The Life of I. K. Tefft

by

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Israel Keach Tefft was born in Smithfield, Rhode Island on February 12, 1794. He was educated in Boston and settled in Savannah in 1816 where he established a hardware business. In 1821 he became joint editor and proprietor of the Georgian. After quitting the business in the same year, Tefft took a position with the Bank of the State of Georgia, of which he was elected Cashier in 1848, a position he filled until his death on June 30, 1862. A man of history and literature, he was one of the founders of the Georgia Historical Society in 1839 and its first Corresponding Secretary. He also had a large personal library of autographs and valuable manuscripts. Tefft became an important civic and social leader in Savannah and was an admirable family man as well. He and his wife, Pemelope Waite Tefft (daughter of the Ex-British governor of Rhode Island), had three sons, all of whom they both survived.
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As a man devoted to literature and history, Israel Keeoh Tefft dedicated much of his time to the procurement of valuable autographs and manuscripts. He began his collection as early as 1816 and, at the time of his death, the thirty thousand or so items in his possession comprised perhaps the largest and most remarkable collection of its kind in existence. "I take it for granted that no collection in this country can well compare with that of my late excellent and much lamented friend," wrote William Gilmore Simms (1806-1870) of Charleston, South Carolina on October 3, 1866. He went on to add:

With him it was indeed a passion....Never was a mortal more avid in the pursuit of gains of letters and manuscripts. His gentleness, tender consideration, mild and grateful manner, and general though unobtrusive intelligence made his way easy to the affections of others....Day and night would he be found poring over his collection with one or more friends who sought to gratify mere curiosity or to obtain rare and valuable biographical and historical material.¹

Tefft's collection contained a large number of Europeans as well as Americans.² He endeavored to include an engraved likeness of the author with each autograph.³

In spite of his diligent and systematic approach to all of his work, Tefft always maintained an extraordinary sense of wit.⁴ His appearance, with his rosy complexion and friendly eyes perched behind his spectacles, was businesslike yet jovial.⁵ Although his life seems to have been full of personal tragedies, Tefft still managed to keep a benevolent attitude toward life.
I. K. Tefft was born February 12, 1794 in the town of Smithfield, Rhode
Island, ten miles northwest of Providence. His father died when he was about four
years old. He was taken to Boston by his mother where he received an academic
education which prepared him for his future business dealings. Israel's mother
was remarried to a Darius Sessions of Thompson, Connecticut.

While still in New England, Israel took his bride, Penelope Waite Tefft.
Penelope was born Christmas Day in 1794, the daughter of the ex-British governor
of Rhode Island. She acquired a good deal of wealth through her family.

Tefft and his bride moved to Savannah in 1816 after a short residence in
Thompson. At the age of 22, he established himself as a merchant in the hard-
ware business in that city, maintaining business contacts in the North. In
1817 he ran an item in the local newspaper advertising "hardware, cutlery, japanned
and plated goods for cash, cotton, or town acceptances." On the first of Feb-
uary that year, the firm of I. K. Tefft and Company was dissolved, but Tefft
had meanwhile purchased the interest of Isaac Cohen and Company, selling hardware,
dried goods, and foodstuffs. He also supplied country merchants as well. He
later moved his concern to a larger location in a stand opposite Col. Shellman's
boarding house on Johnson Square.

In November Tefft took on William Perkins as a partner in the firm of Tefft
and Perkins. Their wares included "hardware, cutlery, gold, silver, plated and
japan goods from Europe and elsewhere which enables them to offer articles in their
line, as well worthy the attention of the public, as can be found in any part of
the country." The following month the firm expanded their line when they
"received in addition to goods already held hoes, saws, nails, scythes, plains,
andirons and fenders, shovels and tongs, preserving kettles, shotguns, duelling
pistols, powder and jewelry." Tefft and Perkins also dabbled in real estate,
offering a dwelling in Oglethorpe Square for rent in May 1818.
The business apparently prospered at the time. Teftt began a family with the birth of his first son, on November 17, 1818.\textsuperscript{22} In December, however, Teftt was forced to sell property to his creditors because he had fallen in debt to the sum of $7251.41 (a tremendous sum for that time) after several business transactions had failed to fully develop.\textsuperscript{23} With the collapse of cotton prices and the failure of many banks in the ensuing spring, Teftt's business also failed in the memorable financial convulsion of the day"—the Panic of 1819.\textsuperscript{24} During this time of economic hardship, the family continued to grow with the addition of William Pitt Teftt, born May 24, 1820 while Penelope was visiting relatives in Connecticut.\textsuperscript{25,26}

