THOMAS PURSE
(1802-1872)

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May 27, 1986
THOMAS PURSE

Thomas Pilkington Purse (1802-1872) was a Savannah merchant, railroad official, and church and civic leader. He was the first superintendent, and for 25 years a member of the Board of Directors, of the Central Railroad and Banking Company of Georgia. He is credited with developing railroad time schedules. He was a city alderman, state senator, U.S. Appraiser of Customs, and a Civil War mayor of Savannah. He married twice, and was the father of 16 children. He is buried in Laurel Grove Cemetery. The large memorial window at The Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Ascension is dedicated in his memory. His active and useful life spanned a time of great expansion in Savannah as well as one of war, tragedy, and Reconstruction.
"It was a peculiar feature of his life that success invariably crowned his efforts; and Mr. Purse, in dying at a green old age, had left behind him a memory that men will cherish, monuments of services that will be perpetuated in the hearts of the people of Savannah, and a record that invites the emulation and the admiration of the living and those who are yet to be born."

-Obituary of Thomas Purse,
  Savannah Daily Republican,
  Dec. 19, 1872
THE STORY OF A WINDOW

On the evening of October 9, 1878, a group of tired but exuberant church members hurried in the fading autumn twilight to the Savannah waterfront, anxious to take advantage of the little daylight remaining for the task at hand. Their destination was the steamer Junliata from Philadelphia. In her hold was a huge crated glass window, measuring nine by fourteen feet, and costing over $500, a large sum for a southern city still recovering from the effects of a war and Reconstruction.

The precious piece of glass, a gift from Savannah businessman Daniel Ogle Purse, was reverently brought up the steep street from the river and to the Lutheran Church at Bull and State Streets, a building undergoing extensive renovation. The Savannah newspaper, in announcing the arrival of the window, had said it would be put in place in a few days. However, the volunteer workers, men who had already put in a full day at their regular occupations before coming to the church, went on to uncrate the window that night. To their relief, it was found to be intact.

Their weariness forgotten, the men placed the heavy glass in place. Candles and lanterns were quickly brought for illumination behind it, to show its beauty to the church members who had assembled.
The window depicted the scene of the ascension of Christ, thus giving the Evangelical Lutheran Congregation a new name. When the rebuilt church was consecrated on April 20, 1879, it had a new title, The Evangelical Lutheran Church Of The Ascension. The window was dedicated to the memory of Thomas Purse by his son, who had become an Episcopalian. The consecration service was filled with symbolism.

This was the same church where Thomas Purse and his young bride Eliza Jane Gugle had been married in 1824. Theirs are the first names on the parish registry which the new pastor, the Rev. Stephen A. Mealy, had just begun to keep in English and not the traditional German of the first Lutherans who had settled in the area from Austria in 1734. Here baptism services had been held for 16 Purse children, and funeral services for many as well, from the family of Thomas. Here also his funeral had been conducted, with so many people present the service began half an hour late. Both the congregation and the Purse family had just gone through periods of prosperity and loss. Now the fortunes of both, and of the city, were again on the rise. Thomas, the patriarch, would not be there to see it. There would only be the great window, the symbol of

EARLY FAMILY HISTORY

Thomas Purse could trace his family back to England, and a forebear William who spelled the name Perse: others were called Perse. The son of that William, born in Manchester, England, was the first of his family to come to the colonies. (Appendix I.) He married Isabella Steele in 1775, the year of the first battles of the Revolution, and his son Thomas was born the next year, that of the birth of American Independence. The English-born Thomas also served under the command of Colonel William Thomson in the 3rd South Carolina Regiment, a fact carefully recorded in the Purse family Bible.

His son Thomas married Mary Jane Fulkington at St. Paul's Church in Baltimore in 1795. Their ten children were to include Thomas Fulkington, who later dropped his mother's name from his own; Elizabeth, Isabella, William, Edward, Robert, Jane, Mary Ann, Juliana, and Susanne Catherine. The family moved several times. Thomas is listed as a native of Winchester, Va., while his sister Mary Ann was born in Baltimore seven years later, 1809. They later
moved to Charleston, S.C. By age 16, Thomas was in Savannah. The records of the Colonial Cemetery here show that Mary Jane is buried in the Gugel-Purse plot. They also show a burial plot, but no date of burial, for her husband. However, another source says that he died in Charleston, and was buried there.

