

Reminiscences
and
Recollections of Old Savannah

By
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L. S. Howdree
at 96
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MEMORIES OF ISLE OF HOPE¹

Elsewhere in this narrative, I have spoken of having worked eighteen hours out of the twenty-four, in an unsuccessful effort to put the old Savannah Republican (newspaper) upon a paying basis. This, of course, was very unwise on my part, for no man can work that number of hours a day for that length of time without feeling the bad effects of it. And so it proved in my case. For at the expiration of that time, my health was so impaired, that my family physician, Dr. J. M. Schley, advised me to go out and live, "on the Salts" for a year.

Acting on his advice, I rented a place at the Isle of Hope from Mrs. Annie G. Stubbs (now Cann) and moved there with my family, in the spring of the year 1873. The place consisted of about four acres of land and a dwelling house and outbuildings. The lot fronted south on the Isle of Hope river. The improvements were on the front part of the lot, and on the back part, was a very rich garden spot of an acre or more, upon which I used to raise all the vegetables the family could use.

The dwelling house was a two story building on a ground floor, with a piazza running along the whole length of the southern front. The rooms were numerous, but not large.

The place was only a ten minutes' walk from the depot of the railroad connecting the Isle of Hope with Savannah. Trains left at 8:00 o'clock in the morning and returned in the late afternoon and night, making it very convenient for those who were engaged in business in Savannah to go in to business in the morning, and return at their convenience in the afternoon or night.

Not many months after we moved to the Isle of Hope, my youngest child, about two and a half years old, named Francis Lewis, died of diphtheria. This is the first

1. First MS. written at the earnest request of his family but which he wished put in here.—M. G. W.

death to occur in the family. Frankie was an unusually bright little boy, and his death was a great disappointment and sorrow to us.

At this time, and for several years previous, Mr. and Mrs. James Gallaudet, my wife's father and mother, and Mr. and Mrs. Robert Erwin, my wife's sister and her husband, and their two children, Robert Gallaudet and James Brailsford, lived in Savannah in a house owned by Mr. Gallaudet, on the northwest corner of Bull and Jones Streets. At the expiration of the year for which I rented the place at the Isle of Hope, my health was completely restored, but the family were so satisfied to remain there that it was decided to rent for another year, in fact to live there as many years as we could rent the property. The second summer we were there, Mr. Gallaudet, who had retired from active business and thought he would like the quiet of an out-of-town home, proposed to rent out his Savannah house, and he, his wife and Robert Erwin and his wife, make their home with us. *And this they did, and made their home with us for the balance of their lives.*

During the yellow fever epidemic in Savannah in 1376, my eldest daughter, Alice and her husband, Henry E. Backus, and their two children, Martha and Henry, refugeed with us at the Isle of Hope. With this addition to our household, there were eighteen of us under one roof. The house, likewise our hearts, was big enough for all.

After the death of Henry E. Backus from yellow fever, Alice Backus and her son and daughter made their permanent home there.

Late in November, after the epidemic had abated to such an extent that it was not considered at all risky to go to the City, our old, faithful Irish nurse, Bridget Mahany by name, who had been with us for nineteen years, and had taken care of all of the children except

the three eldest, wishing to visit her sisters and brothers, whom she had not seen for several months, went to Savannah one day, intending to return before nightfall, but was overpersuaded to remain at night. A few days after she returned to the Isle of Hope, she developed a virulent case of the fever, and died within a week.

Without any apparent reason except a general giving way, Mr. Gallaudet died in the month of October, 1879, aged eighty-three. His death made the fourth that occurred in the house during the six years we lived in it.

One day, just at nightfall, it was discovered that a fire had broken out on the western side of the house, just where the roof joined the kitchen chimney. My wife was notified, and requested to shut the parlor door, which was at the foot of the staircase leading up to the third story, and to make Belle and Meta continue playing the piano and singing, and to let the other children make as much noise as they chose to, so as to keep Mr. and Mrs. Gallaudet from hearing our footsteps as we went up and down the staircase, carrying water to extinguish the fire. Not ten feet from the fire there was a dormer window, and from this vantage point a dozen or more well-directed buckets of water poured upon the roof, found their way to the fire, and quickly put it out. The ruse that we practiced was so successful that Mr. and Mrs. Gallaudet never knew to the day of their death that the house had been on fire.