In this early stage of his life, Teftt began to develop his character in such a way that would enable him to eventually become one of the most respected and admired members of his community. He was a fair businessman with high morals. His honesty was demonstrated when he advertised for the return of "a large sum of money" which had been left in his business establishment.\textsuperscript{27}

Somehow Teftt managed to recover from his financial disaster. His literary tastes involved him in a business deal with Henry James Finn (later to become a successful comedian) in which they became joint editors and proprietors of the Georgian, a Savannah daily newspaper, buying out John H. Harney. They assumed control of the paper on March 24, 1821 and changed its name to the Georgian and Evening Advertiser.\textsuperscript{28} Finn's participation in the business was minimal, however, and Teftt apparently found the editorship too burdensome. On June 1 he sold his interest to George Robertson, Jr. who changed the name of the paper back to its original name.\textsuperscript{29} Teftt continued to receive the paper at no charge until its discontinuance in 1856. He later joked about the "ludicrous vicissitudes" in the life of a Savannah journalist of the day.\textsuperscript{30} Mr. Finn had remained with the establishment, but had announced his intentions to travel in Europe and act as a
Meanwhile, Tefft occupied himself with attempting to raise sufficient subscriptions to publish his historical work, the *Native American*. In December he won a parcel of property in the local land lottery. In the same month he was elected Secretary of the Georgia Royal Arch Chapter, No. 1 Royal Arch Masons.

In 1822 Tefft took a position as an assistant clerk with the Bank of the State of Georgia in Savannah where he remained employed until his death in 1862. The following year he announced that a second book, *The Remains of Henry Denison*, was to be published in the city. The book contained portions of the correspondence of Denison, an American writer, and his "political effusions" with critical comments made by Tefft. Copies of the two hundred page book sold for $1.50.

The youngest of Tefft's sons, Charles Edward, was born January 15, 1824. The same year brought another potential crisis into the life of the thirty-year-old Tefft. For some time he had served as a first corporal in the Chatham Artillery. In February elections were held to fill vacant offices, Tefft aspiring for a position of fourth sergeantcy. Another man was nominated for the position by William Turner. Turner claimed that "the individual nominated was an old member of the corps, known to be a good soldier, and capable of filling any station that might be assigned him." After he was defeated, Tefft resigned from the corps, stating that the election "was not the voice of the corps," but that "new members were influenced by the intrigues of William Turner. Had I been unsuccessful by the employment of fair means I would not have uttered a word, but who is safe against plots and combinations?"

Tefft's letter of resignation was read at the parade of the company on Washington's birthday. On February 27 Turner and Tefft met in the street and an altercation occurred. Turner claimed that he had only wanted to walk with Tefft and discuss the matter, but Tefft claimed that Turner had approached him in a
"ruffian-like manner" and assaulted his person. At any rate, Tefft succeeded in bettering his opponent in the fight. 42

Turner then challenged Tefft to a duel, calling for "a prompt and ample apology," or "direct your friend to act in conjunction with mine." Tefft declined on the grounds that Turner "had chosen his mode and felt the consequences." He added, "I declined the glorious pomp and circumstance of a duel, but assured him that if he attacked I would defend my person and reputation." 43

On the advice of several friends, Tefft made the matter public. He published correspondence that had taken place between the two gentlemen and his own comments in a local journal. 44 Turner published his rebuttal the next week. 45 He also printed a card signed by fifteen of the new members of the corps who stated that he had not influenced their votes. He maintained that Tefft, while a corporal, had been "a burlesque as a non-commissioned officer," and that Tefft had only won the street encounter because of outside interference. Turner publicly apologized for the attack and renewed his request for a duel. Tefft again refused, reiterating that Turner had already received his just chastisement. 46

The Chatham Artillery decided that the affair was a private matter and would not allow themselves to become further involved. Apparently other friends intervened to settle the matter privately or else it was left to eventually blow over of its own accord, for no duel was ever recorded. 47

Rather than his refusal working against the opinions others held of him, the community generally respected the way in which Tefft had defended himself during the affair. The event brought him before the public eye and served to establish his moral character. After the incident he became much more involved in civic affairs.

