NOTES ON HENRY MCALPIN

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History 300

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The following is a presentation on a person that I have really gotten to know over the past month or two. He emigrated to this country and like many others pursued the "American Dream". He was very innovative and extremely original in his methods. Those of which proved to be very effective. The time needed to complete a study may have impaired the quantity of this work. For to encompass all aspects of a persons life and compress it into a draft such as this, hardly seems fair to a person who has achieved as much as he has. I however, have not attempted to do this. I have tried to be realistic and accurate in my research. This was a most difficult task for there was much secondary information on this person. However, I have used the best sources, being deeds, the census, will, news papers and information from living descendants.

Henry McAlpin came to America through the port town of Charleston, South Carolina. He was listed among Chatham County Superior Court records as a citizen of Scotland that came to Charleston at the age of twenty seven on October 16, 1804. He came to Georgia in 1812 and was declared a citizen June 2, 1818.

Having come through Charleston, McAlpin must have made some friends and acquaintances for a notice in The Columbia Museum and Savannah Gazette mentions the marriage between Henry McAlpin and Helen McInnis of Charleston. I was puzzled over the different spellings of a wife mentioned on an inscription of a tombstone in the McAlpin Genealogy File at
the Georgia Historical Society. It did not occur to me until I read the will that there was another Mrs. McAlpin, both of which he must have outlived. Neither of which are mentioned in the will, only the seven children.

Almost immediately his entrepreneurship and his inventiveness became known to me. Henry McAlpin may have actually owned property, including slaves, in South Carolina. I tended to believe this when I read of a runaway slave notice that appeared in The Republican and Savannah Evening Ledger, May 5, 1812. The notice read "Fifty Dollars Reward. runaway from the subscriber, on the 5th of April, a NEGRO FELLOW, named Amphs...", and listed several places where the runaway could be returned, including "the subscriber at Poplar Grove, five miles up Savannah River, on the Carolina side. H. McAlpen." This notice lead me to believe that he must have either owned or through association owned property in South Carolina even though he had not become naturalized. McAlpin wasted no time in his endeavors.

The fact that McAlpin may have owned property before he became a citizen, or had property bought for him by a another party, suggests good creative business sense and knowledge. He possessed the knowledge to utilize the laws, of citizenship and land owning, to his advantage and not let them stand in the way of his endeavors. The person involved in helping McAlpin acquire property seems to be a William I. Scott. Scott purchased land for McAlpin before he was naturalized. The land of which became the site of McAlpin's
many accomplishments, including his plantation house. The land in question, a tract of land along the Savannah River, slightly North of the Township, was known as the Hermitage. It included at the time 100 acres that Scott purchased for McAlpin. Scott purchased other lands for McAlpin including "The Glebe" lands, 275 more acres adjoining the Hermitage property. The deed confirming the transfer of the property over to McAlpin in May of 1819 mentions "...the Hermitage near Savannah Bricklayer and Brickmarket...", one of McAlpin’s first endeavors, the making of a brick plant. McAlpin established a tremendous brick industry. A probate appraisement of 1851 lists 80,000 burnt bricks and 900,000 unburnt bricks valued at $12,540 dollars. Having so many bricks lying around meant there was a need for some sort of transportation of these items. So, McAlpin built a railroad to haul these things around his plantation. There is evidence of this railroad as early as 1820 and is on file in the congressional library. This may even have been the earliest railway in America. Probably most of Savannah’s brick customers were likely to come here and if not for brick to buy lumber from the "steam sawed" lumber mill. Shown in the appraisement, 1851, there was also 250,000 feet of lumber on hand. These two activities were an active part of McAlpin’s life until his death.

McAlpin was a very industrious man. Other pursuits included the iron industry. In an article of the Daily Georgian in association with William Jay, the English
architect and architect of several Savannah buildings, McAlpin is mentioned.

"The subscriber respectfully informs the public that in a few days he will exhibit plans and models illustrative of the present designs, and he further begs leave to observe that he has made arrangements with Mr. McAlpin, who lately has created a foundery for casting, so the subscriber is willing to undertake any building on the principle stated, or in his way offers his professional services.

WILLIAM JAY"

The article dealt with the fireproofing of buildings and noted a definite association with McAlpin to Jay.

