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Historical Method
History 550

Dr. Warlick

THE LIFE OF REBECCA LAMAR MCLEOD

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Note: Abstract is at end of paper
"Oh, how beautiful! Oh, how beautiful! Oh, how beautiful!!"

The young woman cries it over and over, near exhaustion and on the verge of deliriousness, marveling at the sight of the approaching ship which is to rescue her from sure death in the open sea. Slipped into unconsciousness and picked from the edge of a floating remnant of the sunken steamship Pulaski, after having fought the wild elements of the open Atlantic for 3 days and nights, she finds herself awakening on top of a locker in the cabin of the schooner Henry Cameron. There, she is nursed back to recovery and hurries back to her home in Augusta, Georgia.

"I saw a vessel," Rebecca Lamar McLeod writes later in her emotional account of one of the most tragic events of her life, "her sails spread and filled, her hull painted black, and a dazzling sun shining on her canvas."

The Georgia Historical Society Manuscripts Collection # 924 (the "Rebecca Lamar McLeod Paper.") was filed on August 1978 by Hugh McLeod, Jr., the grandson of Rebecca Lamar McLeod, who gave the Society a copy of her manuscript on June 18, 1970. The original of this only known surviving manuscript of Rebecca is contained in the papers of the Georgia Society of the Colonial Dames of America.²

"What a woman!" I told myself after having read this most moving account of a terrible disaster, in which her brother's wife and

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² Coll. No. 985, Fodder 128 (the Papers of the Georgia Society of the Colonial Dames of America —in the library of the Georgia Historical Society)
6 of their 7 children perished, and which she described in graphic
detail. Amidst the harrowing hours of her clinging to a make-shift
float, she displayed a resilience and strength of character the kind
of which could only be the result of good upbringing and heritage.
She comes across as a well-bred, noble, God-trusting young
woman. Tested in and emerging from an extraordinary situation, she
had to approach everything that would happen later in her life with
incredible introspect. At the same time, her actions, reactions and
interactions in that event were the accumulation of her 27 years
spent on earth. In the life of Rebecca McLeod, the Pulaski incident
had to be the crux of her past and future.

As I unfold her original letter—I am burning to see it— on that
heavy desk under the light of the lamp, 64 pages emerge, fragile
and yellowed, yet with a strong, clear handwriting. Her letters are
drawn even and orderly: their overall appearance is pretty and
feminine. And on top of the first page somebody has penciled in:
"Written by dear aunt. Rebecca Lamar McLeod, 80 yrs. after the
disaster." The love and respect I perceive streaming from this little
note might well have been the basis of a woman who had a certain
place in life from the beginning—and always knew it.

She was the 10th child out of 12 (--one died in infancy;) born to
Basil and Mary Kelly Lamar on Dec. 22, 1811, in Augusta, Georgia
(Richmond County.) Her birth is recorded—birth certificates are not
commonly used yet at that period of time— in the Basil Lamar Bible.\textsuperscript{3} Rebecca grows up in the security of a prosperous family—her father, in his future obituary, will be called “a highly respected and old citizen of Augusta,”\textsuperscript{4} the love of her mostly older siblings and the continuity of a rural life cycle. Basil Lamar’s establishment as a propertied man is taken into account in the “Headrights and Bounty Grants” section of 1790-1795,\textsuperscript{5} the “Land Court Held” column of 1786 and 1787 of Richmond County\textsuperscript{6} and in the “1790-1793 Wills.”\textsuperscript{7}

At the age of ten, she might have been a proud little flower girl in the wedding of her brother Gazaway, 13 years her senior. The ceremony on 10/18/1821 in which he marries Miss Jane M. Creswell— who will perish so tragically in the future—is performed by the Rev. Mr. Andrews.\textsuperscript{8}

Weddings are happy occasions when family members can reflect on their progress, successes and memories. Rebecca, however introspective she might have been already at that age, could have, with animated friends and family all around her, forgotten or remembered that only a short time ago, on the 7-10-1821, her brother James, only 21 years old, had died prematurely.\textsuperscript{9}

\textsuperscript{3} \textit{Georgia Bible Records}, Compiled by Jeanette Holland Austin. Genealogical Publishing Co., Baltimore: 1985. Pg. 55 According to the Foreword, most of the bibles in this collection were copied from the Georgia State Archives and the University of Georgia Library.