The marriage of Thomas and Eliza Jane was marked by the birth of 14 children. Even in a time of great infant and child mortality, the losses are pathetic. Six daughters died in infancy or early childhood, of causes ranging from whooping cough to "dropsy of the brain," or "infantile," and are buried in Colonial Cemetery.

Of the two surviving daughters, Eliza Jane, her mother's namesake, married James Lord Pierpont of Boston, a musician, church organist and choir director, and sometimes Savannah businessman. Julie married Lewis Charles Tebeau, a Baptist minister and also a businessman. "My great-grandfather was a real family man," a descendant says of Purse. "He never wanted the children to leave home, especially the girls. He would just say he could add more rooms to the house." Both girls lived at home with their husbands and later, children, for sometime after their marriages.
How James Pierpont was to support his growing family (there were to be five children) was a matter of some concern to both Purse and the Pierponts in Boston. In April, 1859, John Pierpont Jr., a brother, wrote their Unitarian minister father in Boston, concerning a talk he had just had on the subject.

"He said he was happy in his domestic relations had a number of valuable friends, etc. I have heard from others that he is diligent and attentive to business. Indeed, he is under an iron rod in his father-in-law."

It appears that Thomas had helped James set up a paint supply and hardware store on Johnson Square. Part of the time James' partner was Lewis C. Tebeau; part of the time it was Daniel Ogle Purse. In November, 1859, Thomas purchased back James' stock for some $7,000. Or perhaps it was his way of making a secured loan, since there was a provision that James could repay the money within 15 months, and have the store stock. Probably other businessmen in the family continued to manage the store, or merge the stock with other businesses.

The year 1860 was a sad one for the family. First Ella Purse, a daughter of Thomas and Eliza Jane, died of gastric fever, and was buried at Laurel Grove Cemetery. In May it was little James Pierpont Jr., at age six months. The funeral was conducted from the Purse hom on South
In October Eliza Jane Purse died of typhoid fever at age 50. Family genealogy states that Eliza's birth name was Small, and that she was a red-headed Irish baby when she and a half-brother, II, were adopted by the prosperous Gugle family. The census lists her place of birth as Savannah. The names of her birth parents are not known to the family.

Thomas Purse had three sons who followed him into business in Savannah, Daniel, William, and John. Benjamin became a physician. Thomas Purse Jr. of the elite Oglethorpe Light Infantry (Company B., 8th Regiment Georgia Infantry,) was killed at First Manassas, or First Bull Run, in July, 1861.

On Jan. 4, 1862, Thomas Purse married Miss Josephine Almine Felt, a Savannah teacher and Lutheran Sunday School teacher. She was the daughter of Joseph and Ann Marie Felt. Felt, who had died in January, 1861, had been a Savannah justice of the peace as well as a city treasurer. He had also been an elder in the church and Sunday School superintendent. He and Thomas had served together on many civic and church committees.

It was natural that after the death of Joseph, a widower, and Eliza Jane Purse, the two friends should comfort one another and eventually join in marriage.
In entering the marriage Josephine, 38, was still a businesswoman. On Jan. 2, 1862, two days before the nuptials were performed by the Rev. Sylvanus Landrum, the couple entered into an agreement concerning Josephine's property. Her 27 shares of railroad stock and 14 of Savannah Gas Light stock would not become part of a joint estate. They would be retained by her under the management of Gilbert Butler, a Savannah carpenter, or his heirs in case of his death.

Two children were born to this marriage, Sarah Marie in 1864 and Josephine Ann in 1866. Again, Thomas experienced the sorrow of having a child just long enough to love it. Sarah lived two months, just long enough to be baptized. Josephine died at 13 months in 1867 of "convulsions."

