

DIARY
of

NARCISSA MELISSA LAWTON

(6 March 1817 - 16 Aug. 1883)

(Narcissa Melissa Lawton was the ^{fourth child} ~~only daughter~~ of Rev. Winborn Asa Lawton (23 June 1793 - ^{25 June} 23 February 1878) and his first wife, Mrs. Mary Cater Rhodes (1776 - 25 February 1823); she married as his 2nd wife, Alexander Benjamin Lawton, her cousin, son of Benjamin Themistocles D'Ion Lawton and Jane, daughter of Dr. George Mosse.)

(This copy was made by the Rev. Robert E. H. Peeples, great-grandson of the Hon. George Rhodes, a half-brother of Narcissa Melissa Lawton.)

"March 9th: 1862 This is the Sabbath and a most beautiful day it is. There is no preaching but at the Methodist and as I am told that the preacher is not a very good one, I thought I would stay at home and read a sermon. Winny and Tommy went to Monticello in the buggy. Martha and Bobby went to the Methodist Church in Grooverville. I read an interesting and searching discourse, the subject was self examination.

March 10th: Monday night. All have retired and I am alone. My two youngest children are both indisposed tonight. I hope they may be better in the morning. I have not yet heard a word from my son Alexander. Oh! How uneasy I am about him. I feel inexpressibly sad tonight, and cannot tell why it is so. Oh! Sad heart hope thou in God and thou shalt yet praise Him for the help of His countenance.

March 11th: This is a stormy looking day; everything within and without wears a deep gloom; it is but in keeping with my feelings. Oh! Holy Spirit, breathe upon my heart and kindle there a flame of pure love to my blessed Redeemer and rouse up my sluggish energies.

March 13th: I made no record on yesterday being quite busy with a piece of sewing until a late hour last night. In consequence of which I arose this morning with a violent headache, the worst one I have had in some time. It rained all day yesterday and the weather is still cloudy and blustering.

March 14th: On yesterday afternoon Mr. Everette came over to see us; he kindly agreed to sell some hides for us in Thomasville. Winny received a letter from John Tilman informing him of the evacuation of Brunswick as the enemy were all landing there. I have no news yet from my dear son Alexander. Poor fellow, how very tired he must be of camp life. The weather is still cloudy and blustering. This morning after working a little while in my garden, I went into the loom house and twisted a ball of knitting thread; I then spun a small bunch of thread and twisted it. This is one art which I think I never can perform with sufficient ease to make it profitable.

March 16th: This is again the Sabbath and I went to the Baptist Church and heard Brother Blewet preach. It was a sermon on the ordination of a deacon. The deacon who was ordained was a Mr. Davies. How very few men were at Church today. Oh! So many empty seats; nearly all have gone to war. Truly the storm of war has burst upon our devoted land. Each mail

that comes brings the news of a fresh battle fought. I had hoped that by this time the dark clouds would have blown over us. Today's news brought the intelligence of the death (by the enemy) of Generals McCollouk and McIntosh, and several commissioned officers. We are in the hands of Him who made us, and when He has punished us sufficiently, He may in His own good time listen to our prayers and grant us peace. Now come, my heart, and let us commune together. What secret sins are covered up in thee? In the first place here is self love, on another leaf is vanity, here is impatience, pride, sloth, well, well, well, every leaf is filled up with charges against me. Oh! Lord, help me to overcome these faults, give me grace sufficient to help in time of need, and take this sinful heart away and give me a clean heart, and renew a right spirit within me for Jesus' sake.

March 17th: The first news this morning which met my ear on entering my dining room was that Mr. McLendon had killed Ben who had run away and was caught on yesterday afternoon (it being the Sabbath evening) by Mr. Linton. Poor Ben wanted to come to me, thinking no doubt that I could save him, but he was beaten on the head and told that if he dared to come to me his brains would be blowed out. He was then taken to the inhuman McLendon who deliberately whipped him to death. Alas! Alas, that such as this should be done in civilized America. No wonder we are punished by a just and avenging God for the injustice and cruelty which is exercised to our poor negroes. But thank God this is not the case everywhere, for there are some human hearts that can feel for others' woe. Our poor servants are scattered abroad over the country. They never knew what it was to see trouble before, as they had a kind and indulgent master who allowed them many little privileges and alleviated their wants, and who always tried to instill principles of honesty and integrity in them, and to elevate their moral feelings instead of debasing them.

