Biography Of Jerome N. Wilson:
Photographer 1827-1897.
By: James D. Hill.
For: Dr. Warlick.
History 300.
Armstrong State College.
May 25, 1930.

This paper included appendix material (such as photocopies of letters, diary entries, photos, or legal documents) that were not digitized. Researchers are welcome to visit the Lane Library Special Collections division to read such appendix material on site.

Abstract

Jerome N. Wilson was a professional Photographer in Savannah during the late 19th century. He was a native of New York, born in 1827, and arrived in Savannah around 1865. He married Miss Bridget Vaughan, a native of Northern Ireland, that same year and fathered eight children by her. Three of his eight children died during an outbreak of diphtheria in late 1879. The other five lived on into adulthood. Jerome was entangled into several legal matters ranging from law suits to cases of failure to pay debts and taxes. Jerome did have much luck in the court room when it came to such cases. He continued to do photography work in Savannah until 1896. In February of the following year, Jerome Wilson passed away at his residence of 309 York Street from complications resulting from facial cancer.
Jerome N. Wilson was born in New York (County Unknown) on January 27, 1827. Information about his young life, prior to 1865, is very limited and little other than his birth date was located. Jerome N. Wilson first appeared in Savannah, Georgia on June 1st, 1865 in a write up of a court case printed in the Savannah Newspaper that was concerned with a Mr. P. Stemm, along with Wilson, and the recovery of "pay for fixtures". The article reported that the case had been decided under the Military Government and that the decision went for the defendant though it is unclear who the defendant was since no further information on that case could be located.

Just nine days after that article appeared in the newspaper, Jerome N. Wilson (N is for Nelson) took thirty year old Bridget Vaughan, an immigrant from Northern Ireland, as his wife. They were married on June 10th, 1865 at the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist by Reverend Peter Whealen in a mixed marriage since Wilson was originally Protestant and Bridget was Roman Catholic.

Mr. Wilson appears to have set up shop as a professional photographer during either the year of 1865 or 1866. This is a trade that he must have learned while in New York since no evidence could be discovered to indicate the existence of a photography school in the Savannah area during that period. Mr. Wilson's first professional listing, in the City Directory of 1866, described him as: "Wilson JN, photographer, successor Whitaker
and Broughton sts". Wilson also began appearing in the Savannah paper with a similar advertisement in December of 1866 where he advertised views of Bonaventure and Lourel Grove Cemeteries.

Less than one year after their marriage, Bridget gave birth to Margaret Ann Wilson, the first of eight children, on June 4th, 1866. Mr. Wilson continued to advertise his "...stereoscopic views of our city and Bonaventure, and Lourel Grove Cemetery..." in the newspaper on through the next year. In that following year, 1867, the Wilsons continued building their family with the birth of Jane E. Wilson on November 11th, and then again two years later when Bridget gave birth to their first son, Jerome N. Wilson Jr., on January 16th of 1869. By that year things seemed to be going pretty well for Mr. Wilson because on top of having a son, it appears as though he also must have brought out some of his competition when him placed an advertisement in the newspaper claiming that he had "...purchased the negatives of all pictures taken at Coonley's Photograph." This advertisement also listed Wilson as a "...well known Photographer...".

Jerome N. Wilson's success in business and family building seemed to continue right on into the next decade with the birth of his second son, John Howard Wilson, on October 23th, 1870. The photography business must have really been doing well at that time because Mr. Wilson was not only supporting a wife and four children but also managed to purchase a lot, number 26, in the Columbia ward of Savannah for three thousand dollars from a Jacob Walding on April 26th of 1871. On that lot he Wilson began construction of a three unit dwelling in 1872 and had it
completed by 1873. Soon after the house's completion, Wilson moved his family from their previous residence at 153 York street to what seems to have been the middle unit of the new house, number 59, and apparently rented out the other two.

