Glimpses

Items of recent and historical interest from members of The Heritage Library

Vol. 3 No. 2 Fall 2011

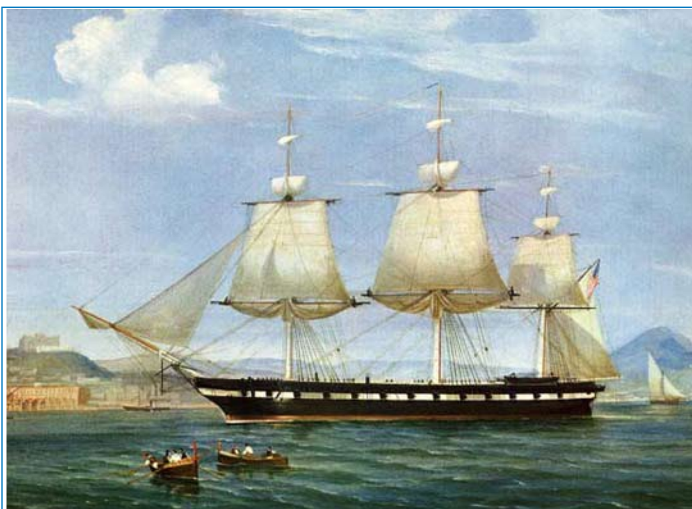
Civil War Profiles

Josiah Tattnall, Confederate Hero

Josiah Tattnall, the officer commanding Confederate naval forces at the Battle of Port Royal Sound, was an interesting person with a colorful background. He had a career of nearly a half century in the United States Navy, strongly devoted to the defense of the country's flag and Constitution. His career could have filled (and did fill) a book; we give here some of the highlights.

Josiah's grandfather had come from England and settled in South Carolina in 1700. Josiah's father, also named Josiah, was born in Beaufort but later moved to Georgia, where he was eventually to become prominent politically, serving as a Senator and later as Governor.

Josiah was educated in England (the family still had ties there); he returned to the United States and in 1812 was appointed Midshipman at the age of 17. As a young officer he was quite dapper, remarked by friends as fearless, well-spoken, and knowledgeable. He also seems to have been somewhat hotheaded (he was involved in at least two duels).



The USS **Constellation** *was the first ship on which Midshipman Tattnall saw service. It was the last all-sail ship built by the U.S. Navy. Today it is a National Historic Landmark, preserved as a museum in Baltimore Harbor. This image is from an 1862 painting by Tomaso de Simone.*

Mediterranean Duty

Commodore Josiah Tattnall in his pre-Civil-War uniform.

In 1815, Tattnall had a part to play in the Second Barbary War. He was then serving on the *USS Epervier,* a British-built ship that had been captured off Cape Canaveral in the War of 1812 and sent to Savannah for repairs. The *Epervier* was ordered to join the fleet of Stephen Decatur, which was to proceed to the Mediterranean and stop the harassing of American shipping by Barbary pirates. Confronted with this squadron, the Dey of Algiers readily capitulated, a peace treaty was signed, and the *Epervier,* its mission completed, was to return to the U.S. with a copy of the treaty and some captured flags.

But when the *Epervier* set sail, Josiah was not aboard; an officer attached to the *Constellation* asked Josiah to trade places with him. Josiah, whose first service was on the *Constellation* and who seemed to enjoy Mediterranean duty, consented. Their respective commanding officers approved the exchange, and the officer headed home. The *Epervier* passed through the straits of Gibraltar on July 14, 1815, and was never heard from again. (She may have encountered an Atlantic hurricane; one was reported on August 9.)

In Mexico

By 1836, Tattnall was in command of the *Pioneer* when it was given a sudden and unexpected assignment. That year, Santa Anna, the president of Mexico, was captured in Texas following the Battle of San Ja-

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cinto. The Texans, wary of holding such a prominent prisoner, sent him to Washington. There Santa Anna signed a treaty ending the conflict, and the government in Washington decided that Santa Anna should return to Vera Cruz.

Together with his chief aide, General Juan Almonte, Santa Anna was put aboard the *Pioneer,* commanded by Tattnall, and the *Pioneer* set sail for Vera Cruz. When they arrived at their destination, there was a huge and ominous crowd gathered on the pier, angry at the loss of the Texas territory and prepared to shoot their former president on sight. Generals Santa Anna and Almonte, knowing they were facing a dangerous crowd, and fully expecting to be shot, nevertheless prepared to disembark. Then Tattnall appeared in full uniform, took Santa Anna by the arm, and said, "General, I will see you to your hotel."

