Joseph Robert Thompson was born in Savannah in 1798 and died in Savannah in 1855. He was a master carpenter; his renowned skill displayed in his beautiful home on Bull and Perry Street where he lived from 1830 until 1847 with his wife and seven children. My paper begins with his heritage and proceeds with an account of his life story by informing the reader of the data in the following order: heritage, marriage, trade, property, civic affairs, death, and then the lives of his children.
Joseph Robert Thompson

Joseph Robert Thompson is an ancestral and genealogical chain originally descended from the Charleston and Georgetown districts of South Carolina. Joseph's grandfather ____ Thompson, married the daughter of the Royal Governor of South Carolina, Lord William Campbell of Charleston, in 1771. However, this must have been ____ Thompson's second wife as ____ Thompson's son and Joseph's father, John Thompson, married Ann Cooper, also of Georgetown in 1782. If John had been the issue of ____ Thompson and Campbell's daughter, he would have been eleven years old when he married Ann Cooper. This information was furnished by a present day descendant, a Mr. John L. Cope of Savannah, who owns the Harburg Hymnbook where the information was obtained. These proposed dates and facts could not be verified by consulting the South Carolina History and Genealogical Magazines; volumes 1-15, the South Carolina Census as the earliest date is 1800, nor the South Carolina Marriages (1732-1867). Also there was no available biographical genealogy on either Thompson or Campbell families that could connect the two families.

Joseph Robert Thompson was born August 4, 1798, in Chatham County to John and Ann Cooper Thompson. If this information is correct, the John Thompsons must have moved to Chatham County between 1782 and 1798 in order for Joseph to be born in Chatham County. However, since John died in 1805 and Ann in 1806 (information furnished by Mr. John L. Cope), this could not be verified by newspapers (there were no funeral notices), wills (there were none), deeds (none), or cemetery records (there was no record in any of the cemetery records of either John or Ann's deaths and burials.)
Joseph probably had at least one sibling, a brother, John Thompson, a South Carolina planter, who died in 1831 at the age of 38. He is buried in the Colonial Park Cemetery along with his wife, Ann, and a son. John Thompson was probably Joseph's brother as Joseph sends out the funeral announcement for John and their respective ages would make that possible.

If the dates of John, Sr. and Ann Thompson's deaths are correct, this would have left John and Joseph orphans at ages 15 and 13 respectively. It is interesting to note at this point that in an excerpt from Oglethorpe County Wills there is listed a John Thompson as the father of three orphans: Hannah, John, and Joseph and the grandfather is listed as Robert Thompson in 1809, but as the information was limited to this disclosure, no trace or link between the two families could be established.

Joseph Robert Thompson was married on January 19, 1825, by the Reverend Mr. Hong, to Elizabeth Margaret Shaffer. Eliza, as his wife was called, was the daughter of James Shaffer and Susannah Dasher Shaffer, both of Savannah since 1802. Eliza was born September 9, 1803.

Between 1825 and 1839, seven children were born to the Joseph Thompsons. In the latter part of 1825, a son, James Cooper, was born. In 1828, a daughter, Susan Rosamond, was born. There followed one other son, Joseph Robert Jr. in approximately 1832 and four daughters: Virginia Ann, September 26, 1830; Georgia Elizabeth in 1836; Harriet Shaffer on November 10, 1838; and Augusta Louisa, in 1839. The birth dates of the children not specified were derived from grave markings and lists courtesy of the Laurel Grove Cemetery Records. The one exception is Susan Rosamond whose birth date was derived from Grave Markings of Burke County, Georgia. Both sources are listed in the bibliography of this paper.
The first account of Joseph's trade as a master carpenter occurred in the announcement of the dissolution of his partnership with Thomas Askew on February 27, 1827. Thereafter, any mention of Thompson's business is as sole ownership as in 1827 he advertises as a repairer of public pumps and gives his address (residential) as Drayton and South Broad Street. Upon examining tax deeds and tax digests and assessments prior to 1830, there can not be found any record of Joseph owning property prior to 1830. But on November 26, 1830, he purchased from Mr. Peter Massie, two lots numbered 42 and 43 in Brown Ward located on 9 and 3 West Perry Street respectively, for the sum of $800.00. Also in 1830 he is taxed for a shop on Percival Ward in the amount of $200.00.

Thompson apparently constructed his home on lots 42 and 43 Brown Ward between 1830 and 1831 for the value thereof increased from $100.00 in 1830 to $2,800.00 in 1832. There is no mention of the lot on Percival after 1841 and this could not be verified as having been sold by the tax digests. But in 1840, Thompson is commissioned to pay a $2,000.00 note by the next year or his property on Brown Ward would be sold from under him. In the same year, just two months later, there exists a deed which Joseph sells to F.W. Heineman several slaves in the amount of $2,000.00. In 1847 he sells the house in Brown Ward to Joseph Washburn, a banker, for $6,250.00.