From 1817 through to the death of Thomas in 1872, and later with his descendants and family into the next century, there are Purse references in the general index of the Savannah newspapers. The first ones, for the year 1817, simply include the name Thomas Purse among those having mail held for them at the Savannah Post Office. This would indicate the father or son were at least part of the time here on business, possibly in preparation for the move here from Charleston.
In subsequent issues, these often refer to business advertising, and are too numerous to list here. In fact, the full scope of the financial as well as civic career of Thomas Purse is too great to cover in the course of this brief paper, and must await a fuller biographical treatment which it deserves. This also includes the many newspaper and legal references at the county court house to his business dealings. In some of these, he was simply acting as an agent for a corporation or fraternal organization, as a church trustee, or as an executor in settling an estate.

Thomas Purse began his business career as a clerk with a grocery firm on Market Square in Savannah. He then became part of the book firm of Purse and Styles, and later a sole proprietor of what was also a printing and stationery business. He later sold this business to P. C. Thomas, it was still later owned by John M. Cooper. His quick mind had seized upon what was to become the central work of his life, the building of the Central of Georgia Railway.
WORKING ON THE RAILWAY

The desire to build a railroad from Savannah to interior Georgia had come about through an old rivalry between the port cities of Savannah and Charleston. In the early years of the 19th Century, Savannah had seen products arrive at her port through the navigable rivers of the area, the Savannah River to Augusta, and the Ogeechee and St. Mary's Rivers to eastern Georgia. However, as The Central of Georgia Railway history by Richard E. Prince tells the story:

"With the opening of the new South Carolina Railroad in 1830 between Augusta and Charleston, the picture was changed. This new route soon began to divert export traffic from the interior away from Savannah up to Charleston, and actually threatened the position of Savannah as a major east coast port.

"In view of these circumstances, during the fall of 1833 some of the farsighted citizens of Savannah organized the Central Railroad and Canal Company to construct a railroad westward from that port toward Macon. The city government of Savannah also offered a helping hand with the appropriation of $500,000 toward that venture as incorporated under a charter issued at the Georgia state capital in Milledgeville on Dec. 20, 1833."
The route of the road was a matter of considerable dispute. Three surveys of the road were made before the line following the Ogeechee River for some 50 miles, was actually built. Others favored a more direct route. But the river route was selected because, as the third surveying engineer, L.C. Reynolds, pointed out,

"This northern path would serve an area already developed and plentiful with large plantations that would not only provide potential freight traffic for the new railroad, but would also supply cheap slave labor that could be used to construct the line during winter months when the field hands would otherwise be idle." Prince adds,

"It was a time when cotton was king in the South, and the Central grew rich and powerful transporting that commodity to market."

Construction of the main line of the company had already begun in December, 1835, since the first nine miles out of Savannah would be used with any route. Capital stock had sold for $100 a share, with the City of Savannah the largest stockholder. However, in the difficult early days, the price of stock dropped to $20 a share. Many workers walked off the job, forcing the company to depend more and more on slave labor.

In 1835, the Georgia State Legislature authorized the company banking privileges in order to secure a more favorable investment for the stockholders. The name was changed to the Central Rail Road and Baking Company of
Georgia, which it kept until 1895.

From the beginning, Thomas Purse was involved with the project. He was one of the four City of Savannah representatives to whom the railroad president William W. Gordon extended the Central Rail Road charter in 1836. He was its first superintendent, from 1837 to 1847, and for 25 years a member of its board of directors, 1840 to 1865.