As they stepped upon the wharf, a sudden silence fell over the crowd; then, as if in recognition of an act of profound boldness, the band struck up and shouts of "*Viva!*" were heard. A Lt. George Sinclair, who was present, said, "Tattnall knew the danger of the move, but danger was always a welcome guest to him. He was made a lion of in Vera Cruz."

The *Saratoga* Unmasted

In March of 1843 Tattnall was in command of the sloop-of-war *Saratoga*. He had sailed from Portsmouth, New Hampshire, with the benefit of a light breeze. At 11 o'clock at night the wind suddenly became a "severe gale," bearing with it snow and sleet and reducing visibility to less than half a mile. The masts, sails, and everything on the ship quickly became coated with ice. The *Saratoga* was being blown toward the rocks. The sails were stiff with ice and impossible to furl. By 3 a.m. it became obvious that the masts might have to be cut away. By 9 a.m. the ship found itself close to the lighthouse on the Isle of Shoals. The pilot from Portsmouth was still on board, and an attempt was made to return to that port. But the heavy sea and the tide were against them. Tattnall, facing the rocky shore, realized that not a moment was to be lost.

When the order was given, officers and men sprang into work. The ship was anchored, the masts cut away and put overboard, all in less than eight minutes. The *Saratoga* rode out the gale and eventually limped back into Portsmouth. Tattnall was fully expecting a Court of Inquiry, but instead letters poured in commending him for quick thinking and saving the lives of one hundred and forty men.

The *Saratoga* was refitted and spent the next two years off the coast of Africa where its duty was to protect "legitimate American commerce and break up the slave trade so far as it was abetted by or carried on in United States vessels." It was hot and monotonous duty and Tattnall's health was affected. Returning to the States, he went on leave until 1846, when war was declared between the United States and Mexico. You will recall that Tattnall was familiar with the waters off Vera Cruz and he knew that he would need a vessel of light draught. Therefore he urged his assignment to the steam gunboat *Spitfire*. The *Spitfire*, the *Vixen*, and four other armed vessels were formed into the *Mosquito Division* under Tattnall's command. At the anchorage at Sacrificios this division provided covering fire while an army of twelve thousand men disembarked.

The *Mosquito Division* distinguished itself in several battles nearby and Vera Cruz surrendered in March of 1847. By June, Tattnall was back in Georgia, where a grateful legislature passed a unanimous vote of thanks and awarded him a sword inscribed with the words, "The State of Georgia to Commander Josiah Tattnall as a tribute to his gallantry in the Mexican war."

Escorting the Japanese

Various commands followed, concluding with two years in the Far East as his young country was pursuing relations with China and Japan. When he set sail for San Francisco in March of 1860, he had on board a

***Glimpses** is published by The Heritage Library. • 852 Wm Hilton Parkway Suite 2A •*
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delegation from Japan: two ambassadors, various officers, doctors, and interpreters, and a covey of attendants including barbers, pike bearers and servants. The total was 72 persons, with baggage amounting to more than 50 tons. It was the first time the nation of Japan had sent ambassadors to another country, and most of the party had never sailed in anything larger than a junk.

While the Japanese delegation lingered in San Francisco, Tattnall proceeded to Washington, where he was handsomely feted at the Navy Yard, then the British Embassy, and then by the President. He was at the White House again when the Japanese ambassadors were formally presented.

Tattnall was now 65 years old and had served his beloved country for nearly half a century. Tired, he was happy to receive a command at Sackett's Harbor, on Lake Ontario, and looked forward to months of rest and recuperation.

But it was not to be.

The Commandant's House at the Navy Yard in Sackett's Harbor is a tourist attraction, having been restored to its condition when the Tattnall family lived there.

The Civil War

Tattnall was still at Sackett's Harbor when he heard that Georgia had seceded. He had argued against secession, but it was now a fact that he had to face.

It must have been one of the most difficult decisions of his eventful career. He believed ardently in the Union for which he had sailed and fought for nearly five decades. He loved his country but he also loved his native state.