In May 1824 Tefft was selected to serve on the Board of Health for the city of Savannah, representing the Anson Ward where he then resided. 48 He was subsequently made Secretary of that body. 49 He continued to serve on the Board of
Health sporadically through 1841. He represented the Darby Ward in 1825, the
Brown Ward in 1826, the Reynolds Ward in 1827-28, and the Warren Ward in 1829-31,
1834-39, and 1841. He was Secretary of the Board of Health in 1824-28, 64-63
and, at least in 1826, received one hundred dollars compensation from the city
for excellent services rendered in that capacity. He introduced a resolution
in September 1830 which called for the concealment of smallpox cases in the city
to be punishable by fine or imprisonment. The resolution was adopted by the Board
and recommended to the Legislature.

Tefft was chosen by the City Council to serve in a fire company formed in
February 1825, but he resigned from that post in December of the same year. In
October 1826 fire was involved in another trial which Tefft had to face.

The citizens of the city were awakened about two o'clock on the morning of
Sunday, October 29 by the commotion caused by a blaze which originated in the house
of a Mr. F. M. Stone at the corner of Drayton Street and the Common. Firefighters
were quickly on the scene, but were unable to control the flames, greatly due to
a scarcity of water since the neighborhood pumps were rapidly dried up by the suction
of the fire engines. The fire spread to Tefft's house which lay east of
Stone's house. Outbuildings also burned, five buildings burning in all. The
highly combustible two-story frame homes were constructed of pitch pine so they
were reduced to heaps of glowing embers within an hour and a half.

Mr. Stone lost all of his possessions—furniture, clothing, and a number of
bank notes. His family barely escaped harm, running half-clad into the temporarially disrupted darkness of the night.

The Tefft family fared much better. Aroused by the blaze, Israel herded his
wife and children out into the streets in their flannel night gowns. Most of the
furnishings were saved by being thrown out the windows by Tefft and some helpful
neighbors. Six-year-old William Tefft ran back into the house to rescue his be-
longings and succeeded in dragging out a trunk containing his books and playthings. Eight-year-old Henry's belongings were thrown from a window. Two cows, kept for the making of butter, were thought to have perished, but were later found wandering about. A valuable Newfoundland bulldog which had been a recent gift from a friend was lost in the flames, however. Much of the furniture saved was damaged in the fall from the windows.\textsuperscript{74}

The total damage of the fire was estimated to be six or seven thousand dollars. Arson was suspected since the fire started in a room which was not used by Mr. Stone.\textsuperscript{75} Tefft guessed that about two or three hundred dollars worth of his furnishings were lost. Nothing was said of his collection; it was evidently saved. The house was partially insured, to the sum of six hundred dollars, but to rebuild would cost about three thousand dollars. Tefft estimated his real loss at $2500. Despite his hardship, he assured his parents, "We are now better off, notwithstanding our loss, than we were four or five years ago."\textsuperscript{76}

Tefft believed that several of his possessions had been stolen during the confusion of the night. He ran an ad the following week requesting the return of clothing, books, razors, and other odd articles which he felt had been rescued from the fire but then carried off.\textsuperscript{77} He and Mr. Stone petitioned the City Council to reduce the ground rent ($112 a year) on their now vacant lots.\textsuperscript{78} Tefft had no intentions of rebuilding, but chose instead to rent a dwelling where his family could set up housekeeping and rebuild their disrupted lives.\textsuperscript{79}

In 1827 Tefft served on a civic committee whose purpose was to plan an Independence Day celebration in Savannah. He busied himself with such an enterprise almost every year.\textsuperscript{80} He would often give toasts at these celebrations, usually to men of the day, but some of which revealed something about his views of the world he saw around him. At the July 4 dinner held in the Savannah Exchange in 1828, he said, "Agriculture, Commerce, and Manufactures—three sister Arts, mutual
support and fellowship are necessary for the prosperity of each." 81 Obviously he felt that a harmony of interests could exist between the three. At the 1834 dinner he toasted, "The Union—cemented by the blood of our fathers; he who would dare attempt to weaken its cords, may the silent, freezing, universal scorn of his countrymen attend him wherever he goes." 82 His view on this issue was not quite the same over two and a half decades later.