Wilson's family continued to grow during the year of 1873 with the birth of another daughter, Mary E. Wilson, their fifth child. During this same year it also appears that Mr. Wilson moved at least part of his photographic gallery to a different location in the city. This business moving which took place during that year and the next tends to get a bit confusing because Wilson was listed at more than one business address at the same time. For instance, Wilson was listed in 1873 as not only working out of 143 Broughton, should be corner of Broughton and Whitaker as he was originally listed in 1866, but also at 21 Bull in the very same newspaper advertisement from January of that year. And then it appears that Mr. Wilson decided to move the part of his gallery still remaining at 143 Broughton to a new location at 177 Congress street during the month of October, 1873. This little move proved to be very interesting because it led to the first of several court battles which plagued Mr. Wilson during the 1870's. What seems to have happened in that particular case was that on the 30th of October, 1873, J. N. Wilson brought the then occupants of 177 Congress street, Baker & Company, out and moved what was left of his business at Broughton street to that location. One of the Owners of the Congress street building, J. & W. Rutherford, claimed later in court that on that same day, in October of 1873, "Mr. Baker came into my
store and requested me to go up stairs, when he informed me in
the presence of Mr. Wilson (defendant) that he had sold out and
wanted to know if I would relieve his firm from the payment of
further rent, due for the balance of the year, that Mr. Wilson
had agreed to pay the same rent which he had paid and to accept
the premisses on the same terms Baker and Company did". As it
turned out, Mr. Wilson must have grown weary of paying rent on
two galleries and on April 30th, 1874, after submitting
vacating note a month earlier, moved all of his business to 21
Bull street and broke his lease with six months still
remaining. Needless to say, J. & W. Rutherford took Jerome
Wilson to court and sued him for the remainder of the lease and
won their suit through a decision handed down on April 21st, 1875
by Judge Issac Russel who ruled that Mr. Wilson was liable for
the rent due through October of 1874. During the time that this
case was taking place, Bridget Wilson gave birth to the Wilson
sixth child, Micheal Edward Wilson, on March 7th, 1874. Though
Mr. Wilson's good luck with fertility would continue on through
the rest of the 1870's, so would his bad luck in the court room.

Another such bad luck case happened in November of 1875 when
we find Jerome Wilson once again in court for due payments except
this time he was being charged with failure to pay on his
installments for a loan of twelve thousand dollars. It appears
that Wilson had received this money in the form of sixty shares
of stock from the Georgia Mutual Loan Association who acted as
the plaintiff in that case. Wilson was suppose to pay sixty
dollars a month and had used his new house as mortgage (or
collateral) for the loan which was issued to him in March 1873. But for some unknown reason, Mr. Wilson had neglected to make these payments on his loan and the loan company was prepared to foreclose on his house. This included the unit his family was living in and also the rental property he had owned. This only included the western 2/3's of the building because Mr. Wilson was apparently in the process of selling the eastern 1/3 to a Ms. Mary F. Rogers which became final on December 3rd, 1874. It seems that Wilson also sold the western 1/3 of the house later on as well. This was done in January of 1876, between the time of the original loan agreement's drafting and the time of the court case and was sold to a Christopher C. Casey for three thousand and two hundred and twenty dollars. Of that money, three thousand was paid on the loan in question which brought the amount due down to nine thousand dollars. But despite that extra payment, the loan company did not let up on its foreclosure suit and in the case's judgement, handed down by Judge Henry B. Tompkins, it was "...ordered that the said Jerome N. Wilson do pay into the court in or before the first day of the next (February 1878) term thereof, the principle interest and cash due in said bond and mortgage and all attorney's fees and commissions in this proceeding, or show cause to the contrary, if any he has, and that in default thereof his equity of - in and to said mortgage premises be forever named and foreclosed." On hearing that decision, Wilson apparently heeded the warning and got caught up on his payments for the 1880 Federal Census still has the Wilson family listed as still living at 59 York Street.
At about the same time that the foreclosure case was being carried out, there other incidents took place concerning the Wilson family. First off, Bridget Wilson gave birth to the Wilson's fourth son, and seventh child all together, sometime during the year of 1876. He was named James W. Wilson. Bridget Wilson also apparently lost her older sister, Barbara Vaughan, who was only forty-nine years old at her death on November 2nd, 1876, due to Yellow Fever. And lastly, Mr. Wilson got himself caught up in another legal matter once again. That particular case tends to be rather confusing, especially for someone not to well educated in the way of the courts. The case involved the family of a David B. Tomlinson who must have been some sort of business associate of Mr. Wilson due to the nature of the case. Apparently, Mr. Tomlinson passed away sometime prior to the beginning of the case, in January of 1876, and on his death had several items belonging to Mr. Wilson in his possession thus bringing Wilson to file suit against Tomlinson's wife, Matilda, who was unwilling to turn over the property. This property was said to consist "...of pictures [and] frames..." and "...that the value of said personal property [was] fifteen hundred dollars,..". It later becomes evident as to why Mrs. Tomlinson refused to turn over Mr. Wilson's property when her and her daughter, Annie M. Stults, counter sued Wilson on May 20th of 1876 for a Life Insurance policy taken out by her late husband and which named her and her daughter as the beneficiaries of two thousand dollars. Mr. Wilson's lawyer, R. R. Rishands, stated that "...said policy of insurance was bonafide purchased from
said David B. Tomlinson, the person insuring his life, by said Wilson, for a valuable consideration, on to wit the 14th day of May 1874...""