March 18th: We are now in the midst of a terrific thunderstorm. Mr. Everette is here. He went to Thomasville on yesterday to see a lawyer about the murder of Ben. I am told that they (the jury) passed a verdict of not guilty on the murderers for it seems that there were two concerned in it, the man who hired him and his overseer. Alas! There seems to be no such thing in this world as justice. My soul is filled with horror unspeakable at the details of this horrid murder. His wife goes about like a poor broken-hearted creature. Vengeance belongs to God alone. I do not pray for vengeance but I do hope that this truly awful event will produce the effect of arousing the impenitent man who committed the deed to a sense of his lost and ruined condition.

March 22nd: On yesterday Winny started to Doroughty Co.; Israel went with him in the buggy; I really am afraid he will not be able to get along as all of the watercourses are up. Bobby started to Grooverville Station this morning and had to swim through the Ocilla; he heard that the bridge over the Piscola had floated away, so he had to come back home. Winny has also returned home.

March 23rd: Today is the Lord's Day and we are all at home, as there is no chance of getting to Church even if there was any preaching in the neighborhood, as the Ocilla River which lies between our house and Grooverville is swimming. Well, if this is so, why may we not serve God in our own home? Why not raise here an altar of praise to His name? Oh! Is He not the same everywhere, at all times and in all places? Yes, thanks to His great and condescending kindness, He is

the same in all times, places and seasons. Wherever the heart pants after Him, wherever there is secret prayer, there will our Heavenly Father be found. Bless the Lord, Oh my soul, and all that is within me praise and adore Him for His loving kindness. Yes, do down, my soul, at His feet, struggle there, plead earnestly. Oh! Give not over, faint not, who knows but that the Lord will hear thee and pour into thy heart a rich blessing. Oh! Try the efficacy of secret prayer. What has thy dear Savior told thee, "Ask and ye shall receive, seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you". These are not promises made to be broken, but heaven and earth shall pass away before His word shall fail.

March 25th: Tuesday night. This morning opened upon us with a white frost; it seems as if we are just beginning to have cold weather. It will prove most destructive on all of our fruit as they were in such a growing state. The orange trees appear to be much injured.

March 27th: Dear Winny received a letter this evening from his Uncle Joseph desiring him to join him in Albany where he was making up a regiment; he wrote that Alex would be with him. Oh! How very sad does this make me, dear graceful quiet boy, how unfitted for a rough soldier. I had hoped that he had quit the camp and the field and would return to college, but this is not to be. God's will be done. Oh! Wild and dark is the tempest that is now raging over our land. Our enemies are approaching nearer and nearer to us. Oh! Merciful God, remember us in pity; we are but the creatures of Thy hand. Oh! Lay not Thy chastening rod too heavily on us.

March 28th: This morning Winny left me again to join the army. God bless you, our child, and keep you unpolluted and pure in heart. I scarcely dare to trust myself to think about my dear Alex. It is so long since I have heard from him and Oh! so long since I have seen him. But I must strive to attain more faith and to be willing to trust everything which I hold dear to Him who gave them to me.

March 30th: This is the Sabbath morning and no preaching anywhere about except at the Methodist Church, and as the minister is not a prepossessing one, we prefer staying at home where we can read a sermon. I would like so much for my children to go to Church every Sabbath and I hope before I die to live in a place where they may be able not only to go to Church but also to Sabbath School. SUNDAY NIGHT. The weather is warm and clear. It has been a very hot day. I have to mourn over my hard heart, my love of ease, self love, and worldliness. Oh! God let Thy Holy Spirit remain with me and save me from my own wicked heart for Christ's sake.