He is credited with being one whose firmness and enthusiasm brought eventual success. A writer for the Southern Historical Association wrote in 1895,

"When an effort was being made to secure a stock subscription of $500,000 in the enterprise from the city of Savannah, one of the speakers at a public meeting said that the city could not subscribe $5,000. Thomas Purse took the stand and said that Savannah could not only, but would, subscribe $500,000, a vast sum in the 1840s, and he pledged himself to see that it would be done. It was raised in stock and he himself negotiated the loan for nearly half a million dollars, which resulted in the building of the first great system of southern railways, and not a dollar was lost to the city." 23

In 1872, an obituary writer for the Savannah Daily Republican said of him,
"It is said that once in the early history of the building of the road, when the contractors had only proceeded but a short distance and had become discouraged, they were prevented from a threatened abandonment of their task only by Mr. Purse's compliance with their demand and pledging his personal estate and responsibility for the completion of the enterprise." 26

In 1837, a financial crisis hampered progress. Cotton prices plunged. Bad weather hampered construction. But by 1839 the depot in Savannah was under construction. The city had given a five-acre plot for that purpose. Most of the landowners donated the needed right-of-way. They knew the railroad would spell economic progress. In October, 1843, the railroad reached the east bank of the Ocmulgee River across from Macon. At the time its 190 miles was said to be the longest in the world under one ownership. 27

Thomas Purse is also credited with the development of railroad train schedules by the Savannah newspapers, which state that at first the proposal brought objections from the workers and engineers. They felt that trying to keep too close a schedule might lead to haste, and accidents. 26

With the completion of the Central Railroad of Georgia, Savannah edged past Charleston in total cotton exports, foreign and domestic, and moved into third position among America's cotton ports. Population growth came with the prosperity. In 1840 the city had 11,214 inhabitants; in 1850, 15,312; and in 1860, 22,292. 27
FROM THE CITY EXCHANGE TO THE CUSTOMS HOUSE

The prosperous antebellum years of Savannah were busy ones for Thomas Purse. His energies seemed to go everywhere. He served as a city alderman from 1832 to 1837, from 1843 to 1851, and from 1856 to 1857. During this time he was frequently called upon to act as Mayor Pro Temp in the absence of the mayor. He was also elected as a Democratic senator from the First District to the Georgia Senate, serving one term, 1849-50. During this term the Savannah newspapers credit him with the passage of a law sought for the benefit of the Savannah Sisters of Mercy, "although he is a Protestant." 23

In 1852 the U.S. Customs Service moved to new quarters in a handsome building at Bay and Bull Streets, designed by architect John S. Norris. From 1853 to 1861, Purse served as U.S. Appraiser of Customs, under the administrations of both Presidents Franklin Pierce and James Buchanan. 24

It was a demanding job, given the growth of Savannah's port in the antebellum period. The staff of some 21 persons was inadequate. Purse, like his predecessor, hired temporary inspectors at peak times, and defended the practice in letters to Washington. 25
Yet the pressure-filled job was a prestigious one, sought after as a political plum after each election. It was a tribute to Purse's political standing as well as executive ability that he was reappointed to fill it, and later served after the secession of the state in the same post for Georgia, until he became mayor of Savannah.

BUSY YEARS

During the same period, he was in a leadership role in several other organizations. Through his marriage to Eliza Jane Wagie and their Lutheran affiliation, though in his youth he had been a Methodist, he became involved with the hard-working Salzburgers of the area. He was a charter member of the German Friendly Society, along with Joseph Felt. It was organized July 26, 1837, for the "Relief of Indigent Members, their Widows and Orphans, and to promote social and friendly harmony among the members of the said Association." Another of the organizers was the Rev. Stephen A. Mealy.

By 1855, he was the chairman of the finance committee, and the organization had invested $1500 of its $2,000 assets in 18 shares of Central Railroad stock. The group was proud of its investment, and of having Purse as a member.
Thomas was also a Master Mason, and a member of the Order of Odd Fellows. From 1836 to 1840 he was the president of the Union Society, the prestigious charity which operated the Bethesda Home for Boys, an institution founded in 1736. 32

He was also a Chief for two years of the Savannah Fire Department after its reorganization in 1853. It was a demanding job. As historian Richard H. Haunton described it:

"The discovery of a fire, announced by the ringing of a bell in the Exchange Steeple and the firing of watchmen's muskets, sent firemen scurrying to their respective engine houses, rewards being given to the Negroes who got there first. Nothing could be done until there was enough manpower to move the engines, which had to be dragged by hand through the sandy streets of the city. Once arrived at the fire, the companies had to await the orders of the chief fireman, who had the impossible task of organizing all of them for the purpose at hand." 33