Yet another activity of McAlpin's was his "Steam Rice Mill" that he petitioned to the Mayor and Aldermen of Savannah of which is listed in The Savannah Georgian. The article went on to mention the advantages of having a rice mill in Savannah and gave statistics on how well the rice mill in Charleston was doing.

McAlpin seemed to do well at anything he pursued. His interests led him into brick making, casting iron, and an effective means of production for rice. These endeavors had several things in common. The common denominator of these pursuits may seem to building or construction. However, the fact remains that to pursue what one likes to do there must be an initial means. In other words most everyone would like to spend their time fulfilling their dreams. However, many of these dreams must be supported financially. This was true for Henry McAlpin as well. Building may have been a passion for him. But to keep a business going one needs cash flow. To supply the cash McAlpin traded in the most important
commodity of the time period, slaves.

It seems that Henry McAlpin was a major slave holder. He bought, borrowed, and traded using slaves to secure his loans. McAlpin dealt a great deal with William I. Scott and at times mortgaged the Hermitage and at times Scott held liens on McAlpin's slaves on loans exceeding the five figure 14 mark. McAlpin may have seemed, by today's standards, to place himself in jeopardy. However, the debts McAlpin assumed during his lifetime were offset by the profits. For when he died he left a considerable estate in his wake.

McAlpin continued trading in slaves because they were a valuable commodity. The average price for an eighteen year old Negro, based on many of McAlpin's dealings, was around 15 $500 dollars. McAlpin seemed a fair and just slave holder (oxymoron) in that he would sell families as units. This was noted in the deeds and appraisements as they were 16 listed in parentheses. He would let the older slaves stay on. Nancy, of ninety-one years was listed among the appraisalment of 1851 even though she was only valued at one 17 dollar. She would have been hard to sell anyway. However, the fact that families remained intact seemed to show a man of compassion. At the time of his death Henry McAlpin owned 172 slaves valued at $3,890 dollars, on the plantation, and kept sixteen slaves in his town house, valued at $4800 18 dollars.

Henry McAlpin was apparently a very busy man. While researching McAlpin I came across a very interesting little
item. It was little in size; however, full of facts and
statistics and extremely big in title, to be named later. It
was published around 1848 approaching McAlpin’s death.
However, McAlpin seemed to be in the prime of his life. In
this book, to be called Census of the City of Savannah, by
Joseph Bancroft, I learned even more of McAlpin that in turn
led me to other sources that I had not considered. I
previously failed to consider extra-curricular activities
outside the normal realm of a businessman. I was very
pleased to learn of McAlpin’s involvement with the St.
Andrews Society. While looking in the records of the society
I learned that not only was he involved, he was also
President from 1840-1851 and Second Vice President from 1830
20
to 1831.

The little book also mentioned that McAlpin was listed
among the directors of the Central Railroad and Banking
Company. While searching in Savannah’s newspapers I found him
listed as such. Bancroft’s small wonder was very helpful.
The 1850 Census listed McAlpin as a farmer. This was
ture; however, there was not enough space to list his other
accomplishments. I feel that I am limited in the same way
the census taker was limited. He was probably happy at the
small amount he had to list.

When McAlpin died he had amassed a considerable fortune.
He had a plantation house, a downtown house, almost 200
slaves, vast properties, stocks, bonds, a little over 30,000
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cash on hand, and a net worth of about 137,056 dollars. His
will stipulated that the entire estate went to his seven children in hopes they would carry on his work on the plantation.

His obituary, found in The Savannah Daily Republican is as follows:

"We regret to announce the death, in this city yesterday afternoon, of a disease of the heart, of Henry McAlpin, Esq. The deceased was a native of Sterlingshire, Scotland, and has been a resident of this city some forty years. He was a man of great enterprise, always largely engaged in various industrial pursuits, and possessed of sterling integrity of character. At the time of his death, he was President of the St. Andrews Society of this city, and one of the directors of the Central Railroad Bank. Mr. McAlpin has left an ample fortune, accumulated by his industry and perseverance." 25

It was a relatively small obituary. However, I sympathize with the author. For, he too had to compress the accomplishments of a great individual into a medium not fitting but required of the time.
EPilogue

Henry McAlpin was a busy man. He came from Scotland and knew what he wanted before he made his attempts. This aided him in his enterprises. He had innovative ideas that he was able to pursue. If an endeavor was costly, he acquired a loan using his slaves as security. This success formula worked for Henry McAlpin. For, he was an accomplished builder, industrialist, farmer, businessman, and everything else he was involved in. He seemed to have led a very fulfilling life, and died a very wealthy man.