In September 1827 Tefft advertised several dwellings which he sought to lease. 83 Whether he came into this property on his own, or whether he was acting as an agent for some other person or the bank for which he worked, cannot be ascertained, since he often functioned as attorney in the administration of estates and businesses. His name periodically surfaced in real estate notices, sometimes listed as an agent and other times not.

Tefft made his only known trip outside of the United States in 1829. He arrived in Savannah in April after staying for an undetermined length of time in Liverpool, England. 84 The nature of his travel is uncertain.

Later that year Tefft served his first term on the Grand Jury of Chatham County. 85 He subsequently served as a Grand Juror in 1830, 1832, 1834, and 1835. 86-89 His name was also drawn for duty in 1835, 1837, 1840, and 1841, but he defaulted in those years and was ordered to pay a fine of forty dollars in each year if there was not sufficient excuse for his not serving. 90-93 The purpose of the Grand Jury was to make a "careful inquest into the state and condition of the public peace, safety and morality of the community." 94 The 1829 session recommended improvements be made in the County Jail—roof and kitchen repairs and extra blankets for the white prisoners—and also recommended that appropriations be acquired for a new courthouse to house the U.S. Courts. 95 In 1832 the Grand Jury concerned itself with less spectacular matters—their chief concern was with the large number of dogs which were allowed to run loose in the city streets. 96
In April 1830 Tefft was elected to the position of Bookkeeper at the bank. He received a one hundred dollar raise over his pay as a transfer clerk, making his salary twelve hundred dollars a year. In October he was appointed a City Constable and again in 1837 for the Warren Ward.

In November 1831 the State Bank promoted Tefft to Teller. Over the next few years, he acted in the capacity of Cashier on several occasions. As his responsibilities increased, he was seldom absent from the city, except on bank business. The family often travelled, however. Penelope and the children usually spent the summer months in Rhode Island with relatives, away from the heat and disease of coastal Georgia. The families of I. K. Tefft and William Gilmore Simms traded visits with one another in Savannah and Woodlands, South Carolina on occasion. Simms affectionately called Tefft "Old Hundred" and gave Penelope her nickname of "Mama."

Penelope controlled one share of the Bank of the State of Georgia in 1834. The stock paid her a handsome one hundred dollars per year for at least 1834 through 1839. Tefft at that time had become active in the Union and State Rights Party of Chatham County.

Henry, at the age of sixteen, received his first taste of the business world in the autumn of 1834. He spent some time making out invoices and bills of laden for cotton bales in Milledgeville for a Savannah merchant.

Tefft's autograph collection began to draw attention to itself in 1835. A Charleston reporter claimed there to be three regional collectors who were par excellence in the field—Tefft, Mr. Gilmore of Savannah, and the Reverend Sprague of Albany (who held twenty thousand valuable autographs in his possession). Tefft considered his autographs as public property for viewing purposes. His holdings at the time included the poet Wordsworth, Talleyrand, Joseph and Napoleon Bonaparte, the original manuscript of Bowring and Bowley's Poems, Lafayette, William
IV, Louis Phillips, Louis XVI, Lady Byron, and the younger Pitt, to name but a few. By 1837 he had all of the signers of the Declaration of Independence but Part, Lynch, Jr., Middleton, Smith, and George Taylor. He continued to collect for another twenty-five years—surely he must have completed such a collection in that space of time. For many years Teftt conducted friendly correspondence with most of the leading literary men of America and some of Europe. He was on terms of intimacy with many of these men.

In June 1835 Teftt's acute sense of business and what would be good for the community led him to subscribe for the organization of a railroad company in Savannah which would boost the area's economy. He pushed for the passage of the Central Railroad and Banking Bill.

At least his son William still held strong feelings for Northern life at this time. He told his cousin Darius Skinner of Connecticut that "a yankee I am determined to be." Henry called William and other "yankees" fools. He refused to write to Darius. In his late adolescence he was eager to assert his independence and was slightly hostile to those who would undermine it. Henry later came to be on very friendly terms with his cousin.