The work was even more complicated because of rivalry between the Savannah Fire Department and private companies. In the Savannah Daily Morning News for May 8, 1854, Thomas defends in a letter to the editor
his decision to purchase two new fire engines. The letter occasioned an answer two days later from a James A. Barron, "Late Foreman of Old Neptune No. 4," regarding an engine which he had ordered previously, 

On the same month's parade of the Oglethorpe No. One and Young America Fire Companies, and a playful contest in which both threw water upon the balcony of the City Exchange steeple. On May 27, the Savannah Fire Company celebrated its anniversary with a parade, and a review before the mayor and aldermen.

"The most interesting incident connected with the Firemen's parade," said the Daily Morning News, was "a surprise to the Worthy Chief, Mr. Thomas Purse, who was made the recipient of a beautiful and elaborately chased silver trumpet, by the members of the Fire Department."

In the Savannah newspapers, his name appears frequently with civic and fraternal duties. He was a director of the Republican Blues Building and Loan Association. He chaired Democratic party meetings. He was on the committee for a railroad festival in May, 1857. He was always among the members of the Democratic Executive Committee appointed to preserve
peace and good order on election day. He was on the Democratic Party Committee to nominate candidates for
the state legislature. When he had jury duty, he was
named foreman.

His involvement with the Lutheran Church matters
was continual. He was a teacher, a secretary, and a
superintendent of the Sunday School, and a lay delegate
to church conventions. He was a member of the church
building committee. He served as secretary for a joint
Sabbath School celebration of the Baptist, Presbyterian,
Methodist and Lutheran schools, which began at 5:30
a.m. with prayers at the Lutheran Church, and ended with
an assembly of the schools at the Academy Yard by the
Independent Presbyterian Church at 4:30 p.m.

But by 1850, the name of Thomas Purse begins
to appear in the newspapers in a more serious connection.
In the wake of the Missouri Compromise of 1850, delegates
from Chatham County were appointed to a mass meeting in
Macon. These included Thomas and his brother Edward J.
Purse. The meeting passed by acclamation its dislike of
the "Clay Compromise," and issued a statement which
concluded:

"The contest in which we are engaged is no
mere party warfare, it is a struggle for the Constitution
and the rights of free men against sectional constructions."
"We hail as brethren all who enter into it with zeal and firmness, and with a spirit to ask nothing but what is right and to submit to nothing that is wrong," the Savannah Morning News reported Aug. 26, 1850.

A meeting on Oct. 24, 1850 of the "friends of Union and Southern Rights," was reported by the Savannah newspaper as "one of the largest and most enthusiastic assemblages ever convened in Chatham County. The Whigs and Democrats who are in favor of the Declaration of Southern Rights (passed in the August meeting in Macon) composed the assemblage.

"Previous to adjournment, three hearty cheers were given for Hon. John McPherson Berrien, Senator; Hon. Joseph W. Jackson, Representative in Congress; and Hon. Thomas Purse, State Senator; and G. Paul Harrison, Esq., Representative; for their devotion to Southern Rights."

THE WAR YEARS

"The present year," Mayor Charles C. Jones Jr. said in his annual report to his fellow citizens on Oct. 1, 1861, "will remain forever memorable in the history of our State and Confederacy. The ties which so long bound us to the old Union have been forever sundered, and Georgia has proudly and cheerfully united with her sister Southern States... The heroic days of 1777 are come again..."
Soon after speaking these words, Jones left office to become a senior 1st Lt. in the 1st Volunteer Regiment, Georgia Artillery. In leaving his civic post, he wrote his father in Liberty County on October 16, 1861.