\textsuperscript{4} “Augusta Chronicle,” 11-6-1827

\textsuperscript{5} \textit{The Reconstructed 1790 Census of Georgia}, pg. 141

\textsuperscript{6} \textit{The Reconstructed 1790 Census of Georgia}, pg. 143

\textsuperscript{7} \textit{The Reconstructed 1790 Census of Georgia}, pg. 146

\textsuperscript{8} “Augusta Chronicle,” 10-29-1821

Despite her generally serene childhood, her confrontation with death would have left her mature early, particularly in view of the two other sad events that she was soon to face. Within less than one and a half year both her father and her mother die.13

Aside from heavy emotional loss, it was a financial burden for the rest of a family to lose father and mother. Already after the death of Basil whose residence was given in the obituary as "below the bridge to Bugg's Saw Mill,"12 the family had to move to another, probably smaller place. When Mrs. Lamar dies her obituary shows a different address:

Lamar, Mrs. Rebecca13, 55y, died at the Sand Hills on Sunday evening last, wife of Basil
Lamar, Sr., deceased, died 8-23-1829.14

For a man to die at age 53 and a woman who bore 12 children, at age 56, was not too unusual for that time. For a girl of 17 to have already lost father and mother, certainly was a sad occurrence to disrupt her life.

According to memories recalled in her letter, she lives now with

13 "Augusta Chronicle," 11-6-1827
14 "Augusta Constitutionalist," 8-26-1829
12 "Augusta Chronicle," 11-6-1827
13 Originally Mary Kelly, she seemed to have preferred to be called Rebecca as later references in this paper will show.
14 "Augusta Constitutionalist," 8-26-1829
her brother Gazaway in Augusta\textsuperscript{16} as well as in Savannah,\textsuperscript{18} and as was the custom of large families in that time, young girls were never idle. If they didn’t do their needlework or other chores, they watched over the smaller children. Rebecca must have spent a lot of time helping Gazaway and his wife to raise their 6 children. There is no doubt in my mind that Rebecca, at her tender age, was already a responsible adult and aware of the ups and downs of life. Whether she was happy to be under the care of an older brother or giving way to stirrings of independence and change, I can’t say; but somewhere during that time she got married.

This husband is never mentioned in later recordings. The only time we learn about him is through her second husband’s apostrophization as “second husband,”\textsuperscript{17} and another time’s laconic statement: “Rebecca married a Mr. Johnson.”\textsuperscript{18} I don’t know how long she was married and when the marriage ended. There is no mentioning of a child, and later on she is referred to as the mother of only one child, that by her second husband.\textsuperscript{19} In her letter, Rebecca herself never once mentions that husband, not even when she recalls the care and attention she receives from her immediate family after her rescue.\textsuperscript{20}

When Gazaway asks her in 1838 to take the trip with him and his

\textsuperscript{15}pg. 87  
\textsuperscript{16}pg. 88  
\textsuperscript{17}Rebecca Lamar McLeod Paper  
\textsuperscript{18}History of the Lamar Family \textperiodcentered pg. 115  
\textsuperscript{19}History of the Lamar Family, pg. 95  
\textsuperscript{20}The Georgia Historical Quarterly, III, (June 1919) pg. 94
family on the Pulaski--she objects at first, confessing to being afraid of the sea, but she is persuaded by him who, after all, knows something about ships. An enterprising business man, he had launched the first successful steamboat, the John Randolph, and been able to provide a good life for everybody in his big household. This is what it was like then, in the Gazaway Bugg Lamar family:

Lamar had achieved recognition and influence by 1825 when a road was cut from Hawi’s Gully to his handsome house on Turknett Springs Road; the new road is known today as Fifteenth street. (Turknett Springs Road is Wrightsboro road and Lamar’s estate is now the property of the Lily Tulip corporation. . . .) he was the first to operate an iron steamboat in America and he did it for the Augusta-Savannah trade. His steamer, the John Randolph, was built in Liverpool for the shallow waters of the Savannah, and it made its first run to Augusta in August, 1834.

