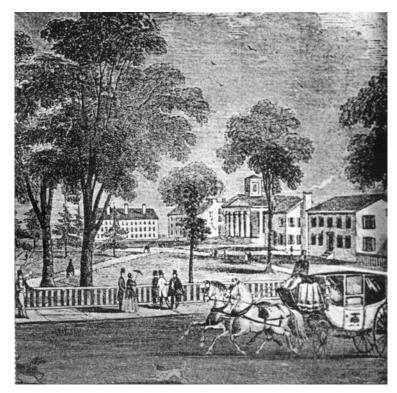
# Athens Historian

Volume 9 Fall 2004



FRANKLIN COLLEGE, IN ATHENS, GEORGIA

Athens Historical Society
Athens

# A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE ATHENS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Excerpted from a history by Susan Frances Barrow Tate

On October 11, 1959, at an informal organizational meeting the Athens Historical Society was born. This meeting was held in the Athens Regional Library, then located on the corner of Hancock and College Avenues. The founders of the Society were Sarah Maret, Director of the Athens Regional Library; John E. Talmadge, Professor of English, University of Georgia; Porter Kellam, Director of the University of Georgia Libraries; Kenneth Coleman, Professor of History, University of Georgia; Richard N. Fickett III; Marion West Marshall; Harry Hodgson, Sr.; John W. Bonner, Special Collections Librarian, University of Georgia Library; Susan Frances Barrow Tate, Library Assistant, University of Georgia Library; and Robert E. Gibson. Temporary committees were formed to plan a general organization meeting to be held October 29, 1959. At this meeting, held in the auditorium of the Chamber of Commerce building, a constitution was approved, aims and/or purposes of the society were formulated, and committees were appointed.

The purposes and aims of the Athens Historical Society expressed in the current constitution are:

- 1. To discover, collect and preserve all materials, especially original and source materials, pertaining to the history of or in any manner illustrative of Athens, Clarke County, adjacent counties, and related areas.
- 2. To disseminate this knowledge for the enlightenment of our citizenry through preparing, editing and publishing historical materials, descriptive and illustrative of Athens and related areas through programs or historical papers.
  - 3. To promote historical research.
- 4. To promote preservation and perpetuation of historic sites and places.
  - 5. To bring together those interested in the history of these areas.
- 6. To promote and stimulate public interest in and appreciation of the history of Athens and related areas and to develop in every way an understanding of their historic past.
- 7. Notwithstanding any provision of these articles, this organization shall not carry on any activities not permitted to be carried on by an organization exempt from federal income tax under Section 501 (c) (3) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 or the corresponding provision of any future United States Internal Revenue law.

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# The Fire Companies of Athens

by Wendell Faulkner<sup>1</sup>

Many hundreds of men and women have been Athens firefighters over the past century and a half, and they each have their own piece to add to this history. Although the firefighters of Athens date back to 1849, not much has been written about us. In a typical history of Athens, some big fire or other significant event may be mentioned, but with very few details. But this is the history of the Athens Fire Department.

Athens and Clarke County began when John Milledge, Abraham Baldwin and George Walton decided that the top of a hill overlooking the Oconee River would be the perfect spot to build the University of Georgia. On December 5, 1801, Clarke County's land area was taken from that of Jackson County and named for Revolutionary War hero Elijah Clarke.

Although the University's charter dates back to 1785, the first classes were not held until 1801. In 1806, the first permanent brick college south of Chapel Hill, North Carolina, was completed and was officially named the Franklin College of Arts and Sciences, in honor of patriot Benjamin Franklin. Since this was actually the only permanent structure on the campus, the University was unofficially called Franklin College for many years, until construction of more buildings, including the New College (1822) began to make the campus look like a university.

As the University grew, the town kept pace and permanent buildings slowly spread down both ends of Front Street, later renamed Broad Street. In those days, few events could excite the townspeople more than the alarm for a fire, though most fires were small and quickly extinguished. The city fathers saw no need to fuss with municipal fire protection.

The last half of 1830 saw a severe drought, worse than many Athenians had ever seen. Crops dried up, cattle had to be driven for miles for water and wells went dry. It was in October of that year that the New College building caught fire. The blaze was believed to have started in a chimney and quickly spread through the attic. As the attic burned, flaming debris fell to the floors below, spreading the fire quickly throughout the entire building. Due to the drought, there was little or no water to be found to fight the fire.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> This paper was presented to the Athens Historical Society at the October 2004 meeting by Chief Faulkner.

Phi Kappa Hall (predecessor of the present building which was built in 1836), near the New College, was saved by cutting down green trees and placing them against the walls, shielding the structure from the intense radiant heat. Although they lacked equipment, many university students and Athens citizens volunteered to fight the blaze, some displaying admirable presence of mind in fighting the fire. John Talmadge was credited with managing the incident. Witnesses reported that he seemed to be everywhere at once, coordinating the efforts to salvage property and protect nearby structures. But, because the city did not have a fire pump, trained firefighters, or an adequate water supply, the building was consumed by fire within three hours of the alarm. This fire was a severe blow to the new university. In addition to the building, books and related supplies, all the mathematics and astronomy equipment was destroyed. Ironically, a month after the fire, it rained two and one half days, causing one of the greatest floods on record, which washed away fourteen bridges in the area.

Within a few weeks, construction on a new building began and New College was completed within two years. City life returned to normal and people soon stopped worrying about the dangers of structure fires.

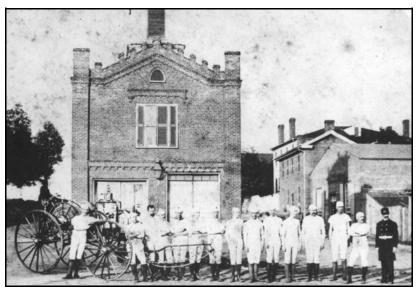
One of Athens' first industrial employers was the Athens Factory, a cotton mill occupied by the former O'Malley's Tavern and now part of the DialAmerica complex. The mill was owned by William Dearing and John Nisbet. During the milling process, cotton fibers are twisted together into thread and yarn, which would then be woven or knitted into fabric. In this process, some of the cotton fibers loosen and float about in the air so that machines and fixtures become coated with a layer of highly combustible cotton lint.

In 1834 an errant spark from a machine or perhaps the open flame of an oil lamp or a candle ignited this layer of cotton fiber and caused a disastrous fire. The building and all of its contents were destroyed. Damages were estimated to be around \$40,000, but the company was uninsured. The owners started rebuilding in 1835 and they were back in business in 1837.

In December 1836, a fire started in Cooper's shop near Broad Street. Before long, every building on the square had been consumed and the fire had spread to the adjoining block. Again, the lack of water and fire fighting equipment rendered the town helpless. One onlooker suggested that buildings in the path of the fire be blasted to create a fire break, a tactic that halted the advance of the flames, but not before 18 houses, businesses and outbuildings were destroyed. Many citizens demanded action, but little was done until 1839, when the Independent Hook and Ladder Company was formed. But without a water supply and a pump, little could be expected.

In 1849 the Athens Factory again caught fire and burned to the ground, as it had in 1834. Citizens of Athens, including factory owner William Dearing, again demanded that the city provide protection from uncontrolled fires. In late 1849, the city chartered Athens' first volunteer fire company and named it the

Hope Fire Company Number One. On February 11, 1850, the Independent Hook and Ladder Company was disbanded and the Hope Fire Company was incorporated under the direction of Captain Reuben Nickerson. It was housed in an old stable near the middle of Market (Washington) Street facing east. City officials raised taxes to pay expenses, but it would be years before Athens would get its first fire engine.



The Hope Fire Company assembles in front of the station in the middle of Washington Street. The steam pumper was pulled by the firefighters to the scene!

In 1853, construction began on three underground cisterns into which rainwater from the roofs of downtown buildings was channeled and stored. The cisterns measured twelve feet square and fifteen feet deep, providing a capacity of about 16,000 gallons per cistern. Their interior walls and floors were bricked and plastered with hydraulic cement, and accessed through cast iron doors measuring two feet square. There were two cisterns under Front (Broad) Street, one at College Avenue and one at Jackson Street, and one under College Avenue at Clayton Street.

Once completed in 1857, the cisterns were definitely a step in the right direction, but things were still going to burn up without some device that could throw the water where it was needed. It was rumored that town officials were slow to buy a fire engine because they feared someone would start setting fires just to watch the engine at work!

Regardless, no engine was available in September 1857 when a fire broke out in the furniture shop of William Wood in Granite Row near the town spring (Fulton Street at Spring Street). When discovered around one o'clock in the morning, the fire had already made enough progress that it was impossible to save the building. Other buildings nearby were also in great danger due to radiant heat and before long the fire started to spread. According to the *Southern Watchman* newspaper of September 3, 1857, the nearby buildings "were saved only by the Herculean efforts and indomitable courage and perseverance of a portion of our young men, acting under the advice and direction of our energetic Marshal, Captain W.H. Dorsey." Even so, a carriage shop, a blacksmith's shop, a house and several outbuildings were totally destroyed by the flames.

Again, to quote the *Southern Watchman*, "This is another warning. Broadway was seriously threatened this time. Have our people made up their minds to suffer the town to be utterly consumed before they adopt any precautionary measures?" Large fires were no longer few and far between. Later that same year, the Athens Factory cotton mill caught fire and burned, as in 1834 and 1849, causing extensive damage.

In November 1857, the city council decided it was time for action and appointed engineers to supervise the local fire protection. A.K. Childs was made principal engineer; R.L. Bloomfield first assistant, and Dr. R.M. Smith second assistant. A used, hand-drawn steam pumper named "Independence" was purchased from the city of Augusta and housed in the Hope Company's station. Soon after the engine arrived in Athens, a fire started "under suspicious circumstances" and burned the horse stable of Dr. Carlton.

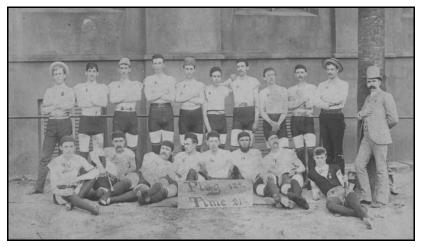
Fires were big social events in those days. Many of the town's citizens turned out to watch and lend a hand. Eventually an ordinance was passed that empowered the fire officer to "impress all able-bodied men to help fight fires, and to impose a fine of five and not more than twenty dollars on those who refused to assist." Association with a fire company brought with it a great sense of pride and social status. Often city and community leaders were members of a volunteer fire company.

Athens' second fire company, the Relief Fire Company, under the direction of Captain A.A. Franklin Hill, was organized in January 1858. The city council offered to equip the Reliefs with hose if the townspeople would buy them an engine. The people agreed and in March 1858, both the "Hopes" and the "Reliefs" had steam-driven engines with which to fight fires.

In June of 1858, the Pioneer Hook and Ladder Company Number One was formed under the direction of Captain Henry Beusse, who in 1872 would become Athens' first mayor. The Pioneer Company was housed in a building on the southwest corner of Market (Washington) and Jackson Streets, now the offices of Cook, Noell, Tolley, Bates and Michael law firm.

In November 1858, the Fire Engineers of Athens made their first report: Hope Fire Company had 42 members, Relief 48, and Pioneer Hook and Ladder

19. Soon Pioneer Hose Reel Company Number Five was established and housed in the Pioneer Station.<sup>2</sup> The Hook and Ladder Company manned a horse-drawn ladder wagon that was fitted with a manually-operated aerial ladder of about sixty feet. The Hose Reel Company manned a hand-drawn, two-wheeled cart fitted with a few hundred feet of leather fire hose wound around a reel. In the event of a fire, the cart was pulled to the fire engine and the hose was unwound from the reel, advancing toward the fire. The required length of hose was disconnected from the reel, then connected to the engine, ready for action.