April 1st: I was quite unwell all day yesterday with a sick headache, but I thank my kind heavenly Father that I feel much better this morning, although still weak and nervous. Yesterday morning Mr. Everette came over to see us. He was about to start to Savannah and kindly offered to do anything for us we wished done. I sent by him for some common flour. Today I sent a hand to help Mr. Brown prepare his crop as all of his sons are in the war and he is in a state of great destitution. The patriotic women of the south are raising money to build gunboats. I sent my poor little contribution yesterday by Mr. Everette, and today I gave Clara a small present of five dollars for teaching her little brother and sister. She said that all she wanted with it

was to send to help to build a gunboat. May God bless the efforts which are being made by all the people of the country to free themselves from the hostile invaders.

April 4th: The summer has now come all at once. Oh! How very beautiful does nature look in her lovely robes of green. Truly everything seems to rejoice at the approach of spring. Listen to the merry peals of the birds, the humming of the bee, the chirping of the cricket. Oh! Everything seems to rejoice in nature but man, wicked sinful man, for now he is intent on deeds of murder, rapine, plunder - instead of thanking and blessing the all-wise Giver of everything for the blessings by which he is surrounded, and staying at home to till the soil and raise his flocks, he has thrown aside his implements of husbandry and left his home to slay the brave noble-hearted men whose only fault is wishing to be parted from those who impose upon them. Alas! How inconsistent.

April 5th: The weather although very pleasant is getting rather dry. I have not yet heard a word from Alex. This is the tenth month since I have seen him. I received a short letter from Sallie by Israel when he brought the horse and buggy back from carrying Winny. I hired Israel to carry the carriage to Thomasville yesterday to have it mended. I look for it back this evening. I have been spinning all of the morning some knitting thread. I feel quite tired.

April 7th: Today is the Sabbath. Clear and bright and beautiful. All of the children have gone to Church except N.M.A. who is indisposed. Dear Lord, be with me this day, directing my thoughts into the proper channel, and let the meditation of my heart be acceptable to Thee. Oh! Grant me Thy whole Spirit, I do most earnestly entreat Thee, dear Lord, let not vain thoughts obtrude nor worldly cares and troubles, but let Christ, and Him crucified, be the theme of my meditations. Oh! Fill my heart exclusively with Thy love. And help me also to love my neighbor as myself, to be kind and forbearing to all with whom I have to do in this life. Oh! Help me to make others happy and to do them all the good that lies in my power.

April 8th: I do not know why it is that I so often break good resolutions and intentions, and why I have so little forbearance. Oh! I am so very quick to take offence at little things. Oh! Could I but possess so even calmness of mind, could I be firm and gentle, and reprove with love and kindness, I should be so much happier. Arm me with strength, dear Lord, for the cares and conflicts of life.

April 9th: I arose this morning feeling quite refreshed; the morning is cloudy and blustering. My garden looks beautiful; its many thousand flowers smile upwards in my face each day as I walk among them and they almost seem to try to chase away the gloom from my sad heart. Old Mrs. Behn told me that the flowers in my garden had refreshed her, they looked so bright and gay. Lona jumped down the steps this morning and hurt her feet; I fear she has sprained her ankle. Martha teaches Tommy and Lona music. It is somewhat difficult to teach Tommy as he is so fidgety, but I intend him to stick to it as I think it will benefit him.

April 10th: As the poet says, "The stormy wind's complaining brings on the wintry day"; so it has proved with the blustering winds of yesterday, and last night we had a storm of wind. Today it has become

beautifully clear although still windy. I feel myself giving way to my old impatient temper. Help me, dear Lord, when I am tempted with my besetting sin and make a way of escape for me through Jesus Christ.

April 11th: A day so lovely as this seldom visits this sad, sinful earth: clear, cold, calm and smiling in all the green and varied beauties of early spring. Oh! Should it not constrain us to bless the beneficent Giver of every good and perfect gift. I do most sincerely thank Him that He has given me a heart to enjoy the sweet beauties of nature. 'Tis here that I am happiest on earth, and I can read God in nature, in the deep silent woods I can listen to the almost funereal sighing of the solemn pines as if wailing over the sins of the world. In sweet harmony with these sounds is heard the plaintive notes of birds, which serve as a symphony to the grand requiem.