The case dragged on for nearly two years and was finally settled in December of 1877 when the jury found for the plaintiff, Mrs. Tomlinson and her daughter, and awarded them a one thousand and twenty dollar settlement from Mr. Wilson despite his claim of legal purchase of the policy"". And to hold true to Mr. Wilson's legal luck, Judge Henry B. Tompkins, who was probably tired of seeing Mr. Wilson in his court room, upped the jury's settlement to ""...the sum of Eighteen Hundred and ninety-four 38 dollars, $1894.38, principle, with such interest as has occurred thereon in the Receivers hand,..."" thus adding even more insult to injury for Mr. Wilson. As for the property of Jerome Wilson, which was said to be in the possession of Mrs. Tomlinson, no information could be located among the judgements of this case meaning either that she was allowed to keep the property or that it was settled separately and that the particular judgement has just been misplaced. Never the less, out of the three known law suits that Jerome Wilson was involved in, he lost all of them proving that with the kind of luck he had with the law, Wilson should have stayed as far away from the court room as possible.

In the following year, Wilson's ability to father children once again arose to the call. On June 13th of 1878, Bridget gave birth to Grace W. Wilson, their eighth and final child"". Her birth was a last happy moment during the 1870's for what happened to Jerome and the Wilson family during the year of 1879 was a much more tragic blow than all of Jerome Wilson's legal problems,
and resulting financial troubles, combined. It started in October of 1879 when an outbreak of Diphtheria, common during that period, broke out in the Wilson home. It is not known how many of the ten family members were effected by the disease, but the ones that lost their lives to it are. On October 25th of 1879, John Howard Wilson, the second eldest son, died due to Diphtheria at the age of nine years. Nine days later, the eldest son, Jerome Nelson Wilson Jr., also died due to Diphtheria on November 3rd of 1879 at the age of eleven years. And lastly, the eldest daughter, Margaret Ann Wilson died from the same disease on November 11th of 1879 at the age of thirteen years. All three had died within three weeks. The Wilson children were all buried in the family lot at the Catholic Cemetery in Savannah. How Jane and the younger four children were able to survive the disease is as strange as it is unknown. But after the tragedy the family seems to have moved on with their lives and Jerome and Bridget carried on raising the five children they still had left.

On into 1880, Jerome Wilson continued on with his photographic profession and appeared in the Savannah news papers several times that year advertising photographs and ferrotypes of different views of Savannah, Bonaventure, group shots and negroes working in the fields. In October of 1880, Jerome Wilson wrote a letter to the editor of the Savannah Morning News explaining a case in which he was fined ten dollars for having a sign hanging out in front of his shop which was against city ordinances. Jerome's letter to the editor once again showed his hard-headedness and willingness to fight for his rights and property.
Also found in the Savannah Morning Newspaper was a listing on April 5th, 1881, announcing property to be auctioned by then Sheriff John T. Ronan for due taxes. Included in this list was "Jerome N. Wilson - Middle one-third part of lot no. 26 Columbia Ward". That piece of property listed for auction was the last part of the row house that Mr. Wilson had built, and owned, and was the section where his family lived. But apparently Mr. Wilson was able to come up with the money for taxes or either brought his own house back at the auction because in an article announcing a minor fire at that address, during February of the next year, listed that the "building was owned and occupied by Mr. J.N. Wilson".