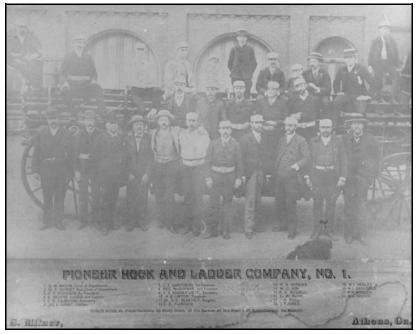


Pioneer Hose Reel Company No. 5, ca. 1880. Courtesy Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library / University of Georgia Libraries.

During a fire, anyone who could walk, run or crawl managed to get to the scene in order to watch the fun and get sprayed with dirty water

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> The photo of the Pioneer Hose Reel Company in the late 1870s or early 1880s showed the group in their competition garb of short pants, shirts and thigh-high gartered hose. Members named in the photograph and their function on the team were (L-R, standing) N. Lowrance, Wheel; Alley Cohen, 4th Rope; E.W. Charbonnier, Tongue; J.H. Beusse, Tongue; Bob Powers, 4th Rope; M. Myers, 3rd Rope; H.H. Crawford, 3rd Rope; H.N. Willcox, 2nd Rope; Will Dottery, 2nd Rope; Will Davis, Wheel; G.T. Hodgson, Captain (standing against tree); and (L-R, seated) W.A. Reaves, Lead Rope; L.E. Bailey, Spanner; R.R. Hipkins, Butman; Frank Hampton, Support; W.F. Dorsey, Drillmaster & Cutloose; Guy [F.M.] Hodgson, Pulloff; Henry Kenny, Nozzle; Gus Nicholson, Lead Rope. *Courtesy Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library / University of Georgia Libraries*.

(intentionally or not). Everyone knew somebody who was with one of the companies, so naturally, each company had its own cheering section, and the firemen would do their best to get the loudest cheers for their company. The companies would compete with each other in functions, such as setting up ladders, being the first to get water flowing, and keeping track of which company saved the most furniture, although in their haste to save the furniture, they sometimes ended up wrecking most of it. If it was a tight contest, extra furniture might mysteriously appear in one company's possession. There is a story of an elderly gentleman whose house was next to one that was on fire. The old gent finally had to arm himself and threaten grievous bodily harm to those who came to "save" his furniture.



Pioneer Hook and Ladder Company, No. 1, ca. 1880.

The fire companies also competed with other companies from around the state in contests called "musters." The purpose of these musters was training, and most importantly, to bring home the blue ribbons and bragging rights. In one such event at Macon on April 15, 1884, the Pioneer Hook and Ladder Company reportedly ran 125 yards with the truck, unloaded three ladders, placed a forty-foot ladder against

a building, sent a man to the top and back down and placed the ladders back on the truck in a time of thirty-two seconds. It was said, "Pioneer's colors never trailed in defeat, and if they did, it wasn't fair." At any rate, Pioneer was never beaten in any event in which they participated.<sup>3</sup>

In 1859, the town council resolved that the bells of the three downtown churches would be used to signal an alarm for fires. A silver dollar was awarded to the first person to sound an alarm and direct the fireman to the scene, the first dispatcher. On the other hand, a five dollar fine was imposed on anyone signaling a false alarm.

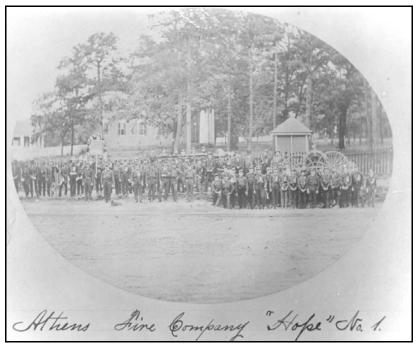
When the fire company carts and wagons were set up to be pulled by horses, a silver dollar was paid to the first person to get a team of horses to the fire station for an alarm. After a few years, the fire companies stabled their own horses and trained them to walk themselves around to the front of the engines when the stall doors were opened. The harnesses were suspended from the ceiling and could be quickly lowered onto the horses and secured.

On April 12, 1861, Fort Sumter, South Carolina, fell into the hands of the Confederate Army. Twelve days later, the first unit to leave Athens for active duty in the Civil War was the Troup Artillery, under the command of Captain Marcellus Stanley. Other officers in the group included Henry Carlton, Pope Barrow, Edward Lumpkin and Franklin Pope.

When the Troup Artillery marched down Oconee Street to the train depot on Carr's Hill, it was accompanied by a large procession of some 2000 men, women and children in carriages and on foot. Among this crowd were the Athens Guards, an infantry company still recruiting men, the Law School cadets and the Athens fire companies. By the spring of 1862, the remaining men of Athens fire companies had organized to form a home guard to protect the town while so many of Athens' men were gone to fight in the war.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> The roster of Pioneer Hook & Ladder Company No. 1, as given on the photo above, included G.W. Mason, Chief of Department; W.F. Dorsey, Asst. Chief of Department; E.R. Hodgson, Ex-President; H. Beusse, Ex-Chief and Captain; G.G. Talmadge, President, Jas. A. Grant, Captain; J.Y. Carithers, 1st Foreman; Geo. McDorman, 2nd Foreman; C.A. VonderLieth, Secretary; H.H. Linton, Treasurer; Dr. S.C. Benedict, Surgeon; C.D. Flanigen, R.R. Hipkins, W.C. Ash, R.B. Russell, G.W. Rush, J.H. Hull, J.T. Jones, W.L. Henley, H.L. Garebold, H.N. Willcox, H.W. Beusse, and torch boys Frank Carithers, Harry Grant, Jim Barrow, and Ben Steedley, with Keith Conway, the mascot. The photo was taken by S. Milner of Athens, Ga.

In the months following the Civil War, a regiment of Union soldiers was garrisoned in Athens to keep the peace and to parole former Confederate soldiers. On November 18, 1865, when a fire started in the Town Hall, soldiers of the 13th Connecticut Volunteers formed a bucket brigade and saved the building. The town gave the men a cash reward and thanked them for their bravery, a surprising display of gratitude considering the hard feelings and mistrust immediately following the war.



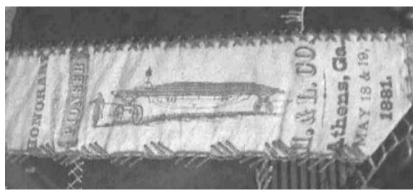
Hope Volunteer Fire Company No. 1 lines up on Broad Street, near the north campus of the University of Georgia, ca. 1860s. Courtesy of Hargrett Rare Book & Manuscript Library / University of Georgia Libraries.

In the years after Emancipation, a group of prominent black Athenians formed another Athens volunteer fire company, Relief Company Number Two, under the command of Captain Madison Davis. Housed in their station on Hill Street, near present-day Old Fire Station Number Two, was a hand-drawn, manually-operated pumper

and hose reel carriage. In later years, the steam engine "Independence" was stationed there.

In autumn 1866 when a fire started in the back of a store on Broad Street, Relief Company arrived first on the scene and quickly worked to contain most of the fire. The remaining companies mainly overhauled the damaged building, looking for fire hiding in the walls and between floors. The fire was limited to three stores. The members of Relief Company Number Two were presented commendations by the leaders of Athens for their quick action and bravery, which saved a large portion of downtown Athens.

In April of 1868, Captain Madison Davis was elected to the State Legislature and was re-elected in 1871.<sup>4</sup> In 1882, Davis was appointed Athens' Postmaster, a position he held until 1893.



The Pioneer fire wagon is shown on this 1881 ribbon given to a member of the Moss family as an honorary member of the Pioneer Hook and Ladder Company. The ribbon was incorporated into a beautiful "crazy quilt" and embroidered with many fancy stitches.

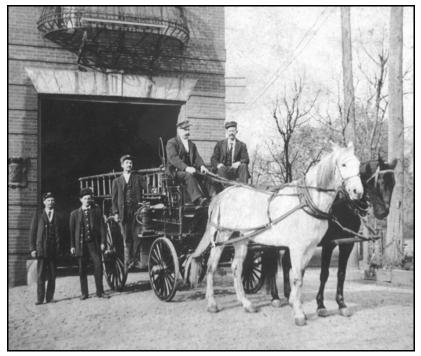
In the late 1800s, the city did not have sufficient money to replace the old, worn-out truck belonging to the Pioneer Company. Like most of Athens' fire equipment, it probably had been purchased used from another city and was only in marginal condition when put into service here.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> See also the article on Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery in this issue. Madison Davis was buried there.

In 1887 a fair was organized to purchase a new ladder truck. Later that year, when the new truck arrived on the flatcar of a freight train, a parade was organized and the members of the Pioneer Company turned out in full dress regalia to escort their new prized possession to the town square. Mr. Prince Hodgson and Mr. Andrew Cobb, representing the city, turned the truck over to the Pioneer Company after a short speech. At this time, Mr. Hodgson introduced Miss May Hull, whose mother had christened the old truck eighteen years earlier. After a short speech, she christened the new truck with the smashing of a champagne bottle, cutting Mr. Hodgson's hand on the broken glass.

The new truck was instrumental in saving countless lives and structures, serving well into the era of the professional Athens Fire Department, which began in 1891. There were a total of seven volunteer companies in Athens at this time, and the city realized that a single professional fire department was needed to protect the city. Tryouts were held to find the best of Athens' firemen to form the Athens Fire Department under the direction of Chief George McDorman.



Athens Fire Station No. 2, about 1910, with horse-drawn ladder wagon. Left to right are Station Captain Hiram Peeler, Chief George McDorman, and three unknown firemen. The horses were named Whitey and Blackie. Photo courtesy of Hugh Peeler.

In the early days of the department, fifteen paid firemen worked out of the former Hope and Pioneer stations, with headquarters at the Pioneer station. It has been said that the firemen worked 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Actually, they were allowed off for three hours per day to go home for meals and got 24 hours off every sixth day. The schedule was arranged so that only a small number of the men would be off at any given time, just as it is today.

About this time, the old steam engine "Independence" was retired from service. The tired, but triumphant old engine sat quietly in a shed outside the Relief Company Number Two fire hall. Unfortunately it was destroyed in 1893 when the shed caught fire and burned to the

ground, thus distinguishing Athens as one of the few American cities with a double-barreled cannon, a tree that owns itself, and a fire engine that burned up.

By the turn of the century, the old Hope station had begun to cause traffic problems as it sat on the center line of Washington Street. In 1901, Athens Fire Station Number Two was built on Prince Avenue at Hill Street and the old Hope Station was torn down. Also in 1901, the Southern Mutual Insurance Company presented Chief McDorman with a horse-drawn buggy so that he would not have to ride a horse to fire calls.

Athens' first automotive fire engine arrived in 1912 – a four-cylinder American LaFrance with chain drive to the rear wheels and a piston-type water pump. Capable of speeds of up to 60 miles per hour, it was said that its solid rubber tires gave one "breathtaking" ride on Athens' cobblestone streets. It was the 624th fire apparatus made by American LaFrance.

In 1912 the Athens Fire Department had outgrown its headquarters station on Washington Street – the old Pioneer Station from volunteer days – and a new headquarters fire station was built on Thomas Street at the east end of Washington. The new station was designed by Athens' city engineer, J.W. Barnett, and scheduled to open on New Year's Day, 1913.