April 12th: 1862 Today twelve months ago the bloodless battle of Sumpter was fought, but Oh! since that time how many bloody ones have been. What a dark page on history will be this fratricidal way. The enemy is now quite near to us, the whole coast of Florida is pretty much in their possession. My trust is in a higher Power than man, and though a host should encamp around me I shall feel safe in His Almighty care.

April 14th: Today is the Sabbath and again must we all remain at home as there is no preaching except at the Methodist Church. Last night we had a terrific wind storm and this morning it is cloudy and cold. I sent to the office yesterday hoping to get a letter from one or the other of my boys, but I got no intelligence from either of them. It has been now nearly two months since I have heard from either of them. I know not what to think; I am afraid my child is sick. I have just finished reading a sermon aloud to the children, the text was: "Keep thy heart pure for out of it are the issues of life". We are there exhorted to keep the heart full of God's grace and to have deep and warm and broad hearts, so that our actions as they flow from our hearts may be filled with loving kindness, charity, and purity. Oh! Lord be pleased to enable me to keep my heart pure, let Thy Holy Spirit dwell within it, and let me possess a warm charitable and loving heart, abounding in every Christian feeling and purpose.

April 15th: After having risen this morning and attended to various household duties, I took my accustomed walk back of the grove. I am almost afraid that it is presumption in me, or that after all it may prove a delusory hope; but I feel deep within the recesses of my heart a happy comfortable assurance of my acceptance with God through Jesus. Oh! Lord increase my faith.

April 16th: I have just laid aside the last will and testament of my beloved husband; my tears blinded me too much to read any more, so I locked it up in my rosewood box. They never carried out the instructions of my husband in the division of the property and I have indeed but little to support me, in truth I may say a mere pittance, but I feel indeed thankful for what I have, for indeed there are many who are much worse off than I am and, although my servant maid whom I raised from a little girl and loved almost like one of my children, has been taken away from me and hired out, and also my cook was taken away and I have to hire her services at a very high price, still with God's help I arrange to get along tolerably. It is true I have a great

deal to do that I never did before, but the times call for it. I can now spin fine sewing thread, and I am now making up clothes for my boys which was woven at home. I have had three pieces woven, and am endeavoring to get another piece ready for the loom. My children help me in various ways: Clara teaches Tom and Lona, and Bob attends to the farm and is trying to make a little crop for me with the few servants that I have.

April 17th: I felt quite unwell last night and retired earlier than usual; I felt too badly this morning to take my accustomed walk. One of our neighbors died night before last, a Mr. Hagan, he has left a large family. I dreamed last night that I saw my dear son Alexander and Oh! how rejoiced I was to see him. God bless my noble boys and take care of them.

April 18th: I heard the news on yesterday evening of a great battle in Tennessee, in which General Albert Sydney Johnston was killed. He was the first in command, after he fell General Beauregard took the command and our side gained a great victory. We are constantly expecting to hear of a battle in Virginia on the Peninsular; it is there that my dear son was the last time I heard from him.

April 19th: I felt indisposed all day yesterday but today am feeling better. We received on yesterday the tidings of the fall of Fort Pulaskie; the men were carried to North Carolina to Fort Hatteras. Truly those who are waging this mad, unjust and cruel war against us will have a great sin to answer for. It cannot last always; sooner or later it will come to an end.

April 20th: Late last night after prayers a little black boy brought me two letters, one from Alex, the other from Winny. The former writes from Goldsborough, North Carolina, the latter from Griffin, Ga. How truly thankful I was to hear from them, and both were well. I enjoyed a better night's rest last night than usual in consequence. This is the Sabbath evening; I went to Church this afternoon where I heard Brother Blewet preach. We had a slim congregation. There are very few men left in the country; all or nearly all have gone to the war. I received a letter today from my dear old father, and I thank God that I still have a father who cares for me and mine; he writes that he is not very well. May the Lord spare his life and may he live to see his beloved country a free and independent nation. Everything seems dull and cold in religion. I am afraid that this is the reason that this war continues; we are so sinful and so cold and negligent of our duty to God that He is punishing us for our sins. I cannot tell why it is that I feel as I do today. My heart is dead in trespasses and sins. My thoughts wander like the fool's eyes to the uttermost parts of the earth. Alas! There are times when I doubt whether I have ever been converted or not, trifles light as air give me pain and sway me and cause me to lose sight of my Saviour's love. And then I fall into a dull, torpid state from which I cannot arouse myself. But there is something, thanks be to God, that can arouse these dead faculties of mine. Oh! God Thy Spirit can fan the dying embers within my poor dark heart and warm and illuminate it; Thy love, dear Jesus, can restore all the springs of my existence. Come, then, celestial Visitant, look upon my languishing, dying state. Oh! Come into my heart and dwell there.