After the disaster, Rebecca stays in Augusta until 1842, when her life changes once again: she marries her second husband, Hugh McLeod.

Who was this man? And what was it that drew Rebecca to him?

Molded and shaped by unusual events in his life, just like that of Rebecca, the 28 year old man has received his commission to brigadier-general only a short time before, on June 17, 1841, and is already considered a hero. Graduated from the United States Military Academy in 1835 and commissioned a second lieutenant of the 3rd Infantry, he got sidetracked by a visit to the Georgia battalion in Macon on his way to the company assigned to, in Fort

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21 Dictionary of Georgia Biography pg. 592
22 The Story of Augusta pg. 73
Jessup, Louisiana. And there, an extraordinary thing happens:

According to a report by John C. Butler, in a public meeting on Nov. 12, 1935, attended by "several distinguished gentlemen in advocacy of the claims of Texas upon the people of the United States for aid in their struggle for independence," young lieutenant Hugh McLeod "made a soul-stirring appeal, pledging himself 'to resign his commission and embark as a volunteer.'"

Once in Texas, he becomes adjutant general, participates in the Caddo expedition of 1838—the year Rebecca was involved in her sea disaster, the expulsion of the Cherokee in 1839 and the Comanche troubles in 1840. And somewhere, amidst the rage of the ongoing Texas Revolution, his path crosses that of another Georgian, equally taken by the desire to fight for a good cause. It is Mirabeau Buonaparte Lamar who, having become the President of Texas by 1941, appoints Hugh as the military leader of the Santa Fe expedition to open a trade route.

Did Rebecca ever formally thank Mirabeau for having introduced McLeod to her? It just so happened, that President Lamar was no other than her cousin, whose life had gone its own strange ways.

He was the son of (another) Rebecca and John Lamar, who was Basil's brother. Already Secretary of Georgia by the age of 25, he participates in the removal of Creek and Cherokee Indians

24 Southern Historical Papers, Vol. I, p. 219
26 see family tree #2: 5th generation
from Georgia, becoming in the process -- the government is opposed to this action - somewhat of a rebel-hero.

Did Rebecca admire her rebel cousin whose various military as well as private escapades, -- he more than once owed money to her brother Gazaway, -- were surely discussed or whispered about in the family circle? Women of the 19th century era were accustomed to growing up in the reflection of the men's glories and basking in their successes. Their status was grounded on their men's eminence and the support they gave their men was at the same time the basis they drew their own strength from.

There must have been a special place in Rebecca's heart for her cousin Mirabeau. Even his name was extraordinary, carefully chosen by a bachelor uncle who didn't have children of his own and therefore bestowed upon his nieces and nephews the fancy names of the heroes he liked to read about. (Mirabeau's brother was named Lucius Quintus Cincinnatus.) Rebecca was 14 when on New Year's Day of 1826 another fancy wedding took place - that of Mirabeau to Tabitha Jordan. Here was a man, handsome and famous and the hero chosen to escort the Marquis de Lafayette from Savannah to Milledgeville. But what Rebecca didn't know at that tender age was that she was forever linked with him, not only through the Lamars' penchant for fateful happenings, but also

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27 The Life and Poems of Mirabeau Buonaparte Lamar, pg. 65
28 Georgia and Georgians, Vol. I, pg. 589
29 Georgia and Georgians, Vol. I, pg. 982
30 Dictionary of Georgia Biography, Vol. II, pg. 596
31 Dictionary of Georgia Biography, Vol. II, pg. 597
through the joy he provided by bringing to her attention the young Hugh McLeod.

In 1830, tragedy shakes up the man who has so much going for him. After only 4 years of being happily married, his young wife dies and restlessly and distraught, he involves himself in travels, then again in politics and — what a contrast! — poetry writing. In 1834, his brother Lucius Quintus Cincinnatus commits suicide, and in 1836, after having permanently moved to Texas, he joins Sam Houston as a private to fight for Texas’ independence, described by a contemporary as a “knighthly swordsman and rider.” He becomes the elected vice president of Texas the same year.