Nearing the end of the year, the station was nearly completed when the department received its new American LaFrance truck on Christmas Eve. Maybe just a little superstitious, Chief McDorman sent the new truck and its crew to the new station on the evening of New Year's Eve, so they would both be operating before 1913. Officially, the station opened the next day. The following year, a new American LaFrance truck was assigned to Fire Station Number Two on Prince Avenue at Hill Street.

In 1913, the Athens Fire Department had one chief, one assistant chief and 17 firefighters. They manned the Chief's buggy, two American LaFrance trucks, two horse-drawn steam pumpers, two hose wagons and a horse-drawn hook-and-ladder truck. The department received alarms through a 1909 Gamewell fire alarm system with 30 boxes. The bells and indicators, restored by the late shift commander Eldridge B. Cape, are permanently displayed in the offices of the Athens-Clarke County Fire Department headquarters.

After it was retired from service, a 1915 American LaFrance, similar to the 1912 model, was put on display under a shed in Memorial

Park, where it remained for many years until it was removed in the 1960s to make room for the construction of the swimming pool.

The chief's horse-drawn baggy was replaced in January 1921 by a black 1920 Dodge five-passenger touring car with a four-cylinder engine. The very first time the Chief drove his car was January 25, 1921, when, at 2:25 in the morning, call box 22 (at Clayton and Thomas Streets) was activated by officer Ed Poss, an Athens policeman walking his beat. Seconds later, box 26 at Broad and Jackson Street was also activated.

When the firemen at Station One opened the engine room doors, they knew they were in for a long night. It looked as though the sun was coming up – from the west. Indeed, this was to be the biggest fire in Athens since 1836.

Owned and operated by Simon and Moses Michael, the Michael Brothers store was a two-story brick structure on Clayton Street adjoining a five-story building that stretched from Clayton through to Broad Street. The Clayton Street frontage ran from Jackson Street to Wall Street, while the Broad Street frontage extended half that far. The store occupied nearly three-fourths of the block.

Although the blaze is known as the Michael Brothers fire, it actually started in the Max Joseph building on the southeast corner of Clayton and Wall Streets. In the basement and on the first floor of this building was the Denny Motor Company, an automobile dealership. Many cars were stored in this area of the building and as the fire spread through the cars, their gasoline tanks began to rupture, releasing flaming gasoline to flow through the low areas of the building. Fed by gasoline flames, the intense heat quickly ignited the exposure across Wall Street to the west – the Michael Brothers store.

Due to the building's age, the dry goods in the store and the construction features of the building, the Michael Building was soon fully engulfed by fire, igniting the exposure to the west across Jackson Street, the Citizens Pharmacy. When the fire was at its peak at around 3:00 a.m., the radiant heat was so intense that plate glass windows across Clayton Street broke and the water run-off was hot enough to cause the rubber on the fireman's boots to separate from the canvas lining. Light from the flames was visible as far away as Monroe.

When Athens Mayor Andrew C. Erwin made an emergency telephone call to request help from the Atlanta Fire Department, the Seaboard Railroad dispatched a special train with two flatcars to transport two fire engines, twenty-two men, Fire Chief William Cody

and Chief Mechanic Tom Medlin. The Atlanta firemen arrived in Athens at around 8:00 a.m. The trucks were not unloaded, but the men were deployed to augment the Athens firemen. The fire had been brought under control only a few hours before the Atlanta firemen arrived. A thick brick wall and a well-organized defensive attack had prevented the flames from reaching College Avenue.

Chief Cody relieved Athens' Chief McDorman, who had earlier fallen from a ladder and broken both wrists, the only person to suffer physical injuries. By early evening, only a few hot spots remained. Later the city of Athens tried to reimburse the Seaboard Railroad and the City of Atlanta for their expenses, but neither would accept a penny. Michael Brothers department store was rebuilt in 1922, and remained open until 1953 when it was bought by Davison's, which remained in this location until moving to Georgia Square Mall in 1980.

In 1922, the fire department adopted a new work schedule. Extra men were hired and all of the firemen were divided into two shifts. Starting on Thursdays, one shift would report to work at 8:00 a.m. and work ten hours until 6:00 p.m. At that time, the other shift would come in and work the remaining fourteen hours. The shifts would then swap on the following Wednesday, with the off-going shift working twenty-four hours.

Only a certain number of firemen were allowed to leave the city limits at any given time, and all were required to live within the city limits. If someone wanted to leave town for any reason, he had to call the dispatcher and have his plan approved. If there were already too many firemen out of town, he was ordered to stay home. At this time, when any big fire would result in off-duty men being called in, it was still considered a privilege to be allowed to go home at all.

#### **Chief George McDorman**

After a fire-fighting career of fifty years to the day, Chief George McDorman retired from the Athens Fire Department on Monday, January 8, 1928. His successor was Doma Watson. At the beginning of his career, Mr. McDorman was a stoker for the Hope Fire Company, charged with building and maintaining the fire under the boiler of the steam engine pumper. He soon was promoted to engineer. Like the men of Hope Company and the other volunteer firemen, Mr. McDorman held a regular job to earn a living, working as a mechanic for the Athens Manufacturing Company. As a Hope Company engineer, his leadership and knack for fire tactics caught the eye of the Athens City

Council and in 1891 he was hired to become the chief of the brand-new Athens Fire Department.

Chief McDorman is remembered for being very exacting in the way he governed the department; many times he was called before the City Council to explain his actions – however, his decisions were ruled just. During his thirty-seven-year career as the first fire chief of Athens, hand-operated ladder wagons and steam engine-driven pumps, both pulled by horses, were replaced by internal combustion engines powering trucks that could speed along at sixty miles an hour, then pump from their own water tanks at the scene of the fire. He worked enthusiastically to bring about positive change at a time when motor cars and trucks were still considered by many to be gimmicks, experimental at best.

Athens became one of the first cities in the South to buy motorized equipment, thanks to Chief McDorman's progressive thinking. It seems that he held off until the right time, however, because the trucks he chose, American LaFrance, were among the most durable and aesthetically appealing fire engines ever made.

But his legacy was more than just trucks. During his tenure, two new fire stations were built and served for decades of everyday use and are present-day historic landmarks. Old Fire Station Number One, rebuilt in 1912, is now part of the Classic Center. Old Station Number Two on Prince Avenue, built in 1901, serves as the offices of the Athens-Clarke Heritage Foundation. Both of these stations came into service when horses pulled steam-driven pumps, remained in service until 1979, when the companies at both stations were combined and moved to the new Station Number One on College Avenue.

Station Number Three was built on South Lumpkin Street in 1950, although its floor plan was considerably different from what it is today. The station was later altered and enlarged to make room for the 1949 Pirsch ladder truck when it was assigned there. Also, the front of the station was not brick, but light-colored stone. It was very attractive, quite different from the "factory-style" architecture that the station had later. The year 1965 saw the building of Station Number Four on Hawthorne Avenue at Oglethorpe Avenue. It was similar in design to the original plan of Station Three, although Station Four also experienced changes over the years.

In 1956, the fire department inventory included three stations, 43 personnel, one 100-foot ladder truck and six pumper trucks. In 1968, extra men were hired and the overall pool of fire department members

was divided into three shifts, changed from two shifts. The work schedule was modified to the 24 hours on duty, 48 hours off schedule that continues today.

Over the years the Athens Fire Department provided fire protection for Athens and all of Clarke County. The county government decided to create its own fire department in 1974 and built Clarke County Fire Station Number One on Whit Davis Road at Cedar Shoals Drive. Soon, however, the county government realized that it did not need a fire department just yet, so the station was sold to the Athens government. It became Athens Fire Station Number Five – there is still a plaque on the wall that proudly proclaims the station as Clarke County Fire Station Number One.

In 1979, the older stations One and Two were closed and their companies moved to the new station at 700 College Avenue. For a few years the fate of each of the old buildings was undecided, but after a series of protests, debates and ideas, each former station found new occupants who would not demolish the buildings. Station Two (1901) became the new home of the Athens-Clarke Heritage Foundation, a society of preservation-minded individuals who work to preserve and maintain old buildings and historic areas in and around Clarke County.

Station One (1912) downtown stood empty for a few years, then was converted into the County Solicitor's office. Then a referendum was passed to build a civic center on the property, incorporating the old Station building. Thus old Number One was renovated once again during the construction of the Classic Center. Although the building is similar to its original design, changes were made in order for the building to be a functional part of the civic center. The engine room windows were lowered, only one of the brass poles remains, large doors were installed in the side walls, leading to other parts of the civic center, and the center truck door was converted into the box office. It is not the exact same building that generations of firemen remember, but the work was done well.

In 1982 the county government again decided that it wanted a fire department, so the entire Athens Fire Department became the Clarke County Fire Department. A new Station Number Two was built on Mitchell Bridge Road at the Atlanta Highway and Station Number Six was built on Athena Drive at Olympic Drive. These six stations housed seven pumpers, two aerial trucks, one rescue unit and a tanker. In 1991 when the citizens of Athens and Clarke County voted to combine the two governments, the fire department changed its name and emblem.

A Fire Training Center built with SPLOST funds was completed in 1999, including an administration building complete with offices, classrooms, a single-bay apparatus room, a kitchen and a restroom with showers. Also part of the complex is a drill building for conducting live burns and search-and-rescue drills, with a four-story tower for high-angle rescues and high-rise building training.

Athens-Clarke County Fire Station Number Seven on Barnett Shoals Road was built during 1999-2000 and opened for business on April 20, 2000. In a 1999 local referendum, voters approved funds that included plans for Station Number Eight at Jefferson Road at Whitehead Road, and Number Nine on the Nowhere Road, along with vehicles to equip them. Plans also called for the relocation of Station Numbers Three and Four. Both the new Station Number Three at Five Points and Station Number Four on Oglethorpe Avenue opened in 2003.

The Fire Department is indeed very grateful to the citizens of Athens-Clarke County for showing continued support and confidence in their fire department. This most recent progress is merely the latest in the long, proud history of the Athens-Clarke County Fire Department. Although the names and faces of the Fire Department and its members have changed over the years, its mission and purpose have remained the same: "To protect lives and property."

# The Boothy Incident

July 17, 1970, began as a typical summer's day in Athens. People did their best to beat the heat during the day and then ventured out into town after dark when it had cooled off.

Bob Boothy was working that night. A 27-year-old truck driver from Gainesville, he had pulled into Athens about 11:00 with a tanker full of gasoline which he was to unload at the Texaco compound on North Hull Street (near the old train depot, now the Athens Community Council on Aging, and Bethel Homes). The Texaco Oil Company maintained the compound as a distribution point for petroleum products. The company had five tanks on the premises that contained a total of 70,000 gallons.

Just before 11:30, Boothy was transferring the load of gasoline from his truck into one of the tanks when gasoline vapors found an unknown ignition source. The resulting explosion involved three of the petroleum tanks, rocking North Athens. The fireball was reported to have been 500 feet tall, visible from 15 miles away.

Athens fire engines immediately responded to the incident – who could miss that noise and light? – and spent the next six hours extinguishing the fire, although Chief Tom Eberhart reported the fire under control (not growing) within about half an hour. Mr. Boothy, the truck driver, was not killed in the explosion, but was taken to St. Mary's Hospital for treatment of severe burns.

Throughout the night, fire and law enforcement departments near Athens heard about the explosion on the radio and television. Several 55-gallon barrels of foam concentrate were brought in by neighboring departments to extinguish the fire. The Athens firefighters were reinforced by firefighters from Oconee and Hall Counties, as well as from the cities of Bogart, Colbert, Commerce, Atlanta, Toccoa and Anderson, South Carolina. Fire trucks of all sizes, shapes and colors were seen around Athens that night, as they were sent to the Texaco fire, as well as to answer the calls received on a typical Friday night.