"As you observe from the daily journals, there has been no election of my successor by the people. In that event it is provided by an act of the legislature that after the board-elect has been fully organized, that they shall at once proceed to select a mayor from the two candidates who shall have received the largest popular vote. I presume from present appearances that Mr. Thomas Purse will be the mayor for the ensuing year, as the board-elect seems to be in his favor. He is a good man in the main, but quite too pliable in his composition and, as I respectfully conceive, unfit for emergencies like the present. Dr. (Richard) Arnold, his competitor, would possibly on the whole have been more reliable, but even he is not the man for the time."

It must be remembered here that Jones is speaking of a political rival. In another letter home on Nov. 9, he complains from Camp Claghorn near Savannah,

"Mayor Purse is represented as being quite inefficient. He could not be found last night when his presence was greatly needed."
However, a letter to the Daily Morning News on Sept. 7, 1861, signed "a taxpayer" commends Purse as the best choice for the post. Judging from the Savannah newspapers and the city government history, he was indeed a busy man. He conferred frequently with commanding officers of the army and navy of the district as to the protection of Savannah against invasion. Discussions were held as to ways to obstruct the Savannah River from naval attack. Three ships, as well as stones from the street pavings, were sunk in the Savannah River.

General G.P. Harrison was asked to move his 6,000 men in camp some 70 miles away, to the Savannah area. A clerk was engaged to issue passes in and out of the city, which were signed by Purse. Money was appropriated to feed troops passing through the city, and to provide other necessary services.

The first act of council over which Purse presided as mayor was the closing of all bars in the city from 5 p.m. to 8 a.m., an action thought necessary with so many soldiers and extra civilians in the area due to the war. When council approved $2,000 toward the defense of the city, Purse had an interview with Gen. Robert E. Lee, then the commander of the military district, as to the defense of the city.
The City Council authorized engaging 300 men to throw up breastworks in the neighborhood of Fort Jackson to the east of the city. The fire department was ordered to be ready to flood the city in case of attack.

In February, 1862, the mayor had the sad duty of greeting a military escort at the Savannah Rail Depot bringing back the remains of six members of the Oglethorpe Light Infantry from their temporary battle burial at Manassas, Va. Escorted under guard of honor to the City Exchange building, a funeral was then held at Independent Presbyterian Church, and they were taken to Laurel Grove Cemetery. Among them, of course, was Thomas Purse Jr. He had been in the army just two months when he was killed at age 18.

The same month, "at the request of the ladies," a day was set apart for fasting and prayer. In March, $2,000 was appropriated by the city for the relief of the families of soldiers, and the Justices of the Inferior Court were requested to levy additional tax to raise sufficient money for the relief of families of men in active service.

Coastal batteries for defense were erected. A meeting was held to consider an appropriation by the city to buy a gunboat for the Savannah River. The books of the city's official records were sent to the state
capitol at Milledgeville for safe keeping, only to be brought back in August, 1864.

At the same time, the sturdy Purse seems to have been a bulwark, with the council, against war hysteria. He opposed a request by General Pemberton for martial law in the city. As his obituary in the Savannah Morning News on Dec. 19, 1872, says, "When an attack was expected on the coast, and 23,000 Confederate troops were in the city, General Purse, notwithstanding the inevitable disorder, would not consent to having martial law declared, and with his small police force maintained quietness." 44

The same General Pemberton wanted to remove the women and children from the city and place them in tents "along the race track." He was reminded that the Confederate army at the time did not even have enough tents for its own use. The same officer wanted to tear down the buildings along the bluff of Bay Street, but was opposed by the mayor and council "unless an attack on the city was imminent." He proceeded to withdraw his troops from the city. He was succeeded in command by General Hugh Mercer, "who adopted more vigorous steps and a more thorough system for the protection of the city," according to Savannah historian Thomas Gamble. 45
During this time Purse had to carry on all the normal duties of mayor in addition to the additional burdens of the war. It was an office of which his predecessor Jones had complained to his father in 1860.

"No one can form any idea of the multifarious and important duties which devolve upon the mayor of this city until called upon practically to discharge them. The accumulated ordinances of a century and a quarter have to be carefully understood and administered with firmness and discrimination. Much lies in the discretion and sound judgment of the mayor, and in many things a nice sense of right, of justice and propriety, is his only guide. The summary jurisdiction of the police court, held every morning at 10 o'clock, also involves in its proper exercise no little firmness, intelligence, and discrimination... In fine, he is expected to have a care for every interest and for the protection of the city at all hours of the day and night."

