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Paul H. Wilkins was born in the year 1768, in the Savannah area. He presumably grew to manhood in this locale and took up the carpenters trade as a young man. With the passing of his father in 1789, young Paul struck out on his own to make his fortune during this great era of opportunity that was creating a new nation. He became active in the building and real estate business and obviously possessed and aptitude for making sharp land and business deals. Through the advantages of the free land lottery he accumulated vast land and property holding in the outlying areas of Liberty County. He became respected citizen and planter and was a devoted family man that actively participated in the church and public affairs of the Sumbury-Midway-Savannah community. His accidental passing, in his late sixties, left a virtual empire of land and slave resources to his surviving children.
The family name of Wilkins goes back many generations in Savannah history. In fact, later day family members claim direct lineage all the way back to the days of the original Oglethorpe settlers (Savannah Evening Press, May 27, 1933). As the Oglethorpe settlement prospered and grew, so did the fortunes of the Wilkins clan. And as they grew in number, they spread throughout colonial Savannah and Chatham County, yet remaining close as a family. This new world of seemingly limitless resources was bursting with opportunity for merchants, artisans and farmers as the surrounding coastal empire was opened up for those enterprising settlers who possessed the wisdom, skill and perseverance to take advantage of its natural gifts. Cast onto this setting the lifetime activities of one Paul H. Wilkins, a member of the aforementioned Wilkins family, probably best exemplifies the vigor and resourcefulness of these early inhabitants of Savannah and the surrounding counties.

Born in the Savannah area in 1768, to John and Elizabeth Wilkins, Paul Hambleton Wilkins grew to manhood in St. Peter Parish along with his sister Elizabeth, brothers John William and Hosiah (Estate of John Wilkins, 1789). Although he seems to have had no
personally distinguishing experiences that would merit public notice, his boyhood days must surely have been laced with hardship and excitement. He was obviously old enough to be aware and affected by the revolutionary activities taking place during the period leading up to the war for independence. Savannah's many crises during the British siege and occupation of the town was a time of trial and suffering for all its inhabitants. Certainly a boy in his middle teens must have experienced elation when the British finally evacuated Savannah in the summer of 1782. And so the early life of Paul Wilkins was a time filled with the unsettled and the unpredictable. There is no available evidence that he positively experienced such events as previously mentioned, nor that he took any active part in the independence effort. However, his mere presence in the area lends credence to the belief that he was a part of it in some unknown capacity as were many undistinguished citizens of Chatham County.