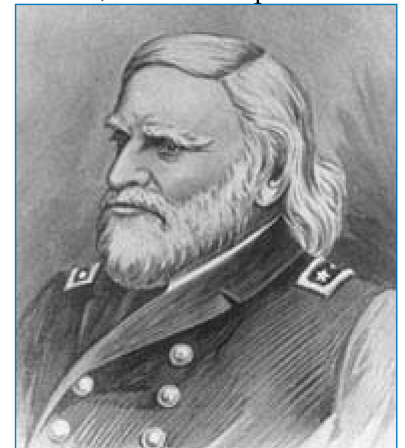
Convinced that his native state needed him, resigned his commission. The enormity of this decision was recognized by a friend who wrote: "…you threw up one of the proudest situations under the sun to take your part with a people who could offer you nothing better than a cock-boat fleet."

On November 7, 1861, with the Union forces off Hilton Head, Tattnall was ready with all the help he could muster. Present that day were his flagship, the armed river steamboat *Savannah*, and two retrofitted tugs: the *Sampson* and the *Lady Davis*. Another vessel in the Port Royal Squadron was absent, off on another mission.

These three ships were up against 14 warships with 140 guns. Despite being greatly outmanned and outgunned, the plucky little fleet moved aggressively to engage the Union forces. The *Savannah* threw 32-pound-shot at the Union frigate *Susquehanna*, which at first did not even bother to return fire. An eyewitness, describing the battle a few days later, said "Our distance was too great and our guns of too light a caliber to do much, if any, injury."

That witness wrote that eventually Union frigates chased Tattnall's forces into Skull Creek. It was by then obvious that the fort's defenders were in trouble, and Tattnall's marines were ordered to disembark and go to their aid. But before they could reach the fort, the firing stopped, and a soldier they encountered advised them all was lost. Now all Tattnall and his fleet could do was to gather up as many officers and men as they could find and take them to Savannah. This took the rest of the day and all night; Tattnall did not get back to Savannah until dawn.

Afterwards Tattnall had various assignments on the Georgia coast and in March of the following year he was put in charge of the defense of Virginia's waters, where he captured some Federal vessels. However, he was later forced to sink his own flagship, the *Virginia*, in the face of advancing Union forces. A subsequent court martial cleared him of any charges, and he returned to Georgia, where he became a prisoner of war when General William Tecumseh Sherman captured Savannah.



Commodore Josiah Tattnall of the Confederate Navy.

On May 9, 1865, he was paroled as a prisoner of war and shortly thereafter returned to Savannah. Learning that General Lee had applied to the President Johnson for a pardon, Tattnall considered whether he should follow his example, and wrote the General asking his advice. He was again torn; he had accepted his commission from Jefferson Davis and still felt bound by it. He had heard the Jefferson Davis was to be tried for treason, and it seemed to Tattnall that if he, Tattnall, applied for a pardon it would be the equivalent of turning State's evidence against him, and likely to have a negative effect on the jury.

General Lee responded that he believed it to be the

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Evolution of a Plantation

by Lyman Wooster

A Hilton Head plantation with the nonsensical but euphonious name of Honey Horn is the one plantation out of the many the island had in the 18th and 19th Centuries that is today a working entity -- not a housing development -- and thus entitled in the 21st Century to be called a plantation. In its existence for more than two centuries, the plantation has had a variety of owners and a variety of functions but only the one name.

Land that once was the preserve of Indians began changing its character when in 1689 the English Crown granted John Bayley of Ireland 48,000 acres on the island; he then had the property divided into lots and put up for sale. That part of Bayley's Baroney that would became Honey Horn was purchased by a Dr. Powell and John Fenwick, who in turn sold it to Edisto Island planter John Hanahan in 1789. According to legend, it was the distorted pronunciation of Hanahan's last name by slaves brought from Africa that gave the property its Honey Horn name. His original purchase was of 445 acres, to which he shortly added 403 acres, and in 1792 he added another 207 acres.

Local government records of sales and of wills attest to changes in ownership, but there is little written or official information about agriculture production on Hilton Head plantations in the 18th and 19th Centuries. Indigo, however, was a fairly common and profitable product grown here and exported to England; that is, profitable until the Revolutionary War, when the British withdrew the bounty it paid the planters that grew indigo. Yet, shortly after the war ended, long-staple cotton was developed in South Carolina's and Georgia's Lowcountry and what became known as Sea Island cotton, said to be the finest cotton ever grown, revived Hilton Head's economic well-being. And that included Honey Horn.

In 1805 John Stoney purchased Honey Horn Plantation from Hanahan; Stoney was one of the largest landowners on the island. John's two sons, however, developed financial problems and around 1854 Honey Horn was sold to William J. Graham, a prosperous planter with a sizeable holding on the mainland. Graham and his wife were perhaps the first owners to live on the plantation, and in 1859 they began the construction of a one-story house, part of which is a section of the house on the property today. The Civil War apparently interrupted the completion of their planned home.