In the meantime, across the country, still unbeknownst to him, a young Hugh McLeod, graduated from the Military Academy at West Point and ranked 56th in his class of 841 — placing him in the first 8% — finds himself drawn, like his future brother-in-law to the Texan cause.

It is the year of 1841, one year away from his marriage to Rebecca, when Hugh has to overcome his greatest obstacles. As he is crossing the prairies with six companies of soldiers, getting involved in Indian fights, treason and sickness, he ends up being taken a prisoner and marched to Mexico City where he is kept for several months. Maybe at that time he has already proposed to

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34 Dictionary of American Biography, pg. 132
Rebecca and thinks of her romantically and hopefully; or maybe he makes up his mind to marry her right there in the strange city, in one of his lonely nights. If there were any love letters written, they were not preserved; his duly recorded documents consist mainly of military records and various accounts of his political involvements.\textsuperscript{35}

There is a possibility that this upcoming marriage was looked upon as a kind of business proposition --after all, Rebecca came from a prosperous and successful family, and marriages at that time were often a matter of convenience. This researcher would like to think that Rebecca and Hugh were romantically in love with each other; I can choose to think so but alas, I cannot prove it! McLeod, finally released, returns to Galveston in 1942 and marries Rebecca.\textsuperscript{35} The young couple settles down and Rebecca adjusts once more. As the wife of a respected veteran and member of the Texas Congress and state legislature, she has found yet another position in life in which she can display her fine character as well as patience and tolerance toward her husband Hugh who is as active as ever, engaging in various political as well as civilian undertakings, and ever not worried about controversy\textsuperscript{37}. It is not clear whether he was the particular McLeod who aroused the ire of the military because of his editorials in the "Republic of the Rio Grande" newspaper, proposing an independent republic in the border states of Mexico.


\textsuperscript{36} Dictionary of American Biography, vol. XII, pg. 132. In various Folios, acquired from the Index to Marriage Licenses (1806-1950) such as #189 (1863-1873), #19 and #31 (1806-1815) I could not find a license for Rebecca Lamar.

\textsuperscript{37} vol. XII, pg. 132
Since the historians could not come to a conclusion about this particular point, I’d like to think that one more or less controversial incidence didn’t make much difference in the life of a man who was later “chiefly known in state politics for his violent tirades against Sam Houston,” but otherwise a “fat, jovial man, . . ., personally popular and highly esteemed.”

In 1850 McLeod is involved in organizing the construction of the first railroad in Texas, a new project exciting enough not only to rouse about to his wife but also to his little son, born in 1846 and called—in the Lamer’s tradition for fancy names—Cazneau. Interestingly, cousin Mirabeau “gives office in 1839” to an old friend named William L. Cazneau. I am sure, Hugh and Rebecca knew him too.

The US 1850 Texas census 40 shows under the names of Hugh, Rebecca and Cazneau the name Isabella, and in the “age” column the number 12 with a little illegible mark on top of it which might be interpreted as “month.” Was Isabella the McLeods’ one year old daughter? She was never mentioned in the Family Bible (—neither is Cazneau, which lends me to believe that this document was not meticulously kept)—or in any other recordings. Or was there somebody else living in the family? If she was a little slave girl she would have been identified as such.

Record keeping is a very volatile matter and cannot always be relied on. I have noticed, as an example, that in this research the

40 Dictionary of American Biography, Vol XII, pg. 133
41 The Life and Poems of Mirabeau Bumgarner, Lamar pg. 69
42 U.S. Bureau of Census, (from the 1850 Texas Census Index, pg. 65) film #16-513
number and identity of Rebecca’s relatives were wrongly presented in the Rebecca Lamar McLeod Paper’s “description” which claims that her mother was lost at sea. It should have said “their” mother, for it was the children’s mother, Gozaway’s wife, who perished.