By way of parenthesis, I will here mention that several years afterwards, while the house was occupied by the Stubbs family, a fire broke out one morning about breakfast time, *at the identical spot*, and made such headway before it was discovered that nothing could be done to check it, and the house, together with the greater part of its contents, was quickly burned to the ground.

Some time during the last year for which I rented the Stubbs house, Mrs. Stubbs notified me in writing that at the expiration of my term she wanted the premises

for the use of herself and family. When I came home in the evening I read the letter aloud and then remarked that there was nothing left for us to do but to go back to the city to live. All with one accord said, "Don't go back to the city if it can be helped. We would rather live at Isle of Hope. See if you can't get another house here, no matter how small it is, we will bundle up together and make it do. We would rather stay at the Isle of Hope."

Just at this time it so happened that I had an opportunity to buy at Sheriff's sale one of the largest and most eligible pieces of property at the Isle of Hope. It was only one door east of the Stubbs property. It consisted of a four-acre lot fronting 450 feet on the river and running back 375 feet, and forty-seven acres of land back of it, about fifteen acres of which was cleared, and had been under cultivation. Near the middle of the four acre lot on the front was a large one and one-half story wooden dwelling house, on a thick tabby foundation. After I got through remodeling this house to my liking, I had a house with nineteen rooms,—seven in the basement, six on the floor above the basement, and six on the floor about that. There were three rooms on each side of a ten foot hall on the first story, and a like number on each side of a ten foot hall on the story above. All the rooms on both stories opened into each other. And there was a ten foot piazza on the east, south and west sides of the first story, and a piazza just like it on the story above. All the windows on the piazzas were cut down to the floor. This was done to utilize to the fullest extent the delightful sea breezes which prevail in the summer, making it more desirable as a summer residence. The home was also so located as to points of the compass that the piazzas on the east and south were completely cut off from the north, northeast and northwest winds which prevail in the winter. No matter how

cold the day, it was always comfortable and pleasant on the south and east parts of the piazza, making it very desirable as a winter residence also.

There were sixteen of us who moved from the Stubbs place to the new house,—my wife, myself, eight children and two grand-children, my wife's mother and her aunt, and Rob Erwin and his wife; my mother and my brother Ben came to live with us sometime later, and when the two Erwin boys were at home on vacation, the household numbered twenty in all. Though the number was large, the roof was wide enough to cover, and our hearts big enough to take them all in.

With the exception of an occasional discordant note (and let us throw the mantle of Christian Charity over that) the harmony of the household remained undisturbed. Selfishness was banished from our thoughts and never permitted to come inside of the family circle. The active principle which was the governing motive of the household was *affectionate courtesy* towards each other, each in honor preferring the other. It was this underlying principle of which my wife and I never wearied, by precept and example, to instill into the hearts and minds of our children, and we were fortunate enough to be permitted to see our teaching bear fruit one hundred fold not only in the lives and practice of our own children, but in the lives and practice of our grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Happy is the household that banishes selfishness and practices at all times and under all circumstances this beautiful principle of *affectionate courtesy* towards each other.

Elsewhere in this paper I have stated that, of the forty-seven acres back of the front lot on which the house stood, fifteen were cleared and had been under cultivation. Later on I cleared five acres more, making twenty in all. Upon these twenty acres, I used to raise vegetables for the Northern markets, with more or less

success each year. This I continued to do for several years, but had to give it up because it did not yield profit enough to pay me for the care and attention I had to bestow upon it, or for the risk and uncertainty attending all such ventures. Just over the picket fence separating the front lot from the farm land, I had a rich garden spot upon which I raised in great abundance a variety of vegetables for family use, also cantaloupes and watermelons; and sugar cane ad libidum for the children. We had pears and figs and delicious scuppernong grapes in season. The scuppernong is the only grape known to me that grows to perfection in this comparatively damp climate. We raised chickens and ducks in limited numbers. We had fish, crabs and shrimp from the river,—and as to milk, we had in the summer time not less than fifteen quarts a day,—milk to drink, milk to cook, milk for clabber, and clabber for curds, cream for coffee, cream for oatmeal, cream for curds, for butter and for ice cream, in fact, we had dairy products in the greatest abundance,—five or six kinds of vegetables from the kitchen garden, poultry from the yard, and fish and crabs and shrimp from the river. Our dining table literally groaned every day under its weight of abundance. We were seldom, if ever, without one or more guests in the house, and on Sundays we often had to set one or two extra plates at dinner for friends who just “happened in.” There was always an abundance for all, and some to spare. We were not rich in pocket, but we always had an abundance of everything that was wholesome to eat and to drink, in fact, you may say, “we fared sumptuously every day.”