As the nation floundered in the aftermath of the struggle for freedom, Paul was approaching maturity and manhood, and a measure of personal independence. In 1789, his father passed away leaving a modest estate to be divided equally among the four children (Estate of John Wilkins, 1789). Far from being alone in the world, for there were numerous close relations in the immediate vicinity, Paul apparently had decided to pursue his life goals on his own from this time on. Evidence indicates that at about this time, he became active in his own right, yet he remained indentified with the existing family as evidenced in later years events (Estate of Elizabeth J. Wilkins, 1814). His first endeavor on public
record was to purchase some real estate in the city of Savannah. On January 13, 1791, he purchased Lot Number 4 in Warren Ward from the city officials who had surveyed off for public auction (Chatham County Deed Book N, p. 286, 1791). Paul was the highest bidder at twenty-two pounds over the one hundred base price which was to be paid as ground rent in five pound increments per year over a period of time. Given the facts that he was a carpenter by trade and had a small purse from his father's estate, it is likely that he purchased this property for investment purposes (Chatham County Deed Book N, p. 296, 1794). Apparently he was endowed with a sharp business mind, so evident in later years. The maps of this period, produced by Vincent show a structure on the southeast corner of the lot. This is the site of present day 7 Habersham Street, Savannah (Vincent’s Map, 1853). There is no available evidence that he lived there himself but the fact that he again purchased property in the Savannah area the following year further supports the supposition that the Warren Ward purchase was likely an investment within the range of his capital. November 23, 1792, he purchased from William Lange lot number 17 of the original plan of Carpenters Row near Savannah (Chatham County Deed Book K, p. 424, 1792). At about the same time, he purchased a young negro slave from a dealer in Charleston for sixty-five pounds (Chatham County Deed Book K, p. 468, 1792). Since this particular slave was a recent arrival in America, it seems logical that he was purchased to assist Paul with household and farming chores rather than in his skill trade of carpentry. The next notable event documented is Wilkins signature as a witness on an
indenture by which John McIntosh of Savannah sold some slaves to Reverend Benjamin Lindsey of Ogeechee in Bryan County (Chatham County Deed Book N, p. 293, 1794). Presumably, Paul was busy during the ensuing time improving on his Warren Ward and Carpenters Row holdings. The seemingly insignificant association with John McIntosh could have been a crucial turn of events for young Wilkins. At least subsequent events seem to warrant such a conclusion. This is presumably the John McIntosh of "Come and take it," Fort Morris fame. If so, Wilkins has now fallen in with a very knowledgeable and influential personage, particularly with respect to the potential value of property in the Liberty County area where McIntosh was well established. Further evidence of a special relationship between Paul and McIntosh appears in the 1794 transfer of property on White Marsh Island from Wilkins to Reverend Lindsey in which Paul alludes to the fact that he had purchased this property from McIntosh (Chatham County Deed Book N, P. 296 – 297, 1794). A land purchase from McIntosh is again referred to in a 1797 transaction in which Paul Hambleton Wilkins sold a three hundred acre plantation to J. Bryan for nine hundred pounds (Chatham County Deed Book U, p. 240, 1797). A thorough search of Chatham County deed indexes under both Wilkins and McIntosh's name fails to reveal any transactions, real estate or otherwise between the two individuals. It is possible Paul was merely acting as a broker for McIntosh or simply as an agent to reduce tax assessment. Whatever the speculation, the facts seem to bear out some special arrangement between the two. It seems illogical that Wilkins the young carpenter could not raise enough capital to buy the small lot in Warren Ward out-
right in January of 1791 yet, three years later he was dealing in large acreage sales amounting to three or four hundred pounds value. Further there is no available evidence of his acquiring such property as White Marsh Island or the plantation sold to J. Bryan. Next, Wilkins sold Lot 4 Warrem Ward with the capital building dwelling house, as noted in the deed transfer, to Henry C. Jones, Savannah merchant, on December 13, 1794, for seven hundred fifty pounds. Apparently, the dwelling house and outbuildings are the logical reason for the substantial increase in value (Chatham County Deed Book 1N, p. 292, 1794). Further, it is becoming clear that young Paul Wilkins is rapidly acquiring considerable capital from property sales. Presumably, he has turned his hand to land speculation whether influenced by McIntosh or not. In March of 1796, he purchased two hundred ten acres near Savannah from Sam Bowen, of Savannah, for two hundred sixty pounds. The sale price included the slave Matilda (Chatham County Deed Book R, p. 379, 1796). It was less than a year later, January 1, 1797, that the previously mentioned plantation sale to J. Bryan was consumated (Chatham County Deed Book U, p. 240, 1797). As the seemingly endless land deals engaged in by Wilkins accumulate, obviously so does his fortune. His apparent quest for personal financial gain could definitely have been stimulated by his presumed association with John McIntosh and the promise of unlimited opportunity in Liberty County.

At this point in his lifetime, Paul H. Wilkins must be considered an accomplished land speculator who has gained considerable capital from the various dealings attributed to him in the short
spam of six years. He was definitely not engaged in offhand, random real estate deals but purposefully engaged in land speculation for capital gain. Whether he had a definite purpose in mind toward which he was working must remain pure conjecture without further evidence, such as a family to centralize his interest and purpose. There is no record of marriage on file in Chatham County involving Paul H. Wilkins or any variance of such a name (Chatham County Marriage Index). During this period in time, Chatham County records on marriages performed in the county are very reliable.