The puzzle aside -- this census also struck me as humorous in two respects: Hugh gives as his profession “none,” even though he was involved in many enterprises and could have, if nothing else, called himself “retired military” or “entrepreneur,” connected as he was, in 1850, with the beginning railroad business. But maybe the infamous Hugh was just playing a little game with the tax people! Rebecca, it seems, was more concerned about another column in the census, her age. It seems that she was vain enough to declare herself seven years younger than she actually was. There might have been other considerations, colored very much by the “Zeitgeist” of the era. Personally sensitive as a second-youngest child in a large family invariably would become, she might have been aware of the fact that to have a four year old child at the age of 39 was considered rather “late in life,” and found it too annoying to give “explanations” to other people. Whatever her motivation was, I’d like to think that she could well afford to do so. Having found no picture of her anywhere, I see her as very nice looking. And if she resembled cousin Mirabeau just a little bit whose handsome, pleasant and somewhat darkly features I viewed in Georgia and Georgians,” she could definitely be called pretty.

Vol. 1, pg. 589 (There is also an older picture in the beginning of The Life and Poems of Mirabeau Bonaparte Lamar)
In 1860, the Hugh McLeods are not found anymore in the Galveston census. Hugh has done it again: after the secession of Texas, he has enlisted in the Confederate army and becomes a colonel in the 1st Texas Infantry; the family moves to Richmond, Virginia.

Going from Texas to Virginia was perfect, I am sure, for a stopover in thriving Savannah where Gazaway, in the meantime married again, with five children, had become the president of the Bank of Commerce, which is located at the NW corner of Drayton and Bryan, and had altogether lived up to his fame. Wheeling and dealing, as had been the trademark of the Lamars, he had lived successfully in New York and even become an intelligent agent for the Confederacy, which gave him a kind of romantic stigma, the kind of which was rather not applied to his fame as a blockade runner.42

Rebecca has also seen Gazaway's son Charles Augustus Lafayette thrive, the surviving child of the sea disaster whom she had cradled on the float. He had made it big in the world of business, encompassing several different branches, such as cotton, shipping and gold mining.43

Gazaway Lamar owned quite some property in Savannah, for instance the one marked #3 of the New Franklin Ward, going back to the year 1835, as the deed shows —Gazaway's signature included. Charles Lamar was equally often represented in

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42 Savannah City Directory 1960, s.v. Lamar, G.D.
43 Dictionary of Georgia Biography, Vol. II, pg. 591
44 Dictionary of Georgia Biography, Vol. II, pg. 591
45 Deed Book 2T Folio 88, date of record: 3/22/1834, Chatham County Superior Court
commercial matters and shown as the grantor in several cases.\footnote{Deed Book 3E/163; 3P/317; 3P/454. Chatham County Superior Court}

There must have been a sense of pride in Rebecca to be related to these men although she was aware, I am sure that not everything was always the way it was supposed to be. Successful men inevitably created resentment, envy and notoriety; and their successes were indeed sometimes achieved by untraditional means. But that was the way it was: Gazaway had valiantly fought and overcome the obstacles life had prepared for him. And so had Mirabeau.

In 1836, two years before he was to become the president of Texas, he had received this (unpublished) letter from his cousin Gazaway:\footnote{The Life and poems of Mirabeau B. Lamar pp. 39}

We have all seen with just admiration and delight your brilliant career in Texas, by which you have illustrated the name even in modern times to something more than its ancient glory. We are proud of your success, ... I have just returned from a visit to Europe where your fame had preceded me, ...

Rebecca had buried her favorite cousin in 1859 in Texas. The man who after his presidency became, among other things, US Minister to Argentina, then Costa Rica and Nicaragua, was to survive in American history not only because of his military and civilian deeds but as much through his poetry. It must have been this soft side that as a woman, she appreciated the most. What a warrior who could also write lines like this:\footnote{"The Harp I dare not wake." Published in the Columbus Enquirer, Nov. 15, 1834.}
No, no— the harp I dare not wake,
So long neglected lain;
My heart, my heart would surely break,
To hear its voice again.
The tones that once so sweetly threw
Oblivion o'er my cares,
Would only bring to memory's view,
The woes of vanished years.