There was one thing which gave the children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren more enjoyment perhaps than anything else, and that was swimming in the open river at or near full tide, when the water was at its clearest and best. There were a dozen or more in the water at a time, some diving, some swimming out

to the middle of the stream, and one or two swimming across the river, and others disporting themselves in various ways. All, even to the youngest great-grand-child, could swim like ducks. It was a beautiful sight to see, and one which I always looked upon with pleasure, for the young people seemed to enjoy the sport far beyond my ability to describe it. These were halcyon days, but halcyon days do not last forever. "There are no skies so blue that clouds may not wander through."

For seven years counting from Mr. Gallaudet's death, in October, 1879, our skies were cloudless blue, but clouds now began to wander through. The first domestic sorrow we had was the death of my wife's mother, Mrs. Margaret S. Gallaudet, who died on November 2nd, 1886, aged eighty-three, and is buried in the Erwin lot, Laurel Grove Cemetery. She was the first to die in the new house. The next was my daughter, Margaret Brailsford, (Meta) aged thirty-two, wife of Samuel A. Woods, who died at Savannah on the 11th of September, 1888, in less than a year after she was married, and is buried in the Woods' lot next to ours in Bonaventure Cemetery. Then my brother, Benjamin Hopkins Hardee, who died of paralysis at St. Joseph's Hospital, Savannah, on the 6th of March, 1889, and was buried in the Philbrick lot in Laurel Grove Cemetery by the side of his two sons, who died in infancy. His wife was Eliza E. Philbrick. She, too, is buried in the same lot. Ben was fifty-four years old. Next was my daughter, Martha Gallaudet (Mattie), aged twenty-five, wife of Abbott Thomas, who died at Darien, Ga., August 27, 1889, in less than a year after her marriage. Her body was brought to Savannah and is buried in the family lot in Bonaventure Cemetery. My mother, Mrs. Isabella Seton Hardee, died at the Isle of Hope on the 21st of June, 1890, aged eighty-three, and is buried in the Lewis lot in Laurel Grove Cemetery. Then Robert Erwin, "Uncle Robert," as he was called in the family, husband of my wife's sister,

Margaret Ann, died of "Angina Pectoris" at Tate Springs, Tennessee, July, 1894, aged sixty-two, and is buried in the Erwin lot in Laurel Grove Cemetery. My wife, whose maiden name was Martha Jane Gallaudet, died at Mrs. Raymond Demere's in Savannah, on the 21st of March, 1900, in the sixty-eighth year of her age, and is buried in the family lot, Bonaventure Cemetery. Harriet Caroline Brailsford, sister of Mrs. Gallaudet, died at Mrs. Withers' on Gaston Street, east, Savannah, on the 7th of February, 1905, and is buried in the Erwin lot in Laurel Grove Cemetery. Robert Gallaudet Erwin, son of Robert Erwin and his wife Margaret Ann, died suddenly at his country estate near Hartford, Conn., on the 13th of January, 1906, aged fifty-two, and is buried at Hartford, Conn. Margaret Ann Erwin, my wife's sister, died in Savannah, at Miss Ellen McAlpin's, on the 20th of November, 1919, and is buried in the Erwin lot in Laurel Grove Cemetery. She was eighty-five years of age.

Of the twenty who were at one time living in the Isle of Hope house as one family, ten are still living (1923). Myself and three daughters, Alice Neufville, Isabella Seton, and Harriet Brailsford, and my three sons, Charles Henry, James Gallaudet, and Robert Erwin, and my two grandchildren, Martha Gallaudet Backus, wife of Dr. Thomas Pinckney Waring, and her brother, Henry Lindsley Backus. Also Col. James Brailsford Erwin, son of Robert and Margaret Ann, graduate of West Point Military Academy, ex-United States army officer, retired on account of age limit, now living at Pasadena, California.

This ends the list of those of our Isle of Hope household who have died since November, 1879, and I have also given a list of those of the house who are living at the present time, (October, 1923).