In November 1861, federal troops occupied Hilton Head, leading to the departure of the white population and the eventual acquisition by the national government of most of the island's property for unpaid taxes. In 1863, Freeman Dodd, about whom little is known, purchased the 1,000 acre Honey Horn Plantation for $200, and shortly thereafter he sold it for a sizeable profit, a sale that led to a succession of sales to owners interested in growing cotton. Edward Valentine was such a person and he held the property from 1870 to 1884; he may have enlarged the house that the Grahams had started. Virginia C. Holmgren, in her book *Hilton Head, A Sea Island Chronicle,* states that "Valentine lost Honey Horn in 1884 when the White Brothers foreclosed their mortgage and then sold off some small plats to Negroes and the rest to Clyde in 1889."

William C. Clyde of New York bought, in addition to the 1,000 acres of Honey Horn, a total of 9,000 acres on Hilton Head, using the land for hunting and fishing. It was a fairly popular development in the late 19th Century and early 20th for wealthy northerners to purchase southern plantations, not for growing cotton, but as hunting preserves and winter resorts. This required the new owners to hire a sizable staff: managers, guides, handlers of dogs and horses, and domestic servants, and to construct living quarters for them. It is assumed that Clyde made some renovations to the Graham House and probably did reconstruction work in order to create a lodge capable of accommodating groups of hunters.

Shuffleboard players at Honey Horn in the 1920s. Photo courtesy of Coastal Discovry Museum.

Roy Rainey, a northern industrialist, bought Honey Horn from Clyde in 1905, and in time owned about half of Hilton Head. He too used the property for hunting. He lost his fortune in the stock market crash of 1929 and thereupon sold Honey Horn to Loomis and

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Thorne around 1930.

Alfred L. Loomis and Landon K. Thorne were also wealthy northerners, but they had sold their stock holdings prior to the 1929 crash and thus were capable not only of buying Honey Horn and other Hilton Head property but of constructing human and animal quarters. Honey Horn was also for them a hunting preserve and a place where they could escape from the tensions of the depressed economy of the 1930s and their personal involvement in scientific developments that had military applications.

Honey Horn as it appears today can be credited to Loomis and Thorne, who made substantial additions and renovations to the plantation's Main House and constructed other facilities. In time, they owned about half of Hilton Head—some 20,000 acres. But their ownership ended in 1950-51 with the sale of their holdings to Fred C. Hack, Sr., General Joseph. B. Fraser, Olin T. McIntosh, and C. C. Stebbins. Those men formed a group called the Hilton Head Company and its purpose was to manage timber operations on the Island. With the completion of those operations in the 1950s, the company began to develop residences and resort facilities.

Fred and Billie Hack in the 1960s. Photo courtesy of Coastal Discovery Museum

Fred Hack became the sole owner of Honey Horn Plantation during the 1960s, and in 1998, 68 acres were sold to the Town of Hilton Head Island for $9,000,000. Town officials believed that Honey Horn could be developed as a place where the public could learn about the history and the culture of the plantation, the island, and the South Carolina Lowcountry. That task was awarded to the Coastal Discovery Museum and it opened on Honey Horn in 2007.

During its more than two hundred years, Honey Horn has served as cotton producing property, as a location for private hunting and fishing, and a supplier to the lumbering industry. It thus seems appropriate that in the evolution of the plantation it should end up as a museum in which its two-century history and the character of South Carolina's Lowcountry can be appropriately and honorably displayed.

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Coastal Discovery Museum, *Developmental History*

Lyman Wooster was born in Kansas in 1917. His colorful career includes stints as a political science teacher at the U. of Pennsylvania, a civilian analyst of Soviet military and political affairs in Army Intelligence, then in Defense Department Intelligence, and subsequently an analyst with the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency. He moved to Hilton Head in 1988. His interest in history led him to the Heritage Library, where he has contributed both research and articles.

Honey Horn today is the busy home of Coastal Discovery Museum, established in 1985 to preserve and teach the natural history and cultural heritage of this area . Photo by Fran Hubbell, courtesy of Coastal Discovery Museum.

A Civil War Soldier's Story
by Barbara Vernasco

Elizabeth Shaffer, my beloved grandmother, loaded the steamer trunk, assorted boxes and luggage, her faithful sewing machine, and her six children aboard the electric train and left the rented farmhouse in Eau Claire, Michigan.