The middle 1880's seemed to be fairly quiet for Jerome Wilson with not much of major concern happening after the fire of 1882. All that is known of his life through these few years is that he did continue his photographic work at the same address and lived at the same address as before. But on August 24th, 1886, Jerome's eldest surviving daughter brought a long needed happy occasion to the Wilson home when she wed "Mr. John S. Funk, a prominent young business man Augusta," were the couple moved after the wedding. John and Jane W. Funk later had a son, Author J. Funk, in 1898, who would later become a teacher at Savannah High School and then the Principal at Commercial High School in Savannah from 1937 to 1953. He then served in the Georgia House of Representatives until 1970 when he retired.

Throughout the rest of the 1880's and first part of the 1890's, Jerome Wilson's name only shows up in the newspaper ads
for his business and in the yearly City Directories which covered him up until 1897. In the 1897 Directory he is listed only as a clerk at L. Adlers and as a boarder in his own house which had received a new address, 309, on the first of that year\textsuperscript{5}. On February 13th of that same year, Jerome Wilson was said to have passed away at his residence due to what the physician, Dr. Saxom, referred to as "Cancer of the Face"\textsuperscript{6}. No prior information on him having this illness could be located other than the county death certificate. He was buried along side his three dead children\textsuperscript{7}.

In his will, Mr. Wilson named his wife, Bridget, as receiver of all his property and also names her as executor of that will\textsuperscript{8}. The only known profession of any of his children relates to Michael Edward Wilson who apparently took up the profession of his father and was advertised as a photographer in the business section of both the 1897 and 1898 City Directories which listed his location as 41 Bull street\textsuperscript{9}. Apparently though, Michael E. Wilson did not stay in the profession very long for he was named as Captain M. Edward Wilson on his grave stone meaning that he must have served some time in the Military. He died in October of 1930\textsuperscript{4}. Bridget V. Wilson lived in Savannah until her own death on January 18th, 1917, at the age of eighty-two\textsuperscript{10}. 
Notes

1) Federal Census, Chatham County Georgia, 1880. E.D. # 27, Line # 37, Reel # T9 138.


3) Savannah Daily Herald, 1 June 1865, p. 4, Col. 3.


6) Directory of the City of Savannah, 1866. p.144.


9) Grave Stone of Margaret Ann Wilson, 7 November 1879. Catholic Cemetery, Sec. A, Lot # 38, Savannah Georgia.


16) Directory of The City of Savannah, 1871, p.345 and 1874, p. 211.

17) Federal Census, Chatham County Georgia, 1880.


19) Case of J and W Rutherford Vs. J.N. Wilson, 21 April 1875. Superior Court of Chatham County Ga., Judgement Records, Collection # 5125SP, Box # 92, Folder # 11627. p.1.

20) Ibid. p. 1.


22) Ibid. p. 6.

23) Ibid. p. 6.


25) Case of The Georgia Mutual Loan Association Vs. Jerome N. Wilson, 26 February 1878. Superior Court of Chatham County Ga., Judgement Records, Collection # 5125SP, Box # 102, Folder # 11960-11961, Item # 3, p. 1.


27) Ibid. p. 2.

28) Ibid. p. 2.

29) Deed For Eastern One-Third of Lot 26, Columbia Ward, Savannah
Georgia, 13 August 1874. Superior Court of Chatham County Ga.,
30) Deed For Western One-Third of Lot 26, Columbia Ward, Savannah
Georgia, 8 November 1875. Superior Court of Chatham County Ga.,
31) Case of The Georgia Mutual Loan Association Vs. Jerome N.
Wilson, Item #3, p.3.
32) Ibid. p.5.
33) Federal Census, Chatham County Georgia, 1880.
34) Ibid.
36) Case of Jerome N. Wilson Vs. Matilda N. Tomlinson, 7 December
1877. Superior Court of Chatham County Ga., Judgement Records.
Collection # 51253P, Box # 98, Folder # 11847, Item 1.
37) Ibid. Fol. # 11847, Item # 1-2.
38) Ibid. Fol. # 11848, Item # 4.
39) Ibid. Fol. # 11847, Item # (none).
40) Ibid. Item # 3.
41) Ibid. Fol. # 11848, Item 18.
42) Grave Stone of Grace W. Wilson, 16 September 1936. Catholic
Cemetery, Sec. A, Lot # 38, Savannah Georgia.
Also, Federal Census, Chatham County Ga., 1880.
Also, Certificate of Death for John H. Wilson, 25 October 1879.
44) Ibid. (Death Certificate).
45) Certificate of Death for Jerome N. Wilson Jr., 3 November