Paul's next activity verified in public documents refers to a judgement in response to a suit he filed against one Jamy Moore, Esquire. Paul acquired $2092.70 plus all goods and land owned by Moore including 200 acres of improved land and buildings in Argyll. The specifics of the suit are obscure in that only the deed transfer was documented (Chatham County Deed Book V, p. 309, 1799). This revelation gives a rather unsavory tinge to Mr. Wilkins' activities.

However, without the knowledge of the specifics of the suit his actions must be accepted as just according to the judgement. In any event Paul H. Wilkins was nearing a vitally important turning point in his life. It was at this time or shortly hereafter that he undertook, two very significant acquisitions. By all indication, sometime during the recent past Paul met and married his devoted wife, Ann. As previously stated, there is no evidence in the Chatham County records or the Liberty County marriage index of this event. Consequently, there is no available information regarding the circumstance of this union nor is there specific information concerning the background of Ann Wilkins. Only most remote
speculation can be derived from the fact that her maiden name could have been Bellinger since one of the five children that ensued from this marriage was frequently referred to by the name Ann Bellinger Wilkins in official documents (Liberty County Will Book A, p. 214 - 215, 1827).

The second significant acquisition must initially be described as a vast land grant in Liberty County. Here again one must reflect on his association with John McIntosh and a possible ultimate design for which he labored to acquire capital. Perhaps the design and purpose fit all to neatly but Paul H. Wilkins has all the traits of a very determined and purposeful man. The proposition that he married and received considerable land grants, particularly after a period of reasonable capital gain, cannot offhand be accepted as coincidental. It seems far more likely that these events were the product of a purposeful design.
CHAPTER II

PAUL HAMILTON WILKINS, PLANTER LIBERTY COUNTY

Mr. Wilkins Liberty County land acquisitions amounted to one thousand acres, the maximum allowed under the 1780 act regulating headrights grants. Under the authority of this act and its predecessors, the colony and state issued all grants free. A man would be entitled to two hundred acres as his own right, plus fifty acres for a wife, each child and slave. The owner could give it away, or leave it to heirs according to his will (Index to Headrights and Bounty Grants of Georgia, p. 132, 1970). Under the existing circumstances, Paul and family received grants of three hundred acres in 1799, 400 acres and 300 acres respectively in 1800 (Index to the Headrights and Bounty Grants of Georgia, p 708, 1920).

The scene for Paul H. Wilkins has now shifted to the Midway - Sumbury area of Liberty County. Although the area had been previously settled, the lands acquired by Wilkins were undeveloped but soon became productive under the same driving perseverance of the skillful, determined Wilkins management. As Paul settled into the more stable life consistent with his maturity he exhibited the same viable force as a planter as he did in his land transactions. Evidently his farming apprenticeship in Carpenters Row was sufficient. Along with the new life style
came new life. Jane Mary was born on March 3, 1800. She was baptised on May 11, of the same year in the Midway Congregational Church, for it was to the articles of this religious body that both Paul and wife Ann subscribed upon their arrival in the area (The Published Records of Midway Church, Vol. I, p. 122 and p.46, 1853). Under the deft management of Paul, his vast properties yielded their potential. Consequently, Paul and Ann were disposed to sell the Argyll land to William Mein in May of 1803, for $3000.00 (Chatham County Deed Book 2A, p. 337, 1803). The sale of this property could indicate both security in their Liberty County holdings or a need for ready cash to finance development of these lands. The succeeding turn of events rather support the former.