A few days earlier Papa Camby, my grandfather and Elizabeth's husband, had contracted the "Spanish flu", an unusually severe and deadly influenza that killed millions between the years 1917 through 1920. Within days after contracting the illness he died and was buried in Dowagiac, Michigan.

My grandmother was now a single mother of six children seeking a home and support for her fatherless family. She relocated her family to Mishawaka, Indiana, her hometown. There she resumed her seamstress business to provide the family income. The faithful Singer sewing machine had accompanied her on the hundreds of miles she traveled with her husband on his latest "get rich scheme." Once again Grandma pedaled the treadle across many miles of thread and materials. My mother said, "We may not have had enough food but we sure had beautiful clothes."

Soon the memories of the Shaffer relatives faded from family discussion, and I had no knowledge of those forgotten great-grandparents. But I had the good fortune to discover the Heritage Library in Hilton Head, South Carolina, a library of volunteers devoted to helping us discover our past.

Wondering about the Shaffers, I wondered, "Where do I begin?" All the relatives of those generations had passed on. So I started with a clue: millions of men served in the Army of the North; why not start there?

Henry D. Shaffer, No. 455993, Pvt. Co. H. 30th Mich. Vol. —that's he one; and he applied for a pension due to illness in 1865; I am in luck. The National Archives will have his records available. I ordered the pension request and it unfolded the life story of Henry Shaffer, my great-grandfather

Not all soldiers were famous; not all soldiers served in battle. My great-grandfather was stationed in Fort Wayne, Michigan, the point in Detroit, Michigan closest to the Canadian border. The U. S. government, aware of British sympathy for the Confederacy, feared a possible invasion by Canada. This fort served as a protection of our northern border and also a mustering center for troops.

Henry was born in 1842 in Ohio and moved to Kalamazoo, Michigan in 1850. After his father died, he began, at age thirteen, working as a drayman to support the family. By his early twenties he owned a wagon and delivered coal, lumber, groceries, and other commodities to the citizens of Kalamazoo.

In December of 1864, after marrying Charlotte Taylor, a widow whose first husband died at the battle of Manassas, Henry volunteered and was mustered into the army at Fort Wayne.

In his pension request, he stated:

> "It was at Fort Wayne, Detroit sometime in April 1865. I had the mumps, and had recovered sufficiently to go on duty. I think it must have been the day that President Lincoln was buried, as we had a funeral procession during the day on account of his assassination, and at night I went on guard at the fort, and when I was relieved I couldn't speak a [word aloud] I had caught cold which had settled on my lungs. So it was not a stormy night. I had been marching nearly all day and then at 7 in the evening I went on guard."

He was discharged from service in June of 1865 and shortly after appeared at his pension hearing. One of his witnesses, John Shummon, Henry's employer, stated:

> "Before Henry enlisted he was a stout, hearty and tough young man who did the hardest kind of work. I considered him a sound man. When he came home he was then to all appearances a broken down man. He was more than one-half disabled and could not work long at a time."

The description of Henry's ailments leads me to believe that he contracted strep throat and that brought about rheumatoid arthritis. The pension states he could not work a full day again. Even though Henry received a pension of six dollars a month, he lived a desperate life, never keeping a job. He states in his testimony that his wife, Flora, earned the family income by sewing and washing the clothes of the neighbors. My heart goes out to Henry, Flora, and the six children..

His life ended in 1899 in a nursing home. His death certificate simply states his occupation as "old soldier."

Editor's Note: *Barbara Vernasco, one of our cherished volunteers, now lives in Huntington, Indiana, but still keeps up with Library activities. She expects to furnish us with another family article, about a colorful ancestress, the daughter of an Indian chief, who married a fur trader.*

Musing on History

When Genealogy Turns Up Surprises

If you've read Barbara Vernasco's story about her great-grandfather, you might have noticed a little discrepancy.

Barbara found that Henry, her great-grandfather had married Charlotte Taylor in 1864. But Barbara's family had always known of Flora as Henry's wife, and Henry speaks of her as his wife in his pension application.

Stories like this often come up in genealogical research. The intrepid researcher is not daunted, but does more digging. That's what Barbara did. Henry's marriage had taken place in Kalamazoo. Thinking there had been a mistake, Barbara ordered the microfilm record, and was shocked to discover that indeed Henry's wife was Charlotte.

