining information on was the private life of Henry Jackson. I came across a letter in a manuscript collection that makes reference to the suffering that he has recently undergone. (see attached papers) I was unable to determine the context in which it was written. The death of his first wife is still uncertain. I examined the records of the vital records department and am still not sure of the cause of death. So much has been written about his military career, I feel that his personal life holds a great deal that needs to be discovered.

Tom Corbin
Attached Documents

1. Cover of a speech made at the dedication of Laurel Grove Cemetery, published in 1853. ms King-Wilder, collection 465, box 2, folder 21, item 339.

2. Cover of a speech made during Commencement Exercises of the University of Georgia, published in 1893. collection 465, item 340.

3. Cover of a speech made at the funeral of the late Reverend Stephen Bishop, Feb. 12th, 1867. ms collection 465, item 1867.

4. Cover of the speech made concerning the Wanderer, delivered in Atlanta, Nov. 13, 1891. ms collection 465.


7. Receipt for rent paid and signed by President Diaz, dated September 30, 1886. ms King-Wilder Papers, Collection 465, Box 2, Folder 19, Item 299.

8. Receipt for rent dated 1886 and signed by Diaz. Collection 465, Box 2, Folder 19, Item 301.

9. and 10. Undated manuscript of poems given to Miss Florence King by Henry Jackson. Item 10 is a handwritten copy of the poem, "My Father." ms King-Wilder, collection 465, Item 303


* All of the above documents are on file at the Georgia Historical Society, Savannah, Georgia.