Hundreds of windows and glass doors were shattered by the concussion of the blast, some as far away as the University of Georgia President's Home on Prince Avenue – a distance of over six blocks. Many of the plate glass windows downtown were blown out, and for most of the night merchants were in their stores to clean up and discourage looting.

Besides the Texaco plant and Mr. Boothy, the hardest hit by the explosion were the Bethel Church Homes, apartments across Hull Street from the tank farm. The sixteen buildings had been completed just over a year before and were filled to capacity. Three of the buildings were severely damaged and most of the windows were blown from the rest, necessitating the evacuation of about 200 families (500-600 people). The Red Cross, area churches and the University of Georgia dormitories were opened to receive displaced families. In all, about fifty people were injured by the explosion, but miraculously, no one was killed.

#### IN MEMORIAM

For many years the names of three Athens firefighters, Hiram Peeler, J.B. Farr and Henry Vandiver, and the circumstances surrounding their deaths, have been largely forgotten. Now, fortunately, later generations of Athens-Clarke County residents and the men and women of the Fire Department will know of their sacrifice and that of their families. We shall not forget.

#### Hiram H. Peeler

About 11:00 Wednesday night, February 22, 1928, the Athens Fire Department responded to the report of a structure fire at McDorman-Bridges Mortuary on Dougherty Street. The mortuary was a three-story brick structure with a basement at the present location of the Jessie B. Denney Tower. Trucks responded from (then) Stations One and Two to fight a small fire in one room of the establishment, which was soon extinguished. There was little damage from the fire, mainly from smoke and water.

There was an elevator in the building, and in the course of the night-time operation, Captain Hiram H. Peeler of Station Two entered the elevator through its open doors. The elevator car, however was on one of the floors above and Captain Peeler fell through the shaft to the basement below, breaking both arms, injuring his back, neck and possibly his brain.

He was rushed to St. Mary's Hospital on Milledge Avenue, where he was listed in serious condition. On Friday, February 24, 1928, Captain Peeler died from his injuries and was buried in Oconee Hill Cemetery on the afternoon of Sunday, February 26, 1928.

Hiram H. Peeler was born in Clarke County on November 25, 1861. At the age of twenty, he joined one of the Athens volunteer fire companies and was later chosen to be hired onto the paid department when it was formed in January 1891. At the time of his death, he was Athens' oldest serving fireman at age 67, with 47 years of service.

#### J.B. Farr

On the afternoon of Monday, December 20, 1937, the fire department was called out to a grass fire on Lumpkin Street. Engine One from Station One on Thomas Street responded, with Assistant Chief J.B. Farr in command. At that time, the assistant chiefs (one for each shift) responded with the first-out engine company on all emergency calls. Present-day shift commanders have a department car assigned to them for the same purpose. As the truck, a 1921 Seagrave, made its way down the hill from Broad Street, an oil tank came loose from under the truck and was struck by the rear wheels. This caused the truck to violently skid sideways. The truck spun around until it was backward, then slid off the street and down an embankment where it crashed against a large tree. The impact pinned Assistant Chief Farr between the truck and the tree,

killing him instantly. Driver Max Pinson and firefighters K.C. Llewallyn and Lawrence Bramblett were hurt in the wreck; firefighter Billy Strudell escaped serious injury.

The oil which had spilled from the loose tank cause another accident as Fire Chief E.F. Lester's car hit the oil slick and crashed into an ambulance, causing only minor damage and no injuries. Firefighter Billy Strudell stated that the tree that had cost Mr. Farr his life had saved the rest of them because if the truck had continued rolling down the embankment, it would have crushed the rest of them.

- J.B. Farr's brother Hugh responded to the scene as an employee of McDorman-Bridges ambulance service. After the wreckers had moved the wrecked fire engine away from the tree, Hugh Farr assisted others in placing the body of his brother in the ambulance, not breaking down until en route to the hospital. Assistant Chief J.B. Farr was laid to rest in Oconee Hill Cemetery on Wednesday afternoon, December 23, 1937.
- J.B. Farr was born Juddie Bernard Farr in Warren County, Georgia, in 1903. At the time of his death, he was 34 years old, an eleven-year veteran of the Athens Fire Department. He was regarded as one of the most well-liked men in the department.

# Henry S. Vandiver

On Monday afternoon, January 31, 1944, the Fire Department was called out to a grass fire in the 1500 block of Milledge Avenue. The engine was crossing Broad Street, heading south with a green light at the intersection. At the same time, a car was traveling east on Broad Street carrying two U.S. sailors en route to training in South Carolina and two college students who had hitched a ride with them. As the fire engine crossed the intersection, it was struck in the right side by the eastbound car.

As the truck was a right-hand-drive 1921 Seagrave, Captain Henry S. Vandiver was sitting on the left side of the seat. Captain Vandiver was thrown from the truck into the street, injuring him critically. The truck slid sideways until it hit the curb, then rolled over onto its side, pinning the driver's foot beneath the vehicle. The driver, Bob Yarbrough, later fully recovered. Also injured were firefighters George Wilson and Lammie Kesler. The occupants of the car were not seriously injured.

Captain Vandiver was critically injured and remained in the hospital for three weeks until he finally succumbed to his injuries on Tuesday, February 22, 1944. He was buried in Oconee Hill Cemetery on Wednesday afternoon, February 23, 1944.

Henry S. Vandiver was born in Jackson County, Georgia, in 1889. He had been hired by the fire department in 1921.

#### Athens' First Brilliant Eccentric Professor

by William Porter Kellam<sup>1</sup> and Gayther Plummer<sup>2</sup>

On January 16, 1834, at 23 years, Charles Francis McCay (pronounced "McCOY") became a tutor of mathematics at Franklin College, now the University of Georgia, for a salary of \$800. He rose rapidly; in November 1835 he became an adjunct professor of natural philosophy, then a professor of civil engineering in November 1837. He also taught mathematics, astronomy and Latin, and he had skills in French and Greek. He participated in faculty affairs, held recitations and acquired a reputation as a strict disciplinarian, in addition to being the secretary to the faculty. Nineteen years later, when he departed Athens in frustration, his salary was only \$2000.

As time passed, turmoil followed in his wake. He irritated colleagues, students often disliked him; and yet, he was highly respected and called simply "Old Mac." John and Joseph LeConte, founders of the University of California, as science-oriented students at Franklin College prior to 1842, admired him immensely.<sup>3</sup> Over his lifetime, McCay published more than 87 reports on the cotton trade, life insurance and other subjects, most of which brought admiration that persists to this day.

McCay was born March 8, 1810 in Germantown, Pennsylvania. The Presbyterian Church there provided a letter of dismissal when he moved. He attended both Princeton and Jefferson colleges and graduated as valedictorian in 1829. Both schools honored him with doctoral degrees in 1856 and 1857. He understood Socratic teaching methods and used them well.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> This biographic-abstract highlights portions of the late W. Porter Kellam's book *Episodes in the life of Charles Francis McCay*. Rights to reproduce that biography were assigned by Prof. Kellam to the second-named author, who reviewed Kellam's original research files in UGA's Hargrett Special Collections (now Hargrett Rare Book & Manuscript Library/UGA Libraries).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> C.F. McCay's *Meteorological Journal* published in the *Southern Cultivator* (1845-1849) interested this author as much as his career.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> See *Athens Historian*, vol. 7 (2001) for an article on the LeConte brothers at UGA.

Before arriving in Athens, he was influenced by Dr. Nathaniel Bowditch (1773-1838), a self-educated mathematician and astronomer from Salem, Massachusetts. Bowditch had been a seaman, a navigator and commander of a merchant vessel. He also translated *Mécanique Céleste*, a five-volume work by Pierre-Simon LaPlace published from 1799 to 1824, from French into English.

When McCay noticed four errors in the first volume, he advised Bowditch, who acknowledged McCay's corrections. Later, when McCay made a bid for advancement to professor of mathematics at Franklin College, he solicited a recommendation from Bowditch. However, the Trustees recognized that McCay's skills went well beyond mathematics and gave him a chair in Natural Philosophy (physics), then a year later created a chair in Civil Engineering which he held for five years. This corresponded to the building of the new railroad between Athens and Augusta. Eventually McCay became professor of mathematics and astronomy at the University of Georgia

McCay's first publication, *Notes on Differential and Integral Calculus*, a syllabus for mathematics, appeared in 1839. A copy of this survives in the Yale University Library. More prestige came to him following a controversial lecture which he presented to the senior class in March 1842. In that discourse, on "Matter and the Mind," he provoked some alienation with the conservative president of the University, Dr. Alonzo Church. McCay's presentation "excited much adverse criticism" among colleagues, but the students liked it and asked him to publish it as a pamphlet. His articles brought him national notoriety over the ensuing years, many of which focused on cotton affairs.

But scandal was soon to darken McCay's tenure at the University. A few students had grown to dislike McCay so intensely that on Thursday, October 3, 1839, they removed his properties from New college and burned them in a bonfire behind that building. The suspected culprits were from the most prominent families in Athens: Phinizy, Dearing, Tinsley and Jones. Controversy simmered for days and McCay was provoked to challenge Dr. William Dearing, Jr., a young physician, to a duel at the old cemetery. Dueling was illegal, so friends intervened to stop the affair. Sophomore David Tinsley, son of a long-time member of the Board of Trustees, and sophomore Jacob Phinizy confessed to having prompted the affair along with Isham Jones, and all were expelled.

Nevertheless, characters were impugned and other circumstances were serious. Remorseful, McCay resigned his chair, but was persuaded

to continue until the Board of Trustees could act on the issues the following August. For ten months, the whole episode sent gossipers into a frenzy. Stories spread to Milledgeville, the state capital, and elsewhere, though not a word was printed by the local newspaper. The Session of the Athens Presbyterian Church reprimanded McCay by suspending his communion for three months, then showed some compassion for his plight. On the other hand, the Presbytery in Augusta did not approve of the lenient treatment and recommended excommunication, but that did not happen.

On August 7, 1840, McCay submitted a letter of resignation to the University Trustees. By a margin of one vote, he was allowed to withdraw that letter, thus saving his career with the University.

Four days later, on August 11, McCay married Narcissa Williams, a devout Baptist about ten years younger than he, the daughter of Athens businessman William Williams. Their first child, a son, was born in 1841 with a physical disability. Soon, in 1843, McCay became the executor for the large estate of his wealthy father-in-law, which included the Princeton Factory, some banking interests, real estate and slaves. Thus the McCay family gained modest wealth.

But his academic interests persisted. Possibly inspired by reading a report on rainfall in France relative to the phases of the moon, in the 1834 issue of the *American Almanac* which was a part of the Franklin College Library holdings at that time, by 1845 McCay had collected eight years of moon phase and rainfall data for Savannah and three years for both Augusta and Athens, all tabulated with precision in his unique "Meteorological Journal." His weather observations and daily records for Athens appeared in the *Southern Cultivator* at three-month intervals between 1844 and 1850.

With references to changes of the moon, McCay showed that rainfall came most frequently three or four days following the new moon. Years later, the entire U.S. Army Signal Corps investigated similar observations elsewhere. McCay's original information was confirmed in 1886 in an annual report by the Chief Signal Officer. It should be noted, however, that since World War II, those observations have been ignored by the federal meteorological communities as unreliable for weather outlooks.