Three other pieces of property were owned between 1832 and 1843. Mrs. Thompson and her sister, Harriet Shaffer (Mrs. Thompson's only sibling), jointly owed buildings and property on William and South Broad Streets (the property originally being their childhood home.) The tax deed show that Mrs. Thompson gave her husband, Joseph, permission to sell the property to a Mr. John S. Holcombe (Mr. Holcombe was the partner of Mr. Thompson's future son-in-law, James E. Cope.)
This property was sold for $500.00 to Mr. Holcombe in 1833. However, the tax
digests show this property still in Mrs. Thompson's name until 1837.

The second piece of property was located on Yamazaw and Oglethorpe and
was purchased from Mr. Thomas Drescott in 1831, for $300.00. This same property
was valued in the tax digest at $3,000.00 in 1832. There is no error about the
figures as they stand. Joseph conceivably could have built a house on the lot
and sold it. The property is not mentioned after 1834.

The third piece of property was on Evansburgh which he is taxed for in 1840,
but there is no mention of the lot after 1843 and the tax deeds do not indicate
a sale. However, in 1840 the property was in Mrs. Elizabeth's Belshinger's name
but Mr. Thompson had a lien on it. Perhaps she paid her debt and the lien was rem
However, the tax deeds did not indicated as such.

Joseph Thompson also owned 10 shares of stock in the Central and Banking Comp
of Georgia worth $350.00 in 1837 and $575.00 in 1838. 11

From 1835 until 1843, Joseph was active in civic affairs. In 1835 he was a
member of the Union and States Rights Assembly of Chatham County, 12 in 1838, 1839,
and 1841 he was elected as a manager officer of the Union Society of Bethesda. 13
And in 1843, Joseph was a member of the Young Men's Democratic Association of
Chatham County. 14

In 1842, Joseph proposed to keep the city wells in order for one year for the
sum of $1,000.00 and was accepted. Consequently, in 1843 he was elected as a city
officer to be superintendent of pumps for Savannah. Previous to these appointments
Joseph was the general keeper of cisterns and pumps for the city.

In an anniversary address saluting the 60th year of independence for the
United States, Joseph gives an address in which he hails the merits of education.
As one of his daughters was a teacher, this attitude of her father may have had
some affect on her decision to enter teaching.
In approximately 1850, Joseph Thompson purchased lot #4 on
129 East Jones Street in Monterey Ward and lived there until his death at
age 56 in March, 1853. Joseph died from pneumonia as indicated by record of
the health department of Savannah. In 1854, this lot in Monterey Ward was
valued at $2,000.00 and was sold in 1888 to Mr. William Elliott. This is
verified by the tax assessment books of 1888.

Joseph's first son, James Cooper, never married. He served as a
clerk in the state bank and lived at home on Jones Street with his mother.
In 1863, on July 14, he died from peritonitis after receiving a kick in the
head from a horse. He is buried in Laurel Grove Cemetery along side his father.
There are several references to a James C. Thompson in the newspapers (Savannah
Morning News). In 1856, a James C., applies to the Board of Health for membership
for 1856 and was accepted. In 1862, a James C. served as a private in the
Cagleboro Light Infantry and in 1863 a James C. served on the jury. But these
men could not be verified as being Joseph's son.

Susan Rosamond, the second child, never married either. After
1870(approximately) and between 1880 she went to live with her sister, Virginia
Ann, in Burke County and died there in 1906. She is buried in Bath Presbyterian
Cemetery along with her sister.

Joseph Robert Thompson, Jr., was listed as a clerk in the 1850
census of Georgia, But this is the only verifying evidence about him. There is
only one Joseph Robert Thompson buried in any of the cemeteries, that could be him.
This is stated because there is a Joseph Robert who is buried in Laurel Grove
Cemetery, death given as May 24, 1918, at the age of 86. This date would cor-
respond with Joseph Jr.'s birth date. In fact this is the only Joseph Robert
Thompson buried in Savannah listed in any of the cemetery records. For further
research on this man, it was found that he married in 1856 on December 2, to
Augusta Louisa Fox by F.R. Sweat. Augusta Louisa, his wife, died in 1868 from
chronic diarrhea. In 1871, Joseph married Jennie A. Cugil on August 2, They had
one son, Joseph Robert, who died at the age of 19 in 1891. Jennie died in 1913 at the age of 80 and Joseph Sr. died on May 24, 1918 at the age of 86.