There can be little doubt that Paul enjoyed considerable prosperity in the next few years. The next addition to the family arrived about mid March of 1803. Paul Hamilton Wilkins Jr. was baptised on March 27, 1803, and apparently became the object of affection above all others, at that time and in the future. This assumption stems from later events such as the deeding of specific property to Paul Jr. exclusive of his other heirs (Liberty County Will Book A, p 197-198). In addition the occurrence of a first male child and the namesake incidence. The obvious joy of Paul Sr., created ominous difficulties for determined historical researchers. For when Paul Jr. grew up and became active in the Savannah area, his activities were difficult to detect from Paul Sr's. Paul Jr. Apparently responded well to his father's affection, for he became a Doctor of Medicine and a respected
member of the neophyte Chatham Medical Society (Daily Georgian, May 14, p. 3, 1836). He married the former Mary Morris of Philadelphia in March of 1827. He and his young wife enjoyed a prosperous life until their accidental death as a result of the steam-packet Pulaski disaster off Cape Hatteras in June 1838 (Daily Georgian June 27, p. 3, 1838).

The additional members of Paul Sr's. household were identified in his will written in 1827. There additional sons, Archibald, and Joseph C. and of course Ann Bellinger in addition to Mary Jane to make up the five children referred to (Liberty County Will Book A, p. 197 - 198, 1827). Like the family, the real estate holding increased over the years. Through the facilities of the Georgia land lottery system, Paul Wilkins Sr. acquired additional land described in BB publications, Serial 1282 in the Georgia State archives at Atlanta (Georgia Land Lottery, p. 97, 1964).

Aside from occasional civic endeavors, P. H. Wilkins remains devoted to his family and his plantation. There is mention of his association with civic groups of Savannah whose purpose was to promote cultural and intellectual enterprises (Daily Georgian, April 14, p. 1836). Otherwise, Paul Sr. continually maintained a steadily improving establishment throughout the first quarter of the nineteenth century. Besides Paul Jr., his other offspring practically faded into obscurity. Archibald being the exception. Twice married, Archibald remained public until mid century (Chatham County Marriage Index, p. 423). According to the 1830 census, all of the children were still alive and living in Liberty County
(Georgia Population Census, Liberty County, 1800). For the most part, the years leading up through the early eighteen thirties were no doubt challenging but uneventful as far as public notice was concerned. Additional information related to this period is surely available in the Midway Church records available in the Midway museum. However, meticulous research will be required since the lack of a consistent filing system makes it necessary to process each literary item in its entirety.

In his later years, 1830's, Paul Sr. could be considered the master of all he surveyed. He alludes to his residence on lot number two in Sunbury where he spent most of his idle time. The only available information concerning the destiny of his wife, Anna, is derived from the fact that she is not mentioned in his will of 1827 nor on the 1830 Georgia population census (Liberty County Will Book 4, p. 197, 1827). Accordingly, Paul spent his later years as a widower absorbed in the functioning of his plantation and the hability of his country. For it was men like himself that had built their fortune around the town of Sunbury and made it a town to rival Savannah itself.

Suddenly without forewarning, the end of life came for Paul Hamilton Wilkins while riding about his beloved plantation on the Isle of Wight (Daily Georgian, August 3, p. 3, Col2). On July 29th, 1839 from a fall of his horse, the man who succeeded from a humble beginning as a carpenter from the colonial town of Savannah, who amassed a vast empire of productive land that stretched from Savannah to the Altamaha River. His zest for living and willingness to seek and conquer the challenge of
of this new land places him among the significant contributors
of this great entity that is modern day Georgia.

The appraisal of his property was attended to by his son
Archibald according to court directives. Aside from his real
property the value of his slaves alone came to $43,000 (Apraisal
of Estates, Will Book B, p. 201, 1836). His final resting place
is still unidentified. Since his day, the town of Sumbury has
decayed and become non existent as a community. The efforts
to locate a possible grave site in the Colonial Cemetery of
Sumbury was hindered because of erosion and undergrowth. The
alleged burial ground on the Isle of Wright could not be located
due to lack of specific direction. Considering the burial custom
of the day, it is reasonable to assume that a more thorough search
for both sites will eventually bear fruit. Other discoveries,
particularly within the literature of the old church records
available in the Midway Museum will make enormous contributions
toward further enlightenment regarding this most interesting
personage.
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