The rest of the story is soon told. Deaths, marriages, removals and other causes reducing my family to three, (myself, and my daughters, Isabella and

Harriet), the Isle of Hope house was too big a proposition for the three of us to handle and consequently, no longer available to us as a summer home. I therefore made up my mind that it was best that the property should be sold as soon as a satisfactory offer could be obtained for it. In the meantime, not thinking it advisable to rent it, I let my grandson, Henry L. Backus, and his family, have the use of the house and grounds, subject to no other condition except that one of my daughters and I should have the privilege of spending our summers with them if we saw fit to do so. I think they occupied the premises from 1916, until the property was sold early in the year 1920 to Ex-Mayor Wallace J. Pierpont, who has spent a large sum of money in remodeling the house, and in beautifying the grounds, making it one of the most beautiful and attractive pieces of property of the kind on the near-by sea-coast of Georgia. I hated to part with the property, for it had become very dear to me from old associations, but "necessitas non legem nescit."

And now let me say a word or two about myself.

On the 9th of August, 1923, I was ninety-three years of age. On the 13th of February, 1883, when I was in my fifty-third year, I was elected City Treasurer, over two other candidates, and have been re-elected without opposition every two years since, thus completing forty years of continuous active service in that capacity on the 13th of February of the present year. Notwithstanding the fact that I was ninety-two years and six months old in January, I was re-elected in that month for another term of two years, ending in January, 1925. Whether or not I am going to live long enough to complete this term also is a matter for the future to answer. Within the four months just passed the question came very near being answered in the negative, as will be seen later on.

In the summer of 1919, when I was eighty-nine years old, I asked for and obtained a leave of absence for five

weeks, which I spent with my granddaughter, Mrs. Thomas Pinckney Waring, at their summer home at Saluda, N. C. I came back very much improved in health and strength, so much so indeed, that losing sight of the fact that I was "an old man" and might not be able to do as much, or as continuous office work as I used to do when I was a younger man, I drove away as usual at my work for the next four years, without asking for, or thinking of a vacation. Such close and continuous application to the duties of the office began after awhile to tell on my health, but so gradually and so imperceptibly, that I was conscious of it only after my health was so much impaired that I had to give up and go home for a rest on May 31st. I confidently thought that a few days' rest would be all I needed, but I was greatly mistaken, as the sequel will show.

Instead of a few days' rest being all I needed to make me "all right" again, I have been away from the office four months, and I think it very likely that it will be a month more before I will be able to go back to duty, even in part.

I now began to suffer from insomnia, couldn't get any refreshing sleep. I lost all appetite for food, and soon began to grow so lean in flesh and so weak in body that I couldn't walk across the floor without the help of a walking stick in my right hand, and one of my daughters supporting me by the left elbow, and I was otherwise almost unable to help myself in any way. I continued to go down, down, so far down that I landed at last so perilously near to the brink of the grave that it seemed to me that there was nothing in God's world to keep me from falling into it. I lost all hope of ever getting well, and made up my mind that the time of my departure was at hand, and was not at all unwilling to go, but my time had not yet come. By the grace of God, the skill of my "beloved physician" and the help of sound

vital organs, I am still in the land of the living, and have so far recovered my health and strength that I am still capable of enjoying life.

Whether or not the rest of my days on earth be few or many, God only knows, but whether they be few, or whether they be many, the wish of my heart is that I may depart this life before any of those now living, who are near and dear to me, are called upon to go.

Though somewhat the worse by reason of age, I am grateful that things are no worse than they are. I still have much to be thankful for. My memory is good, and my mind as clear as it ever was. My nerves are strong and do not show any signs of shakiness, as can be seen by this specimen of penmanship. I still have one hearing ear, and one seeing eye. The hearing of the ear, though somewhat impaired, is still good enough for all the ordinary uses for which the ear is created, and the sight of the seeing eye, though a little the worse for the use, and I may say, the abuse of so many years of constant service, is still good enough to enable me to read ordinary print with my every-day reading glasses, without the help of a magnifyer.

Taking all these manifold blessings into consideration, I should be justly accused and convicted of gross ingratitude if I were guilty of taking a pessimistic view of things as they are. On the contrary, I am full of gratitude for the past and for the present. For surely goodness and mercy have followed me all the days of my life, and I feel that I can truthfully say from the bottom of my heart:

“When all Thy mercies, oh my God,
My rising soul surveys
Transported with the view, I’m lost
In wonder, love and praise.”

For twenty or twenty-five years of my middle life I had to care for and provide a house and home for a "small multitude," but the back was suited to the burden, and did not break. For that reason I will not leave behind me when I go much of this world's goods. But I leave you something far better. I leave you a *Good Name*, which is better than riches.

God bless you all, my children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

(Signed) C. S. HARDEE.

October 3, 1923.