April 21st: This morning is cold enough for fire to feel comfortable. I have commenced teaching my little negroes on Sunday afternoons. I

have a class of six little ones. I have only taught them three evenings, and they exhibit astonishing aptitude, and may God bless the effort to do something useful.

April 22nd: Another cold day has dawned upon us; the wind blows really chilling. I am fearful of frost. Martha and Tommy went to Monticello on yesterday afternoon, but they have not yet returned. I wrote a long letter to my dear Alexander on yesterday but have not sent it, not knowing where to direct it to. I think I shall keep it awhile or find out where he is before I send it.

April 23rd: My eyesight has now become so impaired that I find the use of spectacles very beneficial. My beloved husband, oh what feelings overcame me when I first took these spectacles from the desk, these glasses which were used by him on his death bed. Oh! My poor bleeding heart will it never stop aching for the loved and lost? Did I say lost? Let me recall that expression, not lost but only gone before. How often do I find myself doing things that beloved, and expressing sentiments and waiting and expecting to hear him approving of and coinciding with my sentiments, but cease, fond heart, to look and wait for those whom God has taken to Himself. Oh! Rather let me strive to emulate their examples, and seek to make my calling and election sure. Strive to do my duty, my whole duty, and not neglect those whom God has entrusted to my care.

April 24th: I thank God for having preserved me through another night, and enabled me to behold the opening beauties of this day, and now as I trace these lines my ear drinks in the melody of the sweet mocking birds; at my open window they are so gentle and tame that they will light on the railing of the banister. All is so quiet here that one could almost forget the stirring events which are now being enacted in our beloved country; but it is impossible to forget it long when we have so much at stake.

April 25th: Time keeps on its monotonous tick, tick, as the pendulum of the clock swings to and fro; I have just returned from my morning's walk, and everything wears the same aspect as on the preceding day. I am almost tired of being pent up here in this quiet corner and not knowing at what moment some dreadful disaster may befall those whom I love so dearly. And they fare so hard while I live in ease and have a plenty of the comforts and even luxuries of life. Oh! That I could do more for them and my fellow country-men than I am doing; I feel that I have done nothing while so many others have gone ahead of me.

April 26th: We last night heard that the company that went by here (a few weeks Past) which were from Florida, got immediately into action with the Yankees and their Captain got desperately wounded and the Company very much cut up and taken prisoners. Their Captain we hear has taken the oath of allegiance to the Yankees and is returning home. His name is Capers Bird. His company consisted mostly of young men from Monticello.

April 27th: Today is the Lord's Day, and no preaching anywhere in the vicinity. We are all at home. I read one of Spurgeon's sermons aloud to the children; the subject was God the All-seeing One. I do not feel this day as I desire to feel; my heart seems to partake of the feelings of the weather cold and cheerless, it is just so that I am. Oh! God be

pleased to breathe upon this heart of mine, with Thy Holy Spirit's quickening influence. Help me to arouse myself from this dull lethargy which is seeping over me; dear Lord, leave me not to myself, take not Thy countenance from me. "Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation and uphold me with Thy free Spirit." I have received a short letter from Winny, written from Albany. He has written for Israel to go to him to wait on brother Joe.