After the New College burned in 1830, the new library received \$1000 per year for books. Some 6000 volumes were on hand and the literary societies on campus held another 4000 books. Among the library holdings were the British registrations on mortality and other standard works on the contingencies of human life. These references

supported McCay's hobby as an agent for the Mutual Life Insurance Company of New York, which he pursued from 1846 to 1853. Thus McCay had the means to work avocationally as an actuary for the Southern Mutual Insurance Company in Athens. In 1848 he became a Director of the company, and then proprietor of their life insurance department.

The Clarke County tax digest for 1853 evaluated McCay's property at \$16,260, composed of 20 acres, six slaves, town lots, monies, household properties and much more. He then lived in the Williams home on the northeast corner of Broad and Lumpkin streets, very near the Newton House hotel and across from the original Presbyterian Church. His University salary, outside income, inheritance and other wealth gave his family a good position in life and in the community. By then, "Old Mac" was irreparably frustrated with President Alonzo Church, whose petty rules had become unsuitable to the professor. He resigned his chair on December 14, 1853, and others would soon follow.

Meanwhile, McCay was invited to take a professorship in mathematics and mechanical philosophy at South Carolina College with a salary of \$2500. He did so with some chagrin because his wife's roots were in Athens and, as time will reveal, he liked Franklin College. Nevertheless, he moved to Columbia, South Carolina, in January 1854. The college also allowed him to maintain his relationship with the Southern Mutual life insurance company, a privilege not granted to other professors.

At South Carolina College, he advocated more mathematics, physics, engineering and agriculture in the curriculum, a radical departure from the classical curriculum used by so many universities. Further, McCay wanted students to have more time for declamations and composition, and to put more emphasis on them for deriving the average student rank. All of this generated resistance, and in addition, his erudition was beginning to conflict with their traditional southern perspective.

Then unexpected circumstances caused his election as president of the college, a job he did not seek. This new appointment elicited a deluge of protests from citizens opposed to a Yankee! He ignored some of the ill feelings generated by partisan factions and set to work sorting out a series of administrative problems, including three vacancies on the faculty. Moreover, an ugly student culture emerged which instigated civil disobedience, riots and armed conflicts. The academy in 1856 was chaotic.

Nevertheless, by January 1857, McCay persuaded both professors John and Joseph LeConte to join his Carolina College faculty to teach physics and geology, respectively. The LeConte brothers had earned bachelor's and master's degrees at the University of Georgia, then had gone to New York, become physicians and otherwise pursued advanced studies. In 1846 and 1853 each accepted a professorial chair at Franklin College. Joseph returned to Georgia with revolutionary concepts about evolution and the geologic age of Earth. Both had new ideas about academia which became unacceptable to President Alonzo Church. However, McCay was impressed with their modern information.

The LeConte brothers were respected, well published scientists and they fit in with McCay's ideas to change the academe on campus. The brothers did little to help, though, as McCay was unable to reconcile insurgencies among his faculty and to quell student hostilities. After 18 months as an administrator, he resigned Carolina College in May 1857, thus retiring from academia completely after 26 years. Regardless of all the turmoil, he did introduce innovations that generated long-term benefits for the college and for the LeConte brothers, who later produced medicines for the whole Confederacy.

McCay moved to Augusta in late 1857. He was still involved with the Southern Mutual Life Insurance Company as a director and soon attached himself to other business ventures. He found a sorry state-of-affairs within the various insurance businesses and attempted to correct them by preparing a legislative bill in 1859-1860 to protect the insured and to regulate insurance companies and create an Insurance Commissioner. However the bill died promptly, but the concept survived until 1887 when new laws were enacted to provide for the type of insurance commissioners that now exist nationwide and in Great Britain.

The Augusta Savings Bank opened in 1860 with McCay as its treasurer. That year he also became the purchasing agent for an import-export company which traded cotton during the Civil War. From that business arose legal problems that persisted into the mid-1870s, causing McCay to lose thousands of dollars.

Although many businesses failed during the War, the niches vacated were readily filled with new ventures. McCay's astute skills in banking and insurance capitalized on these opportunities so that by 1869 his wealth exceeded \$128,000. He then sold his home on prestigious Greene Street at McIntosh Street in Augusta, and, more importantly, established a life-long trust for his wife and family. He put most of his assets in that trust.

As a matter of interest, it has been noted that at the end of the Civil War, eight slaves valued at \$16,000 had been attached to the McCay family, possibly on real estate near Athens. The McCay and McCoy names still occur among black families in Athens.

McCay's enduring success as a consulting actuary soon prompted a move to a bigger market, Baltimore, in 1869. For the next twenty years the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad retained him to oversee its Employees Relief Association. He also had a role in the Voluntary Relief Department for the Pennsylvania Railroad, and was the founder and treasurer for a relief fund for the clergy of the Presbyterian Church, South. He became the actuary for the State of Maryland's Insurance Department in 1872.

During his later years, McCay's philanthropic nature reached fulfillment. He decided in 1848 to assist the state of Pennsylvania, so he deposited \$377.35 in a trust designed to grow until the corpus equaled the debt of the state. His interest calculations were meticulous and he made subsequent contributions, but eventually that trust stagnated, possibly because the debt grew faster than the earnings. In 1909, the trust amounted to about \$21,000, a sum which was divided among McCay's heirs.

During the Civil War, he and Mrs. McCay donated much money to war relief funds. Their second son, though physically unfit to join the Confederate army, became a relief rider for a general. When, in 1865, Georgia needed a new state constitution, McCay contributed \$5000, as a loan, for that purpose. In 1869, he gave the University of Georgia \$1000 and an account from which to draw \$1000 from time to time for binding library materials.

Then he gave an extraordinary gift of \$7000 in railroad bonds to the University of Georgia in 1879. With compound interest, this trust was expected to grow to one million dollars in one hundred years, but McCay's timing was eccentric. He stipulated that the corpus stand untouched for 21 years after the demise of 25 possible interlopers whom he named, and that the interest should go to pay for salaries of professors or lecturers. As those stipulations matured, the trust approached \$800,000 and the interest was then tapped to support a new faculty member. Since 1974, those funds have been used as McCay directed, but if the trust had matured to the full 100 years, as interest rates soared above six percent, the corpus would have far exceeded the one million dollar expectation.

Of the eight McCay children, the first five were born in Athens, one in Columbia, South Carolina, and two in Augusta, Georgia. Some led

exemplary lives and all of the siblings displayed genetic anomalies. The eldest son was a lawyer, a genius among the 42 students of UGA's second law class of 1861. He followed in his father's footsteps as a loyal employee and ardent supporter of the University. The second child, a girl, lived about two years and may have been buried in Athens' Old City Cemetery on the UGA campus. The third helped to chase Stoneman's Raiders until he died from typhoid fever. The fourth, a maiden lady, lived 83 years in the McCay home. Her sister, the fifth child, also lived in the McCay home as a widow. She married William McMechen Buchanan and had two children. Buchanan was buried in Baltimore and she may be buried there with him or possibly in Augusta's Magnolia Cemetery. The sixth child, born in Columbia, was about a year old when his body was interred in the Magnolia Cemetery in Augusta, with an elegant monument. The seventh was color blind, yet graduated as a naval cadet and became a renowned civil and electrical engineer in Baltimore. His daughter (1896-1964) was the last surviving McCay grandchild. The eighth and youngest McCay child coowned a lumber company, lived as a bachelor in the McCay home in Augusta, although he was considered quite a ladies' man.

Charles F. McCay died in Baltimore of heart disease on March 13, 1889, five days after his 79th birthday. His estate contained meager assets because he had invested his wealth in the trust for his family. Narcissa Williams McCay was a very small woman with a commanding presence. She took a long-delayed trip to Europe in 1902 at age 82. She died on December 9, 1907. In death as in life, McCay provided resting places for his family. Burial records in Augusta's Magnolia Cemetery include Charles F. McCay, his wife Narcissa Williams McCay, five of their children, a William H. McCay and an infant Johnson.

The intellectuality of Charles Francis McCay was lauded by a friend who said that "Old Mac" was "one of the most brilliant scholars ever to serve on the University of Georgia faculty. ... Engineer, mathematician, author, one-time president of South Carolina University, banker ... and he became one of the nation's outstanding insurance actuaries." The epitaph on his red granite obelisk reads:

"Who – at all times and everywhere – gave his strength to the weak, his substance to the poor, his sympathies to the suffering and his heart to God."

# **James Longstreet**

by Goodloe Y. Erwin, M.D.1

James Longstreet was born January 1821 on his grandfather Longstreet's farm in Edgefield, South Carolina. His mother, Mary Ann Dent Longstreet, was a cousin of Julia Dent Grant, wife of General Ulysses S. Grant. James was a nephew of Augustus Baldwin Longstreet, author of *Georgia Scenes*.

As a boy, James enjoyed swimming, hunting and fishing on his father's farm in White County, Georgia, between Gainesville and Cleveland, and was an excellent horseman. He was a warm and generous young man. His father, James Longstreet, died in 1835 and young James moved to Alabama with his mother. When he was old enough to go to college, he returned to Georgia, spending much time with his uncle Augustus Longstreet, and attending Richmond Academy in Augusta.

James Longstreet received an appointment to West Point where he knew Ulysses Grant and William Sherman; his roommate was William Rosecrans and his classmates included George Pickett, D.H. Hill, and Lafayette McLaws.

In 1848, he married Maria Louisa Garland, daughter of General John Garland. They had ten children, two of whom died in infancy and three of whom died in the scarlet fever epidemic of 1862. The marriage was otherwise happy and he was a caring family man.

During the Mexican War, Longstreet led his men into action in three battles, and was wounded once. He served under General Zachary Taylor, received frequent promotions and ended the war with the rank of Major in the U.S. Army.

As the troubles between the North and South mounted, Longstreet opposed secession but sided with the South. In June 1861 he was interviewed by Jefferson Davis and received an appointment of Brigadier General, reporting to General P.G.T. Beauregard. He participated in the Battle of First Manassas with distinction and in October was promoted to Major General. At that time Beauregard sought to have Longstreet designated as his second-in-command, but

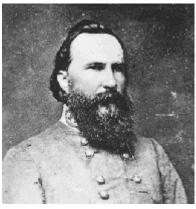
<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Dr. Erwin presented this paper to the Athens Historical Society in May 2003.

was denied. In October, General Joseph Johnston, commander of the Virginia forces, tried unsuccessfully to promote Longstreet to replace Beauregard as his second-in-command.

Longstreet had an outstanding staff, including Moxley Sorrel, Peyton Manning and Porter Alexander. With them, he could manage a division of 10,000 men with ease. Service with Longstreet was demanding, but he never failed to reward good work. He himself had remarkable energy and stamina. At age 41, he was able to go for long periods without food or sleep.

As Lee's second-in-command and commander of the 1st Corps, Longstreet served with distinction at the second battle of Manassas and at Sharpsburg. At Fredericksburg where he designed the famous defense at Marye's Heights, his casualty rate was 1500, compared with Federal losses of 8,000.

Longstreet's remarkable physical stamina allowed him to make meticulous observations of the action on the battlefield, often driving his staff to exhaustion in



General James Longstreet

coordinating his troop movements. He was considered by many observers to be the best combat officer in the South, and in directing troops once the fighting had started, he probably had no superior on either side.

When the Pennsylvania campaign began on June 3, 1863, Lee was lost without Stonewall Jackson, who was killed in May. The 2nd Corps was under the command of General Richard Ewell, and the newly organized 3rd Corps was led by General A.P. Hill. Thus, two of Lee's three corps were led by untested commanders.