In August 1836 Israel Teftt grieved the loss of his niece Sarah Elliot Teftt who died on the eighteenth in New London, Connecticut, at the age of seventeen. She had visited Savannah earlier, at which time she had graced the City's social circles. She had been sincere, ardent, and extremely mature for her age.

Teftt's love of history eventually brought him in contact with others in Savannah who shared a similar interest. The city had long felt the need for some form of historical preservation group. In April 1839 Teftt, Rev. William B. Stevens, and Dr. Richard D. Arnold (later the city's mayor) passed a circular to a number of cultured men whom they thought would interest themselves in the formation of such a society.
A historical society would benefit Tefft in the collection of autographs by bringing him in contact with men of prominence and fellow collectors. Rev. Stevens aspired to write a book on Georgia history and a society which would collect historical material would be of immense value to him. "Doc" Arnold was the only organizer who seems to have had no private motive in the development of the society. 119

At any rate, a meeting was held at eight o'clock on the evening of May 24 in the rooms of the Savannah Library Society and the Georgia Historical Society was established. 120 The Society's primary objective was "to collect and diffuse information in relation to the History of Georgia and American History in general." Arnold, Stevens, and Tefft submitted a proposed constitution. Tefft was then appointed to a committee to draft the by-laws for the organization. 121

Tefft was elected as the first Corresponding Secretary of the Society and continued to perform that duty until his death. His function was to "conduct the correspondence of the Society, his letters having received the sanction of the presiding officer; to preserve on file originals of all communications addressed to the Society and to keep copies of his letters; and to read correspondence at the meetings." 122 In 1855 the Reverend George White wrote that he found Tefft to be "courteous and esteemed" in his position with the Society. 123

The operations of the group were limited, but they still managed to achieve much. Two volumes of "interesting" collections were published and their archives included many valuable manuscripts and rare books. 124 Tefft helped to get the affair off the ground by donating the London Magazine for 1734, Chalæston for 1781, the Journal of the American Continental Congress held in Philadelphia in 1775, a collection of miscellaneous American and English papers from 1760 to 1817, and several other items. He also donated collections of the Rhode Island Historical society on their behalf. 125

Meanwhile, his youngest son, Charley, a ripe fifteen, was entertaining
thoughts of entering college. He had recently been engaged to a young lady he had met while travelling on a sailing vessel. They were to be married in the winter of 1839, but their plans apparently did not work out. Two years afterward his brother Henry described the dashing Charles as entertaining half a dozen girls at a time. The younger brother was a favorite among the ladies. He followed in his father's image as a literary man and was the president of a debating society. He put his talent for poetry to work, writing a "good deal for the amusement of the girls and for the Savannah Republican," a local newspaper. Charley started at Oglethorpe College beginning in the fall of 1841, from which he graduated in 1845.

Henry was working for the mercantile firm of Andrew Low and Company. Business often sent him to New York and the New England area. Henry also had a literary flair. His penmanship was excellent and he was given to lively descriptions of nature. He was a member of the Young Men's Democratic Convention from Savannah in 1841.

William was seemingly in poor health. When he was only fifteen he spoke in such a way that would make one suspect that he did not expect to live a long life. He was said not to have "complained in many months" in the spring of 1841, however. He busied himself with his work, toiling "hard and happily." He apparently had become tighter with his purse strings as well.

The Tefft household was full of life at this time. The pet dog Dash roamed the house and Penelope's pet mockingbird, Billy, and her two canaries filled the air with their songs. After much discussion, Israel bought a stylish carriage and a pair of iron gray horses for his wife. Israel stood in the center of a happy family circle.

Henry and William were working for the same firm in the spring of 1844, doing business in Syracuse, New York. In October William told his cousin Darius
Skinner that he felt that the Presidential election of that year between Henry Clay and James Polk would be a close one which would be decided by the vote of New York. While in that state, William met his future bride, Sarah (ten years younger than he), who visited the Tefft family early in 1845. She made many friends during her short stay and captured the hearts of the household. Israel came to love her as if she were his own child. William apparently married Sarah Frances Tefft in her home state. Their union brought forth two male children, both of whom died in infancy—Willie, aged one year and eleven days, and Henry, aged eleven months and one day, dying November 13, 1851.

