The Life
of
Francis Henry Thomson

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ABSTRACT

Francis Henry Thomson appeared to be a man who was best known for his swordmaking, church, family, and friends. He seemed to make some great investments as well as some that were not so great. He seemed innovative in his ideas, yet kind with the people around him. He was born Francis Henry Budd and died Francis Henry Thomson.
My paper is on the life of Francis Henry Thomson. My paper will go from his birth in New York to his death in Thunderbolt, Georgia. It will attempt to give Mr. Thomson's immediate family members, as well as a list of his occupations and investments. My paper is about a man who was born Francis Henry Budd and died Francis Henry Thomson.

According to Mrs. Stephen Bennett, a living descendant of Mr. Thomson, he was born Francis Henry Budd. His father's name was Wesley Budd and his mother's name was Hannah Helen Dunckle. Shortly after Francis Henry Thomson was born, Wesley Budd died and Hannah Helen apparently remarried to a Mr. McIntyre. The McIntyres had two children of their own. Their names were John McIntyre and Edward McIntyre. Francis Henry left his new family of the McIntyres and moved to Charlestown, Massachusetts to live with his uncle, David Thomson, and his aunt, Harriet Thomson. They would later adopt Francis Henry Budd. (See Appendix A).

Francis Henry Thomson moved to Savannah in 1846 with David and Harriett Thomson. Also in the same household lived Helen McIntyre, his birth mother; John and Edward McIntyre, his half brothers.

While in Savannah, Francis Henry Thomson met and married Annie Helen Blance, daughter of John C. and Valerie W. Blance. Francis Henry and Annie Thomson applied for their marriage on June 15, 1859. There was no indication that the application or marriage ever took place in the court records. However, in the Thomson's family bible, there is a note stating that they were married in Savannah on October 16, 1859.
Shortly after their marriage, the Thomson's would move to Columbus, Georgia for work during the Civil War. They would stay there from approximately 1860 to 1870. While in Columbus, Francis and Annie had several children. They are listed below.

Ellie Lydia Thomson - born August 13, 1860
John David Thomson - born December 24, 1862
Francis Edward Thomson - born September 13, 1865
Charles Henry Thomson - born December 2, 1867

As the war ended and the Thomsons back to Savannah, they would have the remainder of their children. They are listed below.

William W. Thomson - born May 17, 1870
Mary Francis Thomson - born April 10, 1872
George Jacob Thomson - born September 2, 1873
Rosamond Thomson - born July 26, 1875
Annie (Duck) - born January 12, 1877

When the Thomsons first moved back to Savannah in 1871, they lived in a rented house located at 103 West Broad Street. Francis and Annie lived in several locations around Savannah from 1870 until 1896.

After 1896, the Thomsons lived in a house on Isle of Hope located on the Skidaway River until 1903. After the Thomsons left their house on Isle of Hope, they apparently moved to St. Marys, Georgia. Annie Helen Thomson died December 24, 1906. After her death, Francis Henry Thomson lived with his son, Frank E. Thomson, in his house in Thunderbolt. Francis Henry Thomson died there on April 1, 1927.

Francis Henry Thomson had several occupations throughout his life. In the early 1850's, he went through a five year apprenticeship to become a blacksmith. He probably chose this occupation due to his father who was also a blacksmith.
Also, the trade of being a blacksmith led him to the job that made him famous, according to the article in the Savannah Morning News,

"Through Dr. R. D. Arnold's advice, Mr. Thomson when quite young instead of continuing his theological studies, was placed in the blacksmith shop of the Central Railroad to inhale, as the doctor advised, the smoke of pit coal, to strengthen his lungs, and he continued to inhale the smoke for five years of apprenticeship, at the expiration of which time he had become a fine worker in steel. Doing some work for Colonel John G. Winter at the Old Rock Island paper mills, near Columbus, after the war began, when volunteer soldiers were going to the front, new military companies were being organized, and when no swords could be had for the officers, Mr. Thomson was induced to try his prentice hand at forging and tempering a sword. This he did and the blade was finished up and polished by Steven Harper of North Carolina, a machinist then working at the Rock Island Mills. The sword was shown around Columbus and was pronounced a fine, well tempered blade by Mr. Murray and other experts who tested and examined it.

Two days later Louis Haiman and Brother of Columbus had made a contract with Mr. Thomson to forge and temper sword blades for them exclusively."*17*

Francis Henry Thomson made swords in Columbus, Georgia until the factory of Louis Haiman and Brother was burned to the ground in April 1865.

After Mr. Thomson finished being a swordmaker for the confederacy, he returned to Savannah to find work. He found a job as a clerk for the Central Railroad and Banking Company. In 1876, Colonel William M. Wadley appointed Francis Henry Thomson as the auditor of the bank. He stayed in this position until his retirement in 1892.

While Francis Henry Thomson was the auditor of the bank he invested some of his wealth in land. On August 22, 1885, Francis Henry Thomson purchased eleven and a quarter acres on Isle of Hope.
"...being a part of the Isle of Hope bounded on north by land of Daniel Grimball; on the east by land of C. A. Demere'; on the south by Skidaway River; and on the west by land of C. C. Heardee containing eleven and one forth acres more or less. The said tract or parcel of land running from Grimball's land on the north nineteen hundred and twenty-eight feet, south to division line between front and back lots numbers five (5) being two hundred and thirteen feet (213') in width on the north to the Grimball's land and two hundred and thirteen feet (213') on the south on the line between front and back lot running south to low water mark on Skidaway River with a width of two hundred and thirteen feet (213') on the north and one hundred and eighty-seven feet and four inches (187'4") in width..."