Worst of all was the disappearance of Jeb Stuart's cavalry for several critical days. Lee's instructions to Stuart on June 23rd had been three-fold: (1) "Protect the army's flanks and bring word if the Union Army left Virginia;" (2) "You will have been able to judge whether you can pass around their army doing all the damage you can; (3) In either case, you must move on and feel out the right of Ewell's troops [2nd Corps], collecting information and provisions." For a period of several days when Stuart lost contact with Lee's army, Lee had no idea where Stuart was.

On June 28th, when one of Longstreet's spies came into camp with the news that the Federal Army had a new commander, General Meade, and that they were close by, Lee ordered a concentration of his troops at Gettysburg. At times his forces had been stretched out over 70 miles. On July 1st, the 3rd Corps under A.P. Hill, marching toward Gettysburg, encountered Federal forces, the 1st and 11th Corps, just outside the town. Later Ewell's corps, coming back from Carlisle, encountered forces north of town on Culp's Hill outside of Gettysburg. He had an opportunity to take the hill, but ceased fighting at 4 P.M. and went into town to talk with Lee.

During the battle on July 2nd and 3rd, there was poor coordination of the units in the 2nd and 3rd Corps. A.P. Hill was ill during this time and General Lee was up all of one night with diarrhea. There also is some evidence that Lee may have had a heart attack a month or so before the battle. In his letter to Jefferson Davis in late July 1863, Lee stated, "I have not yet recovered from the attack I experienced this past spring. I am becoming more and more incapable of exertion and I am thus prevented from making the personal supervision of the operations in the field which I feel to be necessary."

Factors in the Confederate defeat at Gettysburg have been discussed for more than 140 years. Most authorities agree that the absence of General Stuart in the last days of June handicapped Lee's operations by the lack of knowledge of the enemy's position and movements. The second factor was the failure of Ewell to take Culp's Hill on July 1st, and third was the extended, five-mile line of troops stretching from Culp's Hill to Round Top. Lee suggested to Ewell that moving to the right would concentrate Lee's forces. Ewell and Early disagreed and felt that they could take Culp's Hill.

In September 1863, Longstreet's corps was moved south to help General Braxton Bragg at Chattanooga. Bragg was a close friend of President Davis, but no one else in the Confederate Army could get along with him. When Longstreet arrived by train at Ringgold, Georgia, on September 19th, Bragg had no one there to meet him, and Longstreet spent seven hours trying to find Bragg. Longstreet had no knowledge of the battlefield as the battle had started the day before. Nevertheless, Longstreet's corps routed the Federals when Hood's division broke through a gap in the Federal lines. He was pitted against his old West Point roommate, General Rosecrans. It was probably the greatest achievement of his career.

President Davis next sent Longstreet to seize Knoxville. He was not successful and spent the winter in east Tennessee, rejoining Lee in

April. In May of 1864 Longstreet was seriously wounded by friendly fire. With his windpipe punctured and his right arm paralyzed, he was disabled until October 1864. In April of 1865 he headed the commission to work out the details for the surrender at Appomattox.

After the war, Longstreet settled in New Orleans, becoming a successful cotton factor and the president of an insurance company. Well liked, his friend D.H. Hill described him as a "genial fellow, full of fun and frolic."

Early histories of the war rarely mention Longstreet; Lee, Stonewall Jackson and Jeb Stuart were the favorite heroes. However, Longstreet was a favorite of many enlisted men. Freemantle, the British observer, wrote that the Southern soldiers invariably spoke of him as the best fighter in the Southern army. Other European observers spoke of him as one of the best leaders of the Southern army. General Porter Alexander stated that Lee considered Longstreet's general skills to be the best in the South and the North.

In 1867 Longstreet wrote a letter for publication recommending that the South cooperate with the Republican plan for reconstruction. His uncle, Judge Augustus Longstreet, read the letter and advised against its publication: "It will ruin you if you publish it." Longstreet ignored the advice and published the letter in the *New Orleans Times* on June 8, 1867, touching off a debate from Texas to Maine. The thought that Southerners would make peace with the Republican Party was a threat to southern civilization. Moreover, Longstreet actually joined the Republican Party, endorsing his friend and relative, U.S. Grant, for president. When he was elected, Grant appointed Longstreet Postmaster of New Orleans at a salary of \$6,000.

Generally speaking, no group of men incurred greater dishonor than the minority of white Southerners who supported the Republicans. They were called "scalawags," and were thought to be traitors to their region and the white race. Longstreet's family was ostracized. His transformation from being a respected businessman to a social outcast was swift. This social ostracism led him to leave the Episcopal Church and become a Catholic.

Meanwhile, during the period from 1870 to 1890, Confederate heroes were enshrined into Christian martyrdom. When Lee died in 1870, he was one of a large number of Confederate heroes, yet, even Lee was still second to Stonewall Jackson in the eyes of most Virginians. Lee's historical status gradually changed, though, as many of his former staff officers made it their business to enshrine his memory, sometimes building up his reputation by attacking Longstreet.

Memorial associations were formed to raise money for statues. General Jubal Early and Lee's chief of artillery, General William Pendleton, made speeches all over the South. These men carried out a carefully organized plan of character assassination against General Longstreet. Each charged that, at the battle of Gettysburg, General Lee had ordered Longstreet to attack at dawn on July 2nd, and Longstreet's failure to attack until 4 P.M. lost the battle, and thus the war. This was pure fabrication.

Jubal Early, more than any other man, convinced 19th century Americans and 20th century historians that Longstreet's military career deserved censure. Actually, the failure of Ewell and Early to take Culp's Hill on July 1st was one of the major blunders of the battle of Gettysburg. Later in life, Early was a central figure in an infamous lottery scandal in Louisiana, which caused thousands of Southerners to lose thousands of dollars. When he became vice-president of the Southern Historical Society in 1871 and attacked Longstreet in 1872, Early was confident that most Southerners would automatically support him. Longstreet, who was seen as a Judas figure, would make a perfect scapegoat for the Confederate defeat. Lee was dead and no longer able to set Longstreet's military record straight.

At first Longstreet was silent and believed that such slander would never be believed. However, his growing reputation as a scapegoat would no longer allow him to rest on his wartime accomplishments. During his silence, the Southern population proved more than willing to believe the worst about him. All the while, Lee's venerators gained increasing acceptance for the fictitious version of the battle of Gettysburg.

He was appointed general of the Louisiana militia and in 1873 the predominantly black police force of New Orleans was incorporated into the militia. This event sparked several riots. In helping to quell the riots, Longstreet gained more infamy.

Much of Longstreet's time from 1870 to 1880 was used in a war of words which he lost badly. Neither humble nor gentle, and stung by a decade of abuse, he lashed out blindly, making excessive claims for himself. Worse yet, with Early as president of the Southern Historical Society, and the editor of its journal a friend of Early, the *Journal of Southern History Society* published a clever orchestration of innuendoes and unsubstantiated accusations which "proved" Longstreet's guilt for many of his contemporaries, as well as for many future historians.

Douglas Southall Freeman published a biography of Lee in 1934 which won a Pulitzer Prize and became a bestseller. Using the Southern

Historical Society papers as his reference, he continued the fiction of Longstreet's insubordination at Gettysburg. Modern historians Bruce Catton, Clifford Dowdy and Shelby Foote also picked up the anti-Longstreet fiction at Gettysburg. In 1987, however, William Piston published *Lee's Tarnished Lieutenant* and finally exposed the fictionalized account.

In 1875, at the invitation of the editor of the *Gainesville Southern* newspaper, Longstreet returned to Gainesville, Georgia, purchasing two properties there. The first was the Piedmont Hotel, which served as a winter home. His main residence was a farm outside the city.

Politics was Longstreet's main reason for moving back to Gainesville. His primary interest was the job of federal marshal of Georgia. In 1879 he became Postmaster of Gainesville and in 1881 was appointed federal marshal of Georgia, but due to corruption in the office before his tenure, he lost this appointment. When John B. Gordon became Longstreet's Democratic political rival, Gordon was glad to exploit Early's denigration of Longstreet. Throughout the 1880s and 1890s, members of the anti-Longstreet group published books and articles making him the scapegoat of the Southern defeat.

His beloved wife died in December 1889 and his own health was not good. The wounds from the battle of the Wilderness left his right



General James Longstreet and his wife Helen Dortch Longstreet, 1901.

arm paralyzed and his voice weak and hoarse. In 1892 Longstreet's country home burned and all of his souvenirs and records were lost. He had no insurance and could not afford to rebuild. He spent much of his time during this period working on his memoirs, even though official papers from Washington were difficult to obtain and the fire had destroyed the material he had been collecting.

Still, there was much happiness in Longstreet's autumn years. Reunions, remarriage and reentry into politics were his main interests. When Grant died in 1883,

Northern reporters discovered that Longstreet was the sole major figure who would testify to Grant's military genius. Then, at age 76, Longstreet fell in love with the attractive, vivacious Helen Dortch who had attended Brenau College in Gainesville with his daughter. In 1897 they were married at the Governor's mansion in Atlanta.

Helen Dortch Longstreet was born in Carnesville, Georgia, in 1863 and was reportedly the first woman to hold state office in Georgia, that of Assistant State Librarian 1894-1897. She took up the fight to clear Longstreet's name of any wrongful act at Gettysburg and published *Lee and Longstreet at High Tide* in 1905.

Upon the death of her husband in 1904, Helen Longstreet was appointed Postmistress for Gainesville, holding the position until 1913. After this she was Associate Editor of *The Farmer's National Magazine*, edited a weekly newspaper and contributed to many magazines. She also lectured on many topics, once making a transcontinental speaking tour in the interest of economic justice for agriculture and labor. From 1912 to 1913, she led the fight to prevent the building of a dam at Tallulah Falls, securing a legislative resolution directing the Governor to bring suit against the power company. However, the Georgia Supreme Court ruled in favor of the power company. She also championed civil rights legislation. In 1948 the American League of Women Voters gave her an award for her brochure on race relations. From 1943-1945 she worked as a riveter in the Bell Bomber Company in Marietta. She developed dementia in 1956 and was hospitalized in Milledgeville until her death in 1962.

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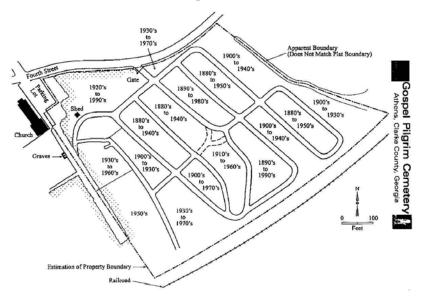
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# Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery: A Rich Resource in African-American History

by Al Hester, Ph.D.

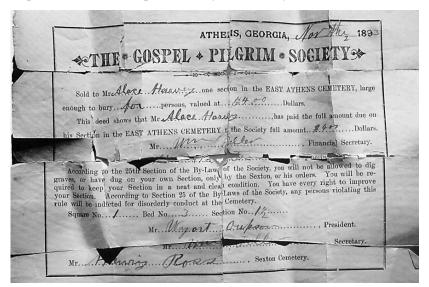
Only seventeen years after the Civil War ended, a group of African American citizens of Athens, Georgia, made a decision to establish what would become the city's largest and most historic black cemetery, where an estimated 3,000-3,500 persons would be buried.



Map of the Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery shows burials by time period, courtesy of Southeastern Archeological Services, Inc.