47) Index To The Catholic Cemetery of Savannah Georgia, Diocese of Savannah Archives.


Also, Savannah Morning News, 16 March 1880. p.2, col.9.

49) Savannah Morning News, 11 November 1880. p.3, col.3.


51) Savannah Morning News, 16 February 1882. p.4, col.3.


Description of Collection.


57) Index To The Catholic Cemetery of Savannah Georgia, Diocese of Savannah Archives.

58) Last Will and Testimony of Jerome N. Wilson, 27 March 1886.
Will Records, Probate Court of Chatham County Ga.


60) Grave Stone of Captain M. Edward Wilson, 11 October 1930.

Works Cited

- Author Joseph Funk Papers, Collection # 1304, June 1979.
  Description of Collection.

- Case of The Georgia Mutual Loan Association vs. Jerome W. Wilson, 26 February 1878. Superior Court Chatham County Ga., Judgement Records. Collection # S125SP, Box # 102, Folder # 11760-11961.

- Case of J. and W. Rutherford vs. J. N. Wilson, 21 April 1875. Superior Court Records of Chatham County Ga., Judgement Records. Collection # S125SP, Box # 92, Folder # 11627.

- Case of Jerome N. Wilson vs. M. Lula T. Tomlinson, 7 December 1877. Superior Court of Chatham County Ga., Judgement Records. Collection # S125SP, Box # 98, Folder # 11847-11848.


- Daily News and Herald (Savannah), 14 December 1866, 17 September 1867.

- Deed for Eastern One-Third of Lot 26, Columbia Ward, Savannah.

-Deed for Lot 26, Columbia Ward, Savannah Georgia, 26 April 1871. Superior Court of Chatham County Ga., Deed Records. Grantor, Vol. 4K

-Deed for Western One-Third of Lot 26, Columbia Ward, Savannah Georgia, 8 November 1875. Superior Court of Chatham County Ga., Deed Records. Grantor, Vol. 4S.

-Directory of The City Of Savannah, For: 1866, 1870, 1871, 1874, 1885, 1888, 1890, 1892, 1893, 1894, 1895, 1896, 1897 and 1898.

-Federal Census, Chatham County Georgia, 1880. E.D. # 37, Line # 37, Reel # T9 139.


-Index To The Catholic Cemetery Of Savannah, Diocese of Savannah Archives.

-Last Will and Testimony of Barbara Vaughan, (Date Unknown). Will Records, Probate Court of Chatham County Ga.

-Last Will and Testimony of Jerome N. Wilson, 27 March 1886. Will Records, Probate Court of Chatham County Georgia.


-Savannah Daily Herald, 1 June 1865.

-Savannah Morning News, For: 5 June 1869, 4 April 1873, 3 November 1876, 4 November 1873, 16 March 1880, 11 November 1880, 5 April 1881, 16 February 1882, 14 November 1883, 1 January 1883, 25 August 1886, 14 February 1877 and 15 February 1877.

-Savannah Morning Telegraph, 22 February 1880 and 14 January 1883.
Appendix

Photographic Works By Jerome N. Wilson.


- Photo #1 From Page 16.
- Photo #2 From Page 22.
- Photo #3 From Page 47.
- Photo #4 From Page 19.
- Photo #5 From Page 134.
- Photo #6 From Page 89.
- Photo #7 From Page 87.
- Photo #8 From Page 85.
- Photo #9 From Page 79.


-5.12 From Page 30.
-14.13 From Page 78.