Purse also had the personal worries of the war, with two sons still in the Confederate service. Daniel Cople Purse, an engineer, served in the ordnance department. Ben was captured while fighting with the First Georgia Regiment at Marietta, Ga., in 1864, and taken to Camp Douglas, Ill., for eight months. Exchanged, he hurried
to join a Confederate unit on the Mississippi River, and was serving there as the war ended.

At home, the family worked tirelessly on war relief projects. Josephine Purse was a treasurer of the Needlewoman’s Friend Society, an organization which helped poor women find cloth for sewing, and then made their products available for sale. Thomas made donations to the Sick Soldiers Home at Camp Jackson, and to the Bartow Hospital. He chaired a committee looking into obtaining cloth for soldiers’ uniforms by forming local weaving groups.

When fever broke out in Wilmington, N.C., he sent the city two Savannah druggists to take the place of men ill with fever. He made donations to the Sick Soldiers Home at Camp Jackson, and to the Bartow Hospital. He was on a committee to devise ways of sending cloth and other necessities to the soldiers in Virginia. He personally donated clothing to the Mitchell Volunteer Guards of the 47th Georgia, for which he received official thanks.

Upon leaving office in October, 1862, Purse said in an annual report to the City Council, "The proportions of the revolutionary struggle in which we are now engaged to secure our independence and a place among the nations of the earth, have assumed during the
current year a colossal form, and the depressing influences of the war are more or less felt from the center to the circumference of our infant Confederacy, but our soldiery, with stalwart hearts and patriotic devotion, have thus far demonstrated that they appreciate the full magnitude of the contest...

"The revenue of our City is dependent upon the peaceful relations of society and the prosperity of commerce; these potent forces have been interrupted by the war, and we have suffered some diminution in our annual revenue, say $24,766.98. No new system of improvement has been initiated during the war; our aim has been rather to keep intact what had been done, so far as has been practicable."

His report showed incidental expenses during the year of $20,269, of which $10,090 was appropriated to Charleston on Dec. 31, 1861, to relieve the citizens after a disastrous fire. The remainder was largely spent in feeding troops and providing assistance to families of soldiers and to the orphans of the city.

He seems to have spent the remainder of the war years in charity work along with his city and railroad board of directors duties.

POSTWAR YEARS
In 1865, Thomas Purse looked about at a familiar landscape sadly scarred by war. Much of his beloved
which had performed so well for the military in carrying soldiers and supplies, was in ruin. On the main line between Savannah and Macon, some 190 miles, 130 miles of track, and all bridges of importance, were destroyed. Other routes were in equal disrepair. Even the rails had been heated and bent, making most of them useless. The Central Rail Road Bank had temporarily closed its doors, leaving $333,962 in outstanding bank bills. It was to be later reorganized separately from the railroad operation, and continue in business until 1896. \( 52 \)

At the Lutheran Church, pews had been carried out and burned as firewood by the Union soldiers occupying the building. The large auditorium had been used for a hospital, with the cushions for pillows. Fires had been built by the soldiers in the church, the marks of which are still visible in the older portions of the building now used for Sunday School classes. \( 53 \)

When the Lutheran Synod met in September, 1865, six persons were present, none from Savannah. It was Thomas Purse who wrote the church leaders explaining that one of the pastors in Savannah, the Rev. D.M. Gilbert, was out of the city for reasons of health, and the other two pastors had left permanently. None of the lay leaders would be able to attend the meeting, "for good and sufficient reasons." \( 54 \)
It was also in that same month that Purse sold his large home on fashionable South Broad Street "together with outbuildings and other edifices" to his son Daniel for $6,000. The son, home from the army, was preparing to marry Laura Ashby of Virginia, a cousin of the dashing Confederate commander General Turner Ashby of cavalry fame, and also a sister of the Georgia cavalry officer Henry M. Ashby.