She dug further. She found in the 1870 Pennsylvania census Henry, Charlotte, and two children. However, by the next census, Charlotte was living alone and had changed her children's last name from Shaffer to Taylor. At some point Henry had left Pennsylvania and moved back to Kalamazoo. Though Henry had six children with Flora, Barbara was unable to find a marriage record.

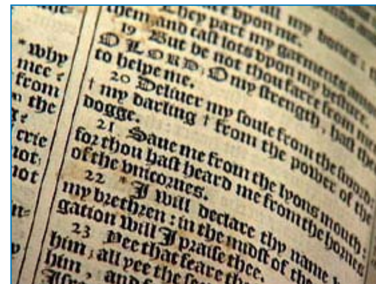
What is clear here, obscured by the lack of records, is that Flora was the ancestress that three generations of Shaffers knew and loved. Barbara, in a later communication, remarked, "Revelation of human frailty makes the research into our past so interesting. Life never changes."

I ran into a similar situation with research I did of an early 19th century Virginian who died quite young as a result of a stingray wound. A local historian had written of this man that he never knew the joys of domesticity or "the patter of little feet." While it was true that the man never married, from his will I discovered that he had several children. He not only provided for his children's education, he also freed his slaves and provided for them to be escorted out of Virginia to escape involuntary servitude. The final reckoning of his estate showed that indeed several slaves had been taken to New York; some older ones chose to remain, allowed to choose their new master.

The article I wrote was my first foray into genealogy and, though the story was sympathetic, I was severely criticized by a local genealogy hobbyist for it, implying I had been unethical. Stung, I contacted several authorities, only to be assured I had committed no breach of ethics. History is history; the man's original will is on file at the local courthouse and is a matter of public record. I felt this man's descendants could rightly be proud of his actions.

Research into almost any family can turn up such anomalies. And so it is with Barbara's story. Flora is still her great-grandmother. But Barbara may have some Taylor cousins somewhere.

Barbara Muller



400th Anniversary

King James Bible

It has been called the only masterpiece ever created by committee.

The committee was one assigned by King James in 1603, and included fifty-four Jewish, Catholic and Greek Orthodox scholars. The king's instructions were to seek out the best translations and compare them to the Greek and Hebrew in lieu of the Latin Vulgate then in use. Tyndale had translated much of the Greek and Hebrew in the early 1500s. Though he was executed for heresy in 1536, much of his work was selected by the committee in the final version published in 1611.

The King James Bible has had a profound influence on our culture -- in language and in literature. Orators like Abraham Lincoln and Martin Luther King drew upon it for word and style, as did authors like Herman Melville, John Steinbeck, and William Faulkner and countless poets, like John Milton, Walt Whitman, and Emily Dickinson. Its phrases permeate our everyday language: nothing new under the sun; turn the other cheek; a law unto themselves; signs of the times; the straight and narrow; a time and a place for everything.

It has enriched our culture for four hundred years.

Jossiah Tattnall, Confederate Hero (Cont'd from Page 3)

duty of everyone to "unite in the restoration of the country and the reestablishment of peace and harmony." He also said he could not see how "the course I have recommended and practiced can prove detrimental to the former President of the Confederate States." He concluded his letter by saying he was sure that Tattnall's own "high sense of honor and right" would lead him to the proper course to pursue.

Savannah was proving to be too expensive for Tattnall to remain there. He determined to move his family to Nova Scotia but, characteristically conscious of proper protocol, he applied to the War Department for permission to do so. It was granted in June of 1866.

We have no information on how he survived for four years near Halifax, but eventually finding his resources exhausted, he returned to Savannah, now 75 years old, to seek employment. A measure of his stature is to be seen in the fact that the Mayor and City Council created for him the post of Inspector of the Port of Savannah with an annual income of twelve hundred dollars. When he died after seventeen months at the job, the post expired with him.

The City Council passed a resolution lamenting his demise, and voted to provide him a public funeral under the direction of a huge committee of aldermen and citizens. This doughty old sailor was laid to rest with a procession that began with a band followed by clergy, the police of the city, the hearse bearing his body, an enormous number of local notables, members of the press, Confederate veterans, officers and crews of all the vessels in port, local citizens, and firemen in uniform.

Barbara Muller

Editor's Note: Most of the information in this article came from *The Life and Services of Commodore Josiah Tattnall,* by Charles C. Jones, Jr., published in Savannah in 1878.

This is the first in a series of articles about officers in the Civil War who were involved in Port Royal and Hilton Head. The next will be about Union General Isaac Stevens.

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