On this parcel of land he and his sons had a pecan farm. In addition, he and his wife lived on this land on the river from approximately 1896 until approximately 1903. (See Appendix B).

Another land investment Francis Henry Thomson made was on May 9, 1888. He purchased 64 acres of land in the town of Rosedew. According to the deeds book in the courthouse, he paid $1,500. for 64 acres of land which was part of Dr. L. A. Falligant's subdivision of Coffee Bluff Plantation.

Francis Henry Thomson's next investment proved to be his last. According to Mrs. Steven Bennett, Mr. Thomson invested a large amount of money with his son, Frank E. Thomson, in the Florida boom at the turn of the century. The investment turned out to be bad and he lost much of what he owned. Based on the deed recorded on October 23, 1903, Mr. Thomson sold both the eleven and one forth acres on Isle of Hope as well as the 64 acres of land at Coffee Bluff to the Chatham Real Estate and Improvement Company for one dollar to pay off the debt that he owed.
Besides business, swordmaking, and family, Francis Henry Thomson had some other interests. First, he was very involved with the church. In his death announcement he was listed as, "... the oldest living member at St. John's Episcopal Church." 

Also, according to William Thomson, another one of Francis Henry Thomson's living relatives, Mr. Thomson was one of the last members of St. John's Church to rent a pew. William Thomson went on to mention "Francis Henry was a long time member of the vestry." William Thomson has since dedicated a bell at St. John's Episcopal Church in memory of Francis Henry Thomson.

Some other interests of Frances Henry Thomson included being a member of the Oglethorpe Light Infantry Brigades, being a member of the St. Andrews Society; and also, he loved to write poetry.

Francis Henry Thomson died at the home of Frank E. Thomson on April 1, 1927 at 92 years of age. He died of arterial sclerosis. He is buried at Laurel Grove Cemetery on lot 1886. (See Appendix C).

This paper seems to answer much of Francis Henry Thomson's life. However, if any historian chooses to research him further he may want to find out what his occupation was in Columbus, Georgia between 1865 and 1870. Also, he may want to find some additional documentation of his adoption by the Thomsons. Lastly, he may want to research the investment in Florida that caused him to lose his money. I feel with these questions answered, Francis Henry Thomson's biography would be more complete.
Appendix A

An envelope that Francis Henry Thomson mentions his adoption by his uncle.
Appendix B

House where Francis Henry Thomson lived on the Skidaway River on Isle of Hope.
Appendix C

Picture of Francis Henry Thomson
Notes

1. Interview with Mrs. Stephen Bennett, a living descendant, on July 26, 1990.

2. Personal papers from Francis Henry Thomson, in the care of Mrs. Stephen Bennett.

3. Savannah, Chatham County Public Library (Main Branch); State of Georgia Census - 1850. District Number 13, page 316, Dwelling Number 1455.

4. Personal papers from Francis Henry Thomson, in the care of Mrs. Stephen Bennett.

5. Thomson family bible, notes from Francis Henry Thomson and family, in the care of Mrs. Stephen Bennett.

6. Savannah, Chatham County Public Library (Main Branch); State of Georgia Census - 1850. District Number 13, page 316, Dwelling Number 1455.

7. Probate Court, Savannah, Georgia; Index to Marriages (1851 - 1866), page 246.

8. Interview with Mrs. Stephen Bennett, a living descendant, on July 26, 1990.

9. Ibid.

10. Savannah, Chatham County Public Library (Main Branch); City Directory of Savannah (1871), page 318.

11. Interview with Mrs. Stephen Bennett, a living descendant, on July 26, 1990.

12. Personal papers from Francis Henry Thomson, in the care of Mrs. Stephen Bennett.

13. Interview with Mrs. Stephen Bennett, a living descendant, on July 26, 1990.

14. Ibid.


16. Savannah, Chatham County Public Library (Main Branch); State of Georgia Census - 1850. District Number 13, page 316, Dwelling Number 1455.


19. Savannah, Chatham County Public Library (Main Branch); City Directory of Savannah (1871), page 318.


23. Ibid., pages 349-350.

24. Interview with Mrs. Stephen Bennett, a living descendant, on July 26, 1990.

25. Superior Court, Savannah, Georgia Deeds, Book 6I, page 139.

26. Ibid., page 139.

27. Interview with Mrs. Stephen Bennett, a living descendant, on July 26, 1990.


30. Interview with Mr. William Thomson, a living descendant, on July 21, 1990.

31. Ibid.

32. Ibid.


34. Interview with Mrs. Stephen Bennett, a living descendant, on July 26, 1990.

35. Ibid.

36. Chatham County Health Department, Bureau of Vital Records, Volume 1, page 742.

37. General Index to Keepers Recordbook, (1852-1938), Laurel Grove Cemetary, Savannah, Georgia, Volume 3, N-V.
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- Savannah Evening Press, Mortuary, April 2, 1927; Column 3, page 16.


- State of Georgia Census - 1850 (Chatham County). Dwelling Number 1455; page 316; referenced from 1850 Census of Georgia (Chatham County), Index by Otto, R. H., 1975, page 101. Housed in the Savannah, Chatham County Public Library (Main Branch).