Thank you to Mrs. Kirk McAlpin, and Mrs. Champion McAlpin. I was glad to get to speak to both of you. I agree that McAlpin is probably buried at Laurel Grove. However, I still can not confirm this at this time. For future research, I recommend to anyone to hit the Newspapers. I wish I had more time for there were so many listings. The deed books were helpful; but, I only scratched the surface. For more complete microfilms of old court records, a trip to the Archives in Atlanta would be helpful. The vertical file at the Georgia Historical Society has a unique "Souvenir of the Hermitage" program written by the younger Henry McAlpin. It is not documented, however. I wish I had done more research on the buildings of the plantation itself. There are deed books for the Hermitage that I did not research. I am still researching the slave houses for another class. So, if anyone knows where McAlpin is buried, please let me know.
NOTES


2. Minute Book 9, Superior Court of Chatham County, in G.H.S., p. 530.

3. The Columbia Museum and Savannah Gazette, 3 June 1819.

4. The Republican and Savannah Evening Ledger, 5 May 1812.

5. Ibid.


8. Ibid., 335.

9. Inventory for Appraisal of August 5, 1851, in Chatham County Probate Court, found with Will of Henry McAlpin. All further references to this work cited as Appraisal, C.C.C.H.

10. Savannah Morning News, 3 December, 1929.

11. Appraisal, C.C.C.H.


Appraisement, C.C.C.H.

Ibid.

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Ibid.

Joseph Bancroft, Census of the City of Savannah Together with Statistics Relating to the Trade, Commerce, Mechanical Arts and Health; With Historical Notices, and a List of the Incorporated Companies and Charitable Societies; to Which is Added a Commercial Directory of the Principal Mercantile Houses, Manufacturers, Mechanics, Professions, Together With Particulars Respecting The Railroads, Steamers, Packets, and c. Connected With the City, 2d ed., (Savannah: Edward J. Purse, Printer, 1848) pp. 24, 46. Further references to this work cited as Bancroft.


United States, Federal Census For Chatham County Georgia, p. 63. Microfilm.

Appraisement, C.C.C.H.

Will of Henry McAlpin, Reference number 321, on file Chatham County Courthouse, in Probate Court.

The Savannah Daily Georgian, 27 June, 1851.
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Aliens to be Declared to Become Citizens and Those Admitted to Citizenship, Chatham County Superior Court. In laminated copy at G.H.S., p. A-19.

Bancroft Joseph, Census of the City of Savannah Together with Statistics Relating to the Trade, Commerce, Mechanical Arts and Health; With Historical Notices, and a List of the Incorporated Companies and Charitable Societies; to Which is added a Commercial Directory of the Principle Mercantile Houses, Manufacturers, Mechanics, Professions, Together With Particulars Respecting The Railroads, Steamers, Packeta, and c. Connected With the City, 2d ed., (Savannah: Edward J. Purse, Printer, 1848) pp. 24,46. Rare book at G.H.S.

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Deed Book 2 I,335, 337. in Record Room: Chatham County Court House, in Superior Court.

Deed Book 2 N, 107. in Record Room: Chatham County Court House, in Superior Court


Inventory for Appraisement of August 5, 1851, in Chatham County Probate Court, found with Will of Henry McAlpin. All further references to this work cited as Appraisement, Chatham County Court House, Reference numbers 1406-1419

Minute Book 9. Superior Court of Chatham County, p. 530, in G.H.S.

The Republican and Savannah Evening Ledger, 5 May 1812. (Microfilm 9900221)

The Savannah Daily Georgian, 22 January, 1820. (Microfilm 9900240)
(Microfilm 990246)

The Savannah Daily Georgian, 27 June, 1851.
(Microfilm 990274)

United States. Federal Census For Chatham County Georgia, p. 63. (Microfilm 19)

Will of Henry McAlpin, Reference number 321, on file Chatham County Courthouse, in Probate Court.

Note: all films used were in G.H.S.