James Pierpont was also home from service in the Confederate cavalry. As part of an unsuccessful effort to start a business in Savannah, he is advertising a street cleaning service in September, 1865 in the newspaper. He later left with his family for south Georgia, as did Julie and Charles Tebano.

The city tax records tell a story of the Purse fortunes similar to many during that period. In 1861, Purse had owned the South Broad Street home as well as outlying property on LaRoche Lane. He had a horse and carriage, and seven slaves. His tax bill was $182.45. In 1866 he owned two unimproved lots and some furniture and personal items, for a total tax bill of $12. In 1872, the last year of his life, he was assessed a total of $5 for two lots, and $1.25 for other property.

Undoubtedly, much of his personal wealth had gone with the destruction of the railroad and the closing of the bank, as well as businesses inspired by the war. For instance, there was the venture of his brother
Edward's Georgia Chemical Works, and glass factory. One of his descendants has, along with family tintypes and other memorabilia, a small trunk containing Confederate money.

According to the Savannah city directory, Thomas spent his last years boarding at rooming houses or living with his sons, presumably with Josephine. In 1866, he was boarding with L.W. Landershine, a bookkeeper, on Jones Street. In 1867, he was living with his son Ben on Jones Street near Bull. In 1870, he was with Daniel on South Broad Street. In 1871, the last year his name appears, Ben is a physician, and his father lives with him on York Street.

On Nov. 26, 1870, Thomas made his will, naming Daniel C. Purse as his executor. He bequeathed to his wife Josephine the insurance from his Odd Fellows policy, and one-half that of the Masonic Order. His estate was then to be divided into seven shares among her and the six remaining children. William was to keep Eliza Jane's and Julie's in trust for them, perhaps a last glimpse of the father who had never wanted them to leave home.

On Dec. 18, 1872, the Savannah Morning News carried the word that "The Honorable Thomas Purse, who has for some time past been confined to his room, is now..."
improving. He is one of our oldest citizens, and has been honored by the people with several important positions, among them the Chief Magistracy of the city. He was active in the Central Railroad enterprise in its incipiency, and was, we believe, the first Superintendent of the Company. The invention of the time and train schedule first originated with him. He has attained the age of three score and ten, and is in full possession of his faculties.”

The next day, the newspaper carried the news of his death, at 10:05 a.m., Dec. 18, 1872. "He was conscious to within an hour of his death, conversing rationally with different members of his family, and requesting particularly that his funeral ceremonies be conducted in the most unostentatious manner."

But it was a large funeral, conducted at the Lutheran Church. The Rev. Dr. I.S.K. Axson of the Independent Presbyterian Church presided, in the absence of the Lutheran minister. Oglethorpe Lodge, No. one, L.O.O.F., and Zerubabel Lodge, No. 15, F.A.M., attended in full regalia, as did the officers and members of the Savannah Fire Company. The Mayor and aldermen were present in a place of honor. The coffin was a handsome rosewood case which bore two wreaths.
The crush of the people and dignitaries was so great that the services were half an hour late in starting. The City Council also passed a resolution in his honor, recalling his "wisdom, energy, and integrity," with "a great sense of public loss."\(^4\)

After his death, Josephine continued in her good works, as Superintendent of the Lutheran Sunday School, a treasurer of the Needlewoman's Friend Society, and a member of the board of the Savannah Free School.\(^5\) She was living in a boardinghouse on Bolton Street when she died suddenly at age 56 of an abdominal complaint on July 7, 1882.\(^6\)

The dutiful daughter who had a husband and babies such a short time, was also separated from them in burial. Thomas Purse lies beside Eliza Jane, and with a number of his children, including little Sarah Marie and Josephine Ann, in the Purse-Pierpont plot, number 343 at Laurel Grove Cemetery. Josephine is beside her parents at Laurel Grove plot 620, a site probably selected by the Folts long before her marriage.\(^7\)

However, she had nearly four years to enjoy the memorial window at what is now the Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Ascension.