Today, extensive restoration efforts are being made at the nine-acre cemetery at Fourth and Bray streets in Northeast Athens, to reclaim it from decades of neglect. A goal is to help today's Athens residents, both black and white, understand its significance. The effort to reclaim the cemetery is led by the East Athens Development Corporation, Inc. (EADC), a non-profit group, with help from scores of volunteers and

financial aid from several grants. It has been my privilege to work with the EADC as a volunteer to research the history of Gospel Pilgrim, to help identify grave sites and to tell its story to the general public. All of us who are working to bring back the cemetery to its once well-ordered beauty and importance are constantly in awe of the efforts made by nineteenth and twentieth century African Americans to establish a respectable and decent place to bury their family members and friends.



A tattered 1893 burial lot certificate for the East Athens Cemetery to one "Alace" Harvey established the cost of a lot large enough for four graves at \$4.00. "Mr. Alace Harvey" actually was Alice Harvey Hill, who died June 5, 1938, the mother of Mrs. Doris Hill Poyner, who showed the certificate to the author. President of the Gospel Pilgrim Society in 1893 was Wyatt Upson; secretary was William Teller, and Henry Ross was the cemetery sexton. Courtesy of Mrs. Doris Hill Poyner.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> The EADC is a 501(c)3 non-profit Community Based Development Organization and Community Housing Development Organization, incorporated in 1993 to facilitate the economic empowerment of East Athens residents and the economic revitalization of East Athens. Winston Heard is executive director of EADC and Vincent White is project manager for the Gospel Pilgrim activities of EADC.

African Americans buried in Gospel Pilgrim include one Reconstruction era black legislator from Clarke County, Madison Davis, leading doctors, educators, black business leaders and hundreds of "ordinary" persons, who contributed to the development of Athens.<sup>2</sup>

About 1882, Athens African Americans founded a new fraternal order and burial society called the Gospel Pilgrim Society. The first reference to this new society is on the deed in which the group purchased most of the acreage which would become the Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery. The Clarke County deed was recorded August 17, 1882, and the sellers were heirs of a prosperous white blacksmith and business man named William P. Talmadge. His wife, Elizabeth A. Talmadge, was named his administratrix and also was attorney-in-fact in selling what would become the Gospel Pilgrim property. The purchase price was \$238.50.3 Clarke County Probate Court records indicate that Mr. Talmadge had considerable land-holdings and investments, including stocks in leading Athens manufacturing companies and railroads.4

Green Bullock was listed in the deed as representing the Gospel Pilgrim Society as its president in the purchase of 8.25 acres for the cemetery, fronting along the road, then known as the Hull Road, which would become Fourth Street. The rear boundary of the cemetery is marked by the right-of-way of what is today the CSX Railroad, earlier the Seaboard Air Line Railway. The Society added to its tract by purchasing an additional three-fourths of an acre in 1902 from George P. Brightwell for \$80.00.5 The Society sold off a small 60-by-100-foot northwest corner portion on Fourth Street to the adjoining Springfield Baptist Church.6

To date, no one has determined how the Gospel Pilgrim Society received its name. There are no living members as far as can be ascertained. A chapel called the Gospel Pilgrim Chapel is located in

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> It is possible a second African-American legislator during Reconstruction, Alfred Richardson of Clarke County, is also buried there, but his grave has not been located. Hearsay persists that he is buried there, although he died in 1872, ten years before Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery was established.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Clarke County Deed Book DD, p. 121.

 $<sup>^4</sup>$  The William P. Talmadge probate records are found ranging from 1877 to 1892 in Box 43, Folder 10 (Estate) 28 pp. and in Box 110, Folder 153 (Estate), no total pages indicated.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Clarke County Deed Book UU, p. 520, recorded July 5, 1902.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Clarke County Deed Book ZZ, p. 164, recorded July 10, 1905.

Bradford, England, but no association is apparent.<sup>7</sup> On November 8, 2003, Pope John Paul II called himself a "Gospel Pilgrim on the world's highways."<sup>8</sup>

The Gospel Pilgrim Society was one of numerous cooperative organizations set up by African Americans in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to assure themselves burial insurance, financial and social support. Michael L. Thurmond, current Labor Commissioner of Georgia and a native of Athens, discussed the fraternal organizations in his book, *A Story Untold: Black Men and Women in Athens History*, a pioneering African-American history book.

By 1912, there were 29 different lodges in Clarke County alone. Gospel Pilgrim was one of these, but it also furnished what was the largest and most elaborate black cemetery in Clarke County. "Each lodge sponsored elaborate social events, gave deceased members pompous funerals, and dressed in distinctive uniforms on special occasions," Thurmond wrote. "When one of the lodge members became ill or died, the lodge would extend financial assistance to his or her family."

"People paid a dime a week, and when they died, they were guaranteed a big funeral," Thurmond told reporter Conoly Hester in a local newspaper story in 1986. 10

In addition, the Gospel Pilgrim members and their families could purchase lots in the cemetery, which was laid out with some landscaping and terracing, a pleasing plan and roadways to reach the family lots.

It is possible that founders of the Gospel Pilgrim Society took their cue from a 1880 column written in *The Athens Blade*, a militant black newspaper published in Athens by William A. Pledger and W. H.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Archive pages of West Yorkshire Archive Service, online at www.archives.wyjs. org.uk/b97accs.htm, obtained via Google, July 28, 2004.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> "Address of John Paul II to the Pilgrims from Croatia," online at www.vatican.va/holy\_father/john\_paul\_ii/speeches/2003/november/documents/hf\_jp-iispc\_20031108\_croatian-pilgrims\_en.html.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Thurmond, Michael. *A Story Untold: Black Men and Women in Athens History*. (Athens, GA: Green Berry Press, 2nd Edition, 2001).

Original story copy from manuscript files of Conoly Hester. The story was written Jan. 31, 1986, and published in the *Athens Banner Herald*.

Heard.<sup>11</sup> The column noted that blacks in Augusta had begun a cooperative effort to form a benevolent society to help widows financially after the deaths of their husbands. "Let the society be one that can command one thousand members in the State – say two hundred in Augusta, two hundred in Atlanta, two hundred in Savannah, one hundred in Athens, one hundred in Rome, one hundred and fifty in Macon, and a hundred in Columbus and a less number in smaller places," the unsigned column suggested.<sup>12</sup>

In the nineteenth century, African-Americans in many places embraced the idea of the burial association according to an Internet article entitled "Going Home". <sup>13</sup> "Burial associations ... served as a kind of insurance that helped offset the cost of funerals. Burial associations agreed to provide a casket, burial garments, and funeral services, thus fulfilling the twofold need of most African Americans to practice frugality while ensuring their loved one could be 'put away nicely'," the article said.

The establishment of Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery came at a time when black Athenians were uniting to obtain better education, more economic advantages and forming a cohesive community in the face of racial prejudice and segregation. Just as in life, blacks often were segregated in death or given less adequate sites for their burials.

Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery would be Athens' first major cemetery controlled by African Americans, although there were smaller cemeteries associated with rural black churches in the county. Several other major black cemeteries were established in Athens, but appear to contain no marked graves earlier than the 1880s graves in Gospel Pilgrim. Several of these cemeteries contain hundreds of graves and are desperately in need of restoration, just as was Gospel Pilgrim. These cemeteries include the Brooklyn Cemetery on Alps Road, the Spaulding Cemetery across Arch Street from East Friendship Baptist Church, the Brotherhood, or Brother Union Cemetery, also on Arch Street and

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> See "The Black Journalists" chapter reprinted from *A Story Untold* in the Fall 2003 edition of *Athens Historian*, Vol. 8.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> "There Is Need of a Benevolent Society That Will Protect Widows," *The Athens Blade*, Feb. 6, 1880, p. 2. Pledger was buried in Gospel Pilgrim when he died in 1904.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> Website of Tennessee Civil War National Heritage Area Center for Historic Preservation at Middle Tennessee State University, http://histpres.mtsu.edu/tncivwar/about/index.html. Site accessed July 24, 2004.

continuing on Dublin Street, and the Knights of Pythias Cemetery in the same area.<sup>14</sup>

None of the black cemeteries have perpetual care or an endowment to keep them up over the years, and as groups or families of the dead have moved away or died out, few are left to care for the cemeteries.<sup>15</sup>

Just a sampling of the graves marked with inscriptions indicates that many of Athens' African-American leaders or their families chose Gospel Pilgrim as a burial place. Madison Davis perhaps is the bestknown person buried at Gospel Pilgrim. Born a slave, the mulatto Davis was elected as a Republican to represent Clarke County in 1868 as was Alfred Richardson. Although more than two-dozen black legislators were later expelled from the Georgia Assembly and Senate, including Richardson, Davis and a few others were allowed to remain in the Legislature because it could not be proven they were more than oneeighth black.<sup>16</sup> Davis served a second term in the Legislature and was active in Republican politics for decades. He was appointed Athens' first black postmaster in 1888 and became respected by both blacks and whites. Stories about Davis' final illness and death were carried in the Athens Daily Banner. One article on the front page of the Aug. 20, 1902, issue praised him: "No Negro ever lived in Georgia who was more greatly loved by his white acquaintances. ... He has always been the friend of the white man with whom he has been associated."17

Also buried at Gospel Pilgrim was Monroe B. "Pink" Morton and members of his family. Like Davis, Morton was active in Republican politics and was appointed Athens' postmaster. He was also an excellent building contractor, and among his fine buildings was the Morton Building, housing the Morton Theater and other offices and buildings in downtown Athens.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> Existing grave markers were transcribed by volunteers from Athens Historical Society in the 1990s and published in *Athens-Clarke County, Georgia Cemeteries* in 1999.

Athens-Clarke Commissioner Harry Sims and some others are making efforts to keep the front portion of Spaulding Cemetery clear of brush. A front part of this cemetery is still in active use.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> Thurmond, A Story Untold, p. 28.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> Evidently Athens' white residents had mellowed considerably in their opinion about Madison Davis. "When Madison Davis was appointed postmaster in Athens, the white citizens draped the post office with black cloth as a sign of mourning," Donald L. Grant says in *The Way It Was in the South* (New York, NY: Carol Publishing Group, 1993), p. 135. Davis was re-appointed to a second term, however

Among the many pioneering educators buried in the cemetery was Samuel H. Harris. In 1922 he was principal of Athens High and Industrial School, which under his administration became the first black public secondary school to be accredited in Georgia. Harris was also a national leader in vocational education. Another educator buried at Gospel Pilgrim was Mrs. Minnie Davis, an ex-slave, who taught black children for 40 years. She was interviewed in 1938 about her slavery memories. Among early twentieth century doctors and dentists buried in the cemetery are those from the notable



Monroe B. Morton

Jackson family – Aubon, Farris, Thomas and Samuel.

Much of Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery has yet to be cleared of its ivy, wisteria and privet gone wild. A \$100,000 grant from the Georgia Department of Labor in 2003 has made possible clearing of about 20 per cent of the cemetery, concentrating on the front side near Fourth Street. Other grants and volunteer efforts have resulted in roughly clearing the avenues throughout the cemetery. Other grants have been made by the Athens-Clarke Heritage Foundation, the Georgia Forestry Commission and the Athens Employers Committee. No permanent endowment has yet been set up, although planning was underway in 2004. In the summer of 2004 capital improvements such as roadways, sidewalks and curbs at Gospel Pilgrim were included in the priority list for \$361,000 funding in the 2005 special sales tax election (SPLOST). The Gospel Pilgrim project is considered vital to the East Athens community and Athens in general, the citizens' committee approving the priority list for consideration indicated.