In 1847 Charles was admitted to the practice of law and immediately proceeded to make his mark upon the community. His legal skills were merely fair, but he was industrious and possessed a "rare mental energy." I. K. Tefft became cashier of the Bank of the State of Georgia at the age of 54 in 1843. He was faithful and diligent in his service. He always exhibited gentlemanly courtesy and had a smile and a handshake for all whom he came in contact with.

On August 13, 1849 Tefft was dealt a terrible blow. His eldest son, Henry D., perished. William administered the will, taking care of Henry's estate which consisted of a five thousand dollar life insurance policy, stock, cash, and personal effects which totaled a little over $5600.

William, himself, died on August 9, 1852 at the age of thirty-four. By then he had opened his own dry goods business. He left behind about eleven hundred worth of property. He was described as having been "a devoted partner—affectionate father and sincere friend."

Charles was very active in the community. He was appointed to a committee by the Governor which examined articles being sent to a London Industrial Exhibition in 1859. In the same year he served on the Board of Health, was a private
in the Chatham Artillery, and was a librarian for the Georgia Historical Society. He was also the vice-president of the Angela Division of the Orrier of the Lone Star. He succumbed to consumption, however, on June 13, 1853 after a long and severe illness.

Penelope had a brush with death in October of the same year. A heavy gust of wind blew a tree down on the buggy in which she was riding, but Mrs. Tefft managed to escape without injury.

Despite emotional trials, the Teffts were doing well economically through this period. The 1850 census showed Penelope to own seven thousand dollars of property. Part of this was a parcel of land which she held in trust for her children. Israel and Penelope jointly held fifteen thousand dollars of real estate and $9500 worth of personal property in 1860.

Tefft continued to be active in his fifties and sixties. He was a member of the Union Society and was involved in the Bethesda Boys' Home.

Tefft was present at the ceremony of the laying of the cornerstone for the monument of Count Pulaski on Tuesday afternoon October 11, 1853 in Monterey Square. Among the items contributed by citizens to be deposited in a copper box placed in the stone were engraved likenesses of George Washington, Benjamin Lincoln, and Robert Morris given by Tefft.

Despite his New England upbringing, Tefft was not above the practice of slavery. As early as 1817 he had sought a male house servant, fourteen to sixteen, for whom "liberal wages" would be paid, presumably to the master of a slave hired out. Tefft owned at least one slave of his own at one time. A master's advertisement in 1828 alerted readers to look for an eighteen-year-old mulatto named Jane, a "pleasing, intelligent; and neatly dressed house servant, formerly owned by I. X. Tefft. If he did not condone slavery, then, as many of his contemporaries did, he merely accepted it. With the information available, it is
impossible to relate his exact sentiment on the subject. From the evidence of his social activities, one must conclude that, as a naturalized, middle-class Southerner, he at least superficially supported the institution of slavery.

Regardless of his views on bondage, for it was not the only issue of the Civil War, Tefft backed the Confederacy. He had been a member of the Savannah Finance Committee in 1856 which had supported the cause of the South in Kansas. He naturally supported the Democratic Party in the 1860 Presidential election. After the outbreak of the Civil War, he joined the newly formed Volunteer Company of the Savannah Artillery, even though he was sixty-seven years old.

In the latter half of his life, Tefft's three-story home at the southwest corner of Jull and Jones Streets became a cultural center for the city of Savannah. He always had a ready wit and an inexhaustible supply of anecdotes and jokes to bring cheer to those around him. He was understanding of the faults of others and careful of their feelings. Tefft was visited in his home by scores of world-renowned literary leaders—the Swedish writer Fredrika Bremer, Fuller, McKay, Harriet Martineau, N. P. Willis, William Cullen Bryant, Dorothea Dix, Edward Everett Hale, John Pierpont, My Lord of Morpeth, and Prince Achille Murat among them.

Miss Bremer called Tefft "The greatest autograph collector in the world." She recalled:

His collection of autographs is the first which I have ever been able to examine with interest and respect, not because it occupied many folios and could not be fully examined in less than six months, but because a portrait is appended to the handwriting of each distinguished person, usually an excellent copper plate engraving, together with some letter or interesting document.
It was merely an example of his passion for exactness and the systematic.