And there was one more hero in Rebecca's life: her husband Hugh. Active and ready to set his mark, he became prominent once more as a member of the infamous Hood's Brigade. Here is an account of what was going on in 1861/62:

... how Hood's brigade won its spurs in Virginia, ... a glimpse of the campaign of 1862—the first real campaign of the war, and one in which that band of heroes carved for themselves and their State immortal fame. ... when the call to arms was sounded the authorities at Richmond were appealed to, and Texas was grudgingly allowed to send three regiments to Virginia ... Shall I pause to describe to you this splendid body of men, as they stood for the first time on dress parade on the banks of the Potomac? Wigfall, McLeod ...

General McLeod's life expired before the war started. He died in camp on Jan 2, 1862. Rebecca, once more, returned to Texas where she buried him in the state cemetery. On her side was their son Cazneau, 18 years old, a young man, though deprived early of his father, was to make his way equally successfully, becoming very probably the ultimate pride of Rebecca, his mother.

At the age of 25 in 1871, he is making his living in Savannah as a lawyer and member of the bar of the Eastern District, living on 156 S.

*Southern Historical Society Papers, vol. xxxv, pg. 187
*Dictionary of Georgia Biography, Vol. xii, pg. 133
Broad St. and having an office on Drayton.  

Interestingly, on Feb. 22, 1896, when the Confederate Memorial Literary Society of Galveston, Texas, formally opens the Jefferson Davis Museum, his wife—Mrs. Cazneau McLeod—is among the "Ladies of the Society."  

By that time, Rebecca McLeod has died in Richmond, Virginia, at the age of 80. According to the Basil Lamar Bible, her date of death is 1/19/91, but a Richmond Times-Dispatch obituary revealed that she died—as the "widow of General McLeod of Galveston"—"on a Sunday night, the 18th of January, 1891 and was buried Tuesday the 20th."  

Oddly, there was no mention of survivors in the obituary. A follow-up inquiry at the Hollywood Cemetery, where she found her rest, could only provide the following names of descendants who joined her later in the same grave:

Cazneau McLeod, on 1/1/1901  
Virginia McLeod, on 3/12/1936 and  

I speculate that Virginia was Cazneau's daughter; it is harder to guess who Alfred was.

Rebecca McLeod lived a full life, I dare to say. She was put in a place, in a time, as we all are, and she filled her position admirably. There is still so much hidden and undisclosed, so much I have failed

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31 Savannah City Directory, 1871, pg. 287. (I drove by the listed addresses, but wasn't sure—for various reasons—what I really looked at. I will make another attempt—because I have to put everything properly to rest—when the quarter is over.)
32 Southern Historical Society Papers, vol xxiii, pg. 354:5
33 Telephone Interview with Mr. Saunders from the Richmond Times-Dispatch, 11/18/92
34 Telephone Interview with Mr. Kendall Clark from the Hollywood Cemetery, 11/18/92
to find and will never know; but there is no doubt in my mind that she was a true Dame of the Lamars, and, as much as the men who surrounded her, a hero. The spirit I perceived in her cousin Mirabeau’s poems is one that I also perceived in her life, despite her tragedies, and the last verse of a poem he wrote in 1858 to a friend’s wife would be the one I dedicate to Rebecca McLeod:

I could not think, dear friend, to close
this volume of memorial lays,
Nor frame one song to her who glows
So brightly in departed days,
the wreath I twine can bring nor fame--
Frail garland wove with little art;
And yet it may this merit claim--
the flowers are gathered from the heart.

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The Life and Poems of Mirabeau B. Lamar Pg. 300
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Abstract

Rebecca Lamar McLeod was born in Augusta, Georgia on 12/22/1811 to Basil and Mary Kelly Lamar as the 10th of 12 children. After the death of her parents she moved in with her brother Gazaway Bugg Lamar and his family who lived in Augusta as well as in Savannah. She married a Mr. Johnson who was not further documented. In 1834, she was a survivor of the sinking of the Pulaski, together with her brother Gazaway and only one of his seven children. In 1842, she married General Hugh McLeod and became the mother of their only son Cazneau, settling in Galveston, Texas. In 1860, Hugh McLeod joined the Confederate Army and moved his family to Richmond, Virginia, where he died in 1862. Cazneau became a lawyer and later moved to Savannah. His widow remained in Richmond where she died on 1/18/1891 and was buried in Richmond, Virginia in the Hollywood Cemetery.