Joseph Thompson, his two wives, and son, along with several of Augusta Fox's relatives are buried in lot #150 in Laurel Grove Cemetery.

Virginia Ann Thompson was married to John Gaynard Green of Burke County, Georgia, on January 19, 1859 (this is the same date as her parent’s marriage—and could possibly be a sentimental gesture) by the Reverend I.S.K. Axson of the Independent Presbyterian Church. They lived out their lives in Burke County, to six children were born—two sons and two daughters. The Greens along with two of their children are buried in Bath Presbyterian Cemetery.

Virginia died on January 12, 1897.

Georgia Elizabeth never married and died on June 27, 1908, at the age of 73 at 8 East Anderson Street. She is buried along with her parents in Laurel Grove, lot #30. Georgia was a teacher at the Nassie School in Savannah.

There is a notice of her own school opening at her mother’s home on Jones Street in 1869, and in 1866 she served as Secretary of Industrial School of Savannah at Chatham Academy.

Harriet Shaffer was married to James Eppinger Cope on November 24, 1858, by David H. Porter. James Cope and his family were cousins of Mrs. Joseph Thompson’s family, the Shaffers. The Copes had eight children, two of which died in 1864 from eating a poisonous weed growing commonly in vacant lots. They were Susan and Eva, ages 6 and 3 respectively. Two of their children’s children are now living in Savannah, John L. Cope and Mrs. Mary Cope Sweat.

Harriet’s husband, John, was active in local government in Savannah.

In 1880 he was elected as the city treasurer and reelected in 1881 and 1882. In 1883 there was scandal over unbalanced treasury books and he resigned his position in that year.
Harriet died in 1895 on February 15, and John on June 20, 1913. They are buried in Laurel Grove Cemetery. Harriet's parents, the Joseph Thompsons, are buried in that lot which was owned by the John Copes. Also buried there is one other daughter of the Copes, Augusta, who died at age one.

Augusta Louise, the seventh child, of the Joseph Thompson's died at age 22 from typhoid fever and is also buried in Laurel Grove Cemetery, lot #30. She died on August 17, 1903. 

Joseph's wife, Elizabeth Margaret, died on February 9, 1875, from pneumonia (as verified by health department records) at her residence on Jones Street and is buried with her husband in Laurel Grove. Her sister, Harriet Shaffer, died in 1874. She also lived at 120 East Jones Street. Harriett Shaffer was Mrs. Thompson's only sibling.

In conclusion I would like to point out some discrepancies in my findings and some possible leads to further research.

The first error I came across was in the book The Mills, Cope, and Related Families of Georgia. On page 197 Joseph's son, James Cooper, is listed as dying in his youth in 1836 but he is listed in the 1850 census which would have made him 25 years old then. Also his grave marking is given as dying in 1883 and this is verified by a newspaper account of his death in July of 1883.

The second error occurs in the Marriage Records of 1851-1866. Joseph Jr. is listed as marrying August Fox while it should be Augusta Fox. This is verified by the cemetery records of Laurel Grove.

The third error also occurs in The Mills and Cope and Related Families of Georgia. Virginia and John Green are listed as having four children but in Grave Markings of Burke County, Georgia there are two other children; a son James Augustus who died at age three months and a daughter, Rosa E.
was born in 1870 and died in 1942.

Further possible research could be done on Joseph Thompson's heritage by making use of the records in the South Carolina Historical Society. I obtained the information of his grandparents and parents too late but I would think that the Royal Governor of South Carolina, Lord Williams Campbell, would possibly have a biographical and genealogical history as he was a renowned figure.

Joseph's childhood remains a mystery to me. I checked for possible residence at the Bethesda Home for Boys as he was an orphan but the records only go back as far as 1963.
Footnote References


5. Goddard, p. 196.

6. Grave Markings in Burke County, Georgia, p. 11.


10. T. J. Waring, "3 West Perry".


20. Grave Markings in Burke County, Georgia, p. 12.


22. Mary Warren and Sarah White, Marriages and Deaths 1851-1866.

23. Grave Markings in Burke County, Georgia, p. 11.


28 Warren and White, no page given.
30 Goddard, p. 192.
33 "Savannah Morning News," 1874, p. 269, and 1875.
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*Annals of Georgia Mortuary Records* by Caroline Wilson, Volume 3.

*Rehaventure Cemetery Records.*

*Catholic Cemetery Records.*

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*Grave Markings in Burke County Georgia, Waynesboro, Georgia, 1974.*

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*Marriages and Deaths: 1763-1820.*

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*South Carolina Marriages: 1732-1801.*