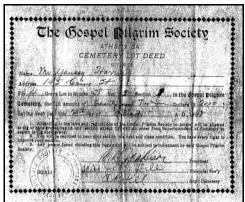
A master plan for renovation and restoration was completed in 2003 by the Jaeger Company. Archeological surveys and mapping are

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> See "Black Educators and Their Schools" chapter from *A Story Untold*, reprinted in the *Athens Historian*, Vol. 4, 1999.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> Thurmond, A Story Untold, p. 129.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> "Plantation Life as Viewed by an Ex-Slave," Federal Writer's Project, United States Work Projects Administration (USWPA), Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Georgia Narratives, V. 4, Part 1, pp. 251-265. (Digital images made available from *America's Memory*, Library of Congress web site, accessed July 28, 2004.)

underway by Southeastern Archeological Services, Inc. Tom Gresham, principal investigator for Southeastern Archeological Services, has estimated that there are as many as 3,500 graves, the majority unmarked.<sup>21</sup>



A cemetery lot deed to Mr. Yancey Harris of 145 Caine Street, for a four- grave lot in Square D, Bed 2, Section 1, for the price of \$20, paid March 29, 1928. B.L. Jackson was president of the Gospel Pilgrim Society, Miss J.D. Lile, financial secretary, and A.R. Hill, the cemetery superintendent.

In the preliminary work more than 300 inscribed gravestones have been located: 239 have birthdates with 22.6 percent dating before or during 1865. The earliest birthdate given was 1780 for Celie Pope, whose gravestone indicated she lived 115 years. A black Celia Pope was recorded in the 1880 Clarke County federal census. enumeration indicated she was born about 1790.22 Her tombstone death date is 1895. It is common to find only approximations of birthdates for African Americans born in eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, since many had birth n o precise

#### information.

A survey of marked burials indicates that burials in this cemetery reached their peak in the 1940s and after that point began their decline. The last superintendent of Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery was Alfred

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> Interview with Tom Gresham by the author, July 20, 2004, Athens, GA.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> 1880 Clarke County, Georgia, Census, Enumeration District 12, page 279A.

Richardson Hill, son of well-known interior decorator Squire Hill.<sup>23</sup> Squire Hill married Althea Richardson, a daughter of Alfred Richardson, the African-American legislator for Clarke County mentioned earlier. Thus, Alfred Hill, the last surviving representative of the Gospel Pilgrim Society, was the grandson of Alfred Richardson.

Several efforts were made in the 1970s and 1980s to clean the cemetery, but no continued campaign was possible until the status of the cemetery was determined. Michael Thurmond and Howard Stroud were among clean-up leaders as many Athens residents worked to restore the cemetery during the 1980s.<sup>24</sup> These efforts, however, were not followed up until 2002-2003 when the East Athens Development Corporation was given the job of overseeing restoration at the cemetery.

In an effort to locate the owners of the property, Athens attorney Jim Warnes performed a Clarke County title search. When no owner could be found, it was declared an abandoned cemetery in 2002. Warnes located a state law which allows local governments to use funds to care for abandoned property without the local government assuming ownership or responsibility.

By the summer of 2004, considerable progress had been made to clear the front section of the cemetery, to survey its boundaries accurately, and to locate graves and other features. The Department of Labor grant has made possible the employment of workers from East Athens on the cemetery project. The cemetery has already become a real resource for educating area teachers and students about African American history and culture, especially in East Athens. Field trips and programs in the spring and summer of 2004 have toured the cleared portions of the cemetery.

A project is also underway to preserve the landscape and treescape of Gospel Pilgrim. In July 2004, a \$45,000 "Streetscape" was being constructed along Fourth Street in front of the cemetery, including

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> Interview with Mrs. Hughie Wise by the author, Dec. 8, 2003, Athens, GA. Mrs. Wise and her husband took care of Alfred Hill in his last illness, as they did his wife in her final illness. Alfred Hill died April 29, 1977 and is buried in East Lawn Cemetery. By that time, Mrs. Wise said, the cemetery was overgrown and uncared-for. Alfred Hill also had his wife's remains removed from Gospel Pilgrim and reinterred in the East Lawn Cemetery, Mrs. Wise said.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> "SPLOST 2005, Project 048-EADC Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery Restoration," proposal prepared by the EADC for submission to the citizens' committee for project selection, May 13, 2004, p. 3.

sidewalks, retaining walls, tree plantings and a new gate for Gospel Pilgrim, according to Winston Heard, director of the EADC.

Workers at the cemetery during the summer 2004 say that not a week goes by without visitors coming to try to locate the graves of their family and relatives, showing a renewed interest in the cemetery. Some relatives have begun clearing their family plots. Eventually grave location will be facilitated by easy-to-use computer locators. A handicap-accessible shelter with a touch-screen computer kiosk inside the cemetery to locate graves is one portion of the SPLOST project.

"Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery can have a huge cultural impact," Heard commented. "I don't think people realized the significance of the contributions made by those who are buried in the cemetery." The cemetery also provides an opportunity for the upcoming generation. "It's living history for them. When an elementary school student visits and finds that ex-slaves are buried here, the past becomes vivid.

History's not just something in a book – it's actually here."<sup>25</sup>

Michael Thurmond, the first African-American legislator from Clarke County since Reconstruction, frequently visits Gospel Pilgrim for meditation and thinking through problems. He became one of Gospel Pilgrim's supporters years ago. "When I go to Gospel Pilgrim, the people buried there counsel me if I listen closely," he said. As a historian, he knows he is surrounded by the great and humble of the Athens African-American community.

"I call Gospel Pilgrim the missing link, the bridge between the past and the present. Cleaning the cemetery is not honoring the dead as much as honoring the contributions and



A silent avenue in the Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery encourages a stroll to ponder its history. Photo taken by Al Hester, 2003.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> Interview with Winston Heard by the author, July 20, 2004, Athens, GA.

troubles of these people. They made all the sacrifices and laid the groundwork for where we are today."  $^{26}\,$ 

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> Conoly Hester's interview with Michael Thurmond, Jan. 31, 1986, Athens, GA.

# T.R.R. Cobb, Educator and Evangelist

by Henry Ramsey

Editor's Note: T.R.R. Cobb, who lived from 1823 to 1862, is well known for his legal scholarship and writings, his activities in the formation and struggles of the Confederate States of America, his profound interest in advancing educational opportunities for both men and women, and his lifelong religious zeal. Apparently he was something of a poet as well, as attested by a brief work dated January 1, 1859, the opening date of Lucy Cobb Institute, named for his daughter who had died at the age of 13 years.



T.R.R. Cobb

This poem by Cobb, and a second poem signed by his wife Marion, were written in an autograph album given to Lucy Chapin, a 21-year-old graduate of Mount Holyoke College in Massachusetts, who had come to Athens from Chicopee, Massachusetts, to teach at Lucy Cobb. She taught until 1862 when she fell ill with consumption, at which time she tried to go home to Massachusetts but was unable to pass through the Union lines at Washington, D.C. She went instead to her sister's plantation home in Mississippi where she died.<sup>1</sup>

In letters to relatives while teaching in Athens, Lucy Chapin referred to life at Lucy Cobb Institute. One letter describes her activities:

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Lucy Chapin, daughter of Titus Chapin and Emily McKinstry, was born August 27, 1838, in Chicopee, Massachusetts. These excerpts are taken from letters written to her sisters Emily Chapin of Chicopee and Roxana Chapin Gerdine, wife of Gen. William Louis Crawford Gerdine of Athens. It was to the Gerdine plantation at West Point, Mississippi, that Lucy traveled when she was turned back at Washington, D.C., while trying to return to Chicopee. Lucy died March 21, 1862, at West Point, Mississippi.

We have a very pleasant set of girls here for boarders whom I like very much. I teach arithmetic, geography, a class of young ladies in grammar, history, botany, Latin, reading, and calisthenics – so you see my time is well taken up. And sit in the school room and meet one evening in the week from seven to nine when the girls study. Then a certain section of the girls I have to look after to see that their wardrobe is in order and lecture on habits of neatness. Fancy me doing it.

*In another she mentions the religious passion of T.R.R. Cobb:* 

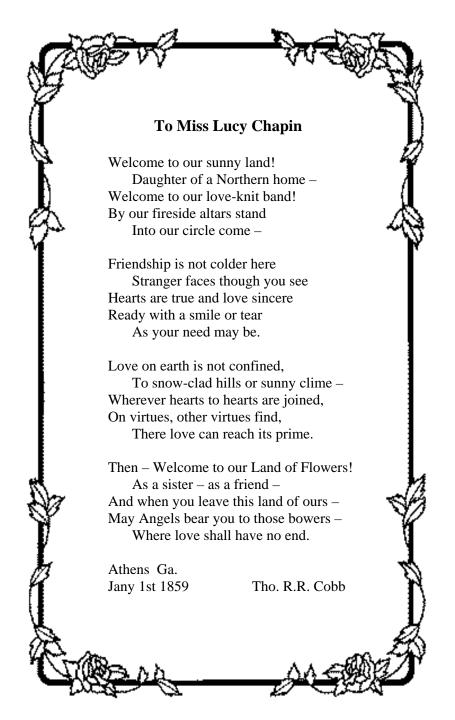
Athens, Ga. Nov 12, 1860

Dear Sister Em,

... I did not know that I had neglected to tell you of my joining the church. I did so on the 7th of Oct. feeling that, although so very unworthy it was a privilege that I would not like to lose. I am a weak sister still, dear Em, but it comforts me that I have praying friends who will surely remember me at the shrine of grace. It does not seem strange that Mr. Cobb wanted all his teachers praying people. A teacher has so much influence over the young minds that she should walk carefully and prayerfully, that she should govern herself and strive to cultivate not only the head but the heart. It is really dreadful to think of the numbers who enter upon school regardless of the immortal destiny of their charges. I have reproached myself bitterly for my sad neglect, but hope to have strength given me to enable me to do better in the future.

> Love to all, Lucy

Cobb's poem, written for the opening of the school in 1859, on reflection, is a beautiful and tragically prescient bit of writing addressed to this young lady.



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- Hamilton-Phinizy-Segrest House on Milledge Avenue, now a sorority house
- Homewood on Dearing Street, a private residence (guided tour by John Barrow)
- Jester House on Cobb Street, now a private residence
- Lumpkin-Mell House, originally stood on corner of Milledge Avenue and Rutherford Street, demolished in the 1960s
- E.K. Lumpkin House on Prince Avenue, now part of the Young Harris United Methodist Church complex
- Michael Brothers' Mansions, originally stood on Prince Avenue between the UGA President's Home and the Taylor-Grady House, demolished in 1960s
- Moss Side on Cobb Street, now a private residence
- Newton House on Prince Avenue, now a doctors' office
- UGA President's Home on Prince Avenue (tour of house and box gardens)
- Sledge-Cobb-Spalding House on Cobb Street, now a private residence (video tour of downstairs interior)
- Taylor-Grady House on Prince Avenue, fully restored by Athens Junior League, available for parties, weddings, etc.
- Thomas-Carithers House on Milledge Avenue, now a sorority house
- Thurmond-Cofer House, demolished in the 1960s
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- Marshall, Charlotte Thomas, ed. *Oconee Hill Cemetery: Tombstone Transcriptions* for that Part of the Cemetery West of the Oconee River. 149 pp., map, indexes. 1971. (out of print)
- Thomas, W.W. *Map of Athens*. 1974. Reprinted by Athens Historical Society, 36" x 45", sepia and moss green ink on cream stock. 1974. \$15.00
- Cooper, Patricia Irvin, ed. *Papers of the Athens Historical Society*, Vol. II, 147 pp., illustrations, index. 1979. \$10.00
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