He received honors outside of Savannah, as well as compliments. In 1859 he was made a member of the New England Historical Society. 170

Tefft never led a very healthy life. He was often sick for weeks at a time. He died at the age of sixty-eight on Monday evening June 30, 1862 between eleven and twelve o'clock after an illness of almost three months. At one time he appeared to be recovering and was well enough to take an occasional ride. He suffered a relapse, however, and died of what was diagnosed as dropsy. Savannah mourned the loss of one of its "oldest and best citizens." 171 Israel Keech Tefft was not given the send off he deserved, however, because of the turmoil of the time. He was buried in a family plot in Laurel Grove Cemetery, leaving no heirs. 172

Penelope was deeply saddened by the loss of her "kind and affectionate husband." 173 She was left to live alone in the Teffts' stately home. William's widow, Sarah, who had lived with the Teffts after her husband's death, 174 had remarried to Charles Walden of New York in 1860 and moved elsewhere. 175 The hard times after the war proved to be costly for Penelope; she was forced to sell her husband's fabulous collection in order to continue to live in comfort.

Tefft's friend W. G. Simms arranged to have the collection sold at auction in New York in 1867. 176 The assemblage was hopelessly scattered, as it was sold piecemeal. A similar collection owned by A. A. Smets, a friend and neighbor of Tefft and a director of the Bank of the State of Georgia, was also sold at about the same time in New York. 177

On September 11, 1873 Penelope was stricken by an embolism of the heart, aged seventy-eight years. Funeral services were held the following afternoon at St. John's Church, 178 whereupon she was laid to rest in the grave of her husband. 179

In her will, she left the household furnishings to her daughter-in-law, Sarah
Walden. The house and lot went to her nephew Darius Skinner, now residing in Providence, \(^{180}\) who was to take over the annual ground rent of \(\$57.60\). \(^{181}\) She had also covered these items in deeds written just a few months prior. \(^{182}\) What was left of her husband's library was donated to the Georgia Historical Society. Any property not covered in the will was sold to pay debts and funeral expenses. The Tefts' old and faithful servant James Bentley Matthews received two hundred dollars and three hundred dollars went to Charles Tefft Pritchard, the son of Dr. Paul Pritchari. Any other money was to be divided equally between Margaret S. Hunter, a friend living in New York City, and Sarah Walden. If Mrs. Walden maintained claims to the estate, however, her money would go to Mr. Skinner. \(^{183}\)

Apparently Mrs. Tefft foresaw trouble, because Mrs. Walden contested the will, claiming that part of the property given to Mr. Skinner rightfully belonged to her and that Mrs. Tefft had been in poor mental health and had been forced to sign the will. \(^{184}\) It appears that Mrs. Walden lost this argument in court, however. Thus ended the short-lived legacy of the Tefft family in Savannah.

Israel Keech Tefft Experienced a number of tribulations during his rather lengthy stay in the mortal world, but he always seems to have kept in the best possible of spirits. He cast his optimism onto those around him. Of course, he was not a man without faults. No human being, regardless of how kind his heart, can claim to be without flaw. The general goodness of his character stood as a towering example for those in his community to follow, though.
I. K. Tefft--from a painting owned by the Georgia Historical Society. The portrait was donated prior to 1868 by his widow. 185

I. K. Tefft house--located at the corner of Ball and Jones Streets. Tefft also bought a share in a plantation in Liberty County in 1855. 186 His house was used as a funeral parlor in the 1920's and is now owned by an antique dealer. 187
Notes


3 *Savannah Republican*, July 2, 1862, p. 1, col. 2.


5 Based on personal observation of portrait hanging in the Georgia Historical Society.

6 Israel Xeech Tefft's name usually appeared as I. K. Tefft on public documents and business correspondence.

7 *Georgia Historical Society Minutes*, July 14, 1862, pp. 349-52.


9 Not documented, but the evidence available to the author suggests such.

10 Tombstone, Penelope Waite Tefft, Laurel Grove Cemetery, Savannah, Georgia, lot 561.

11 *Savannah Republican*, July 2, 1862, p. 1, col. 2.

12 *Georgia Historical*, July 14, 1862, pp. 349-52.

13 *Savannah Republican*, July 2, 1862, p. 1, col. 2.


15 *Savannah Gazette*, Jan. 18, 1817, p. 3, col. 4.


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