John A. Staley was an interesting man, a versatile and somewhat controversial character. Born in Georgia in 1813, he served as Justice of the Peace, from the Third District, from 1857 to 1866. Mr. Staley was seldom employed in the same profession for any length of time. Besides his term as Justice of the Peace, only his length of service as Sheriff of Chatham County is of any real interest.

Mr. Staley probably married in the middle 1830's or early 1840's, though there is nothing to substantiate these dates. The relationship between Mr. Staley and his wife, Jane Williams Staley was not always a happy one. In 1871, Mrs. Staley was involved in the stabbing of a woman who apparently had been having an affair with her husband. Fortunately for Mrs. Staley, the woman lived. However, I was unable to find any record, of legal action, taken against her.

Mr. and Mrs. Staley had ten children, eight of whom survived early childhood. Of the eight surviving children, only Thomas J. Staley, an Episcopal minister, is worthy of mention.

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1 Savannah Newspaper Digest, 5 January, 1857; 27 February
2 Savannah Newspaper Digest, 31 May, 1852; 15 December, 1855 2/6.
3 Savannah Newspaper Digest, 20 February, 1871, 3/2.
4 Georgia, Chatham County Census (1860), page 147.
5 Georgia, Deeds 3T (1860) Chatham County p. 117.
The Civil War years were years of great activity for Mr. Staley. The Savannah Newspaper Digests indexes are filled with references to Mr. Staley in his capacity as Justice of the Peace. Though apparently a capable judge, Mr. Staley was removed from the bench and arrested by occupying Union forces in 1866. I was never able to find a reason for the action taken by the Union forces.

The financial affairs of Mr. Staley and his immediate family are also worth noting. The Staley family, on the whole, was probably more financially secure than most. They owned a fair number of slaves along with some choice property. However, the members of the family apparently had no ability to manage finances, as shown by the frequent sale of their property in open auction before the courthouse door. Also, Alice Virginia Staley, a daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Staley was found in default of taxes in the year 1860.

Although the Staley family could not be called a wealthy family they were deeply involved in numerous business transactions.

6 Savannah Newspaper Digest, 13 July 1866 2/3.
7 Savannah, Ga. Tax Digests, (1856) p. 100
8 Savannah Newspaper Digest, 4 May 1875 2/7.
The Staley family had extensive dealings with many loan and finance companies, underscoring their inability to manage their financial affairs.

Mrs. Staley was apparently a modestly wealthy woman before her marriage to John Staley. However, for reasons unknown, she refused to allow her husband to assert financial control over her estate until 1870. Before that date Mrs. Staley's business affairs were in the hands of John A. Richardson who acted as trustee of her estate until his removal in 1870. I have been unable to determine the exact nature of Mr. Richardson's relationship with Mrs. Staley, although I assume he was a close relative.

Though I can only substantiate this statement with references to the previously mentioned involvement of Mr. Staley with another woman, and his removal from the bench by Union forces in 1866, I believe Mr. Staley to be something less that the ideal husband and father. As I brought out earlier in the paper, Mr. Staley was continually changing occupations. Possibly this lack of stability was the reason for Mrs. Staley's refusal to allow her husband to assert his control over her business dealings until late in her life.

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11 Georgia, Deeds 3Y (1866-1867) Chatham County p. 466.
12 Georgia, Deeds 4G (1870) Chatham County p. 474.
13 Savannah Newspaper Digest 15 January, 1851 1/5; 2- April, 1855 2/7; 2 March 1855 2/6.
Mr. Staley was constantly involved in court actions, usually for his failure to meet financial obligations.

The death of his wife in 1882, from dropsey, seems to have effected Mr. Staley greatly. He drifted from one lodging to another over the next few years, sometimes living with two of his daughters, sometimes alone. Quite possibly he had money problems, for his wife died intestate, leaving a sum of $33.40 out of an estate that was once mildly respectable. His last known occupation was as a clerk for an unknown employer. Mr. Staley died in 1899 and was buried on January 16 in lot number 377, Laurel Grove Cemetery.

I was not able to find any living relatives of Mr. Staley, possibly because I was not sure how to go about it. I did look through the phonebook, which might seem funny but could have possibly had positive results. Other than the effort mentioned, I could think of no other way to find a living relative.

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14 Savannah Newspaper Digest, 12 February, 1873 3/4; 4 November 1875 3/6.
15 Reports of Interments Laurel Grove Cemetery (1878-1886) City of Savannah.
16 Savannah City Directory; 1884.
17 Wills; Office of the Ordinary, File number 651.
18 Savannah City Directory; 1893.
19 Report of Interments Laurel Grove Cemetery (1894-1901)
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