April 28th: I arose this morning and found that it was absolutely necessary for me to send my cook and Ellen into the field in order to save my crop as the first or oldest corn is very much in the grass. Clara cooked the dinner. I was afraid that it would give her a headache as she was not accustomed to it, but she insisted on doing it and succeeded very well. We are obliged to make a great exertion as two of my main field hands are down with the measles. It is with feelings of the deepest sadness that I heard today of the fall of New Orleans, "the crescent city of the sunny south". Oh! My country, my bleeding country, whenever I hear of any new victories gained by our bloody and deceitful enemies over any portion of thy sacred soil, my heart trembles for thee. May the great God of nations protect thee, and give thee help in this thine hour of sore need.

April 29th: Yesterday evening young John Tilman called to see the family; he is home on furlough. I have again sent out all of the house servants into the field. I expect I will have to do so for the next two weeks. I have been so busy all of the morning that I feel tired down. Israel will leave in a few days for Griffin, Ga., and I must try and finish a pair of stockings I am knitting for Winny.

April 30th: Everything jogs along today after the usual way, nothing new having transpired with us. Mr. McDonald arrived at his overseer's house last night (in the stage); Bobby teaches school this week, so as to relieve Clara who has been teaching for eight months.

May 1st: Tommy is quite sick with fever; he had an attack of sick headache last night, and this morning he had a chill. His face is very red; I think perhaps he is taking the measles, as two of the negroes now have that disease. I have just had to pay three and a half dollars to a negro shoemaker for a pair of the coarsest kind of shoes for Bobby. I am afraid we will see hard times if this war lasts long.

May 3rd: I made no record in my book on yesterday as I went to ~~hide~~ in the evening with the children. We went to the lake, hoping to catch some fish, but in this we were disappointed. However, the ride was beneficial to us. Four of my field hands are down sick with the measles. I think now that Tommy has the measles also. We heard that young James Hart had his head taken off by a bombshell at the battle of Shiloh. May God comfort his widowed mother. And this is war....

May 4th: Today is the Sabbath. Tommy is too sick for me to leave him to go to Church. Martha and Bobby went but there was no preacher there so it was well enough that I did not go. I received a letter yesterday from my father, in which he advised me to claim my dower. I think I shall take his advice. He says he thinks that the enemy will take Charleston, Savannah, Mobile and Norfolk. My brother also wrote me a letter which I received yesterday. He says that if they take Savannah he will not leave for he has no where else to go, and all that he owns in this world is there, and he would as soon die as lose everything that he possesses.

Well, we have fallen upon dark times; God is doing it for some wonderful design. Oh, how many things will it teach us. In the first place, it will stir us up to energy, self-denial, self dependence, and yet a trust in God. In a word, it will call out every dormant faculty. Oh, merciful Father of heaven and earth, be with me this evening, comfort my lone desolate heart, let me not give way to despondency. Oh, let me feel Thy Love within my heart, grant me strength sufficient for my day.

May 5th: I have done little else today but nurse Tommy who is very ill indeed with the measles. May a kind and merciful God be pleased to bless the remedies made use of for his recovery.

May 6th: Late yesterday evening Miss Lou Jones from Thomasville drove up in a buggy with only a little black boy to drive her; she came to get hospital stores for the sick soldiers. I am glad that she came as I was desirous of sending something to the soldiers myself. I am truly thankful that little Tommy seems better tonight.

May 8th: I made no record yesterday as I was too busy and I forgot it. Tommy has got up, dressed and walked about, although he is very weak, and his cough is still troublesome. I will try to make him take care of himself for fear that he may take cold. I have actually made a pair of shoes for myself, and am now on the second pair. I now have the first pair on that I made and find them the most comfortable that I ever had on.

May 9th: On yesterday morning Mr. Everette came to see me about making my tax returns. I asked him while he was here to see to the business of having my dower assigned, and he promised that he would do so. Tommy is mending slowly of his cough; Lona has not yet taken the measles. The sick negroes are also recovering. I hope they will be prudent. I have been busily engaged in making myself some shoes and have finished the second pair. I am at a loss to know what I shall do for negro shoes this coming fall, as shoes are selling so high that it would take all the money I would make just to buy their shoes. Today Martha and Clara went to Monticello in the buggy and they have just returned not long; they report nothing of interest to have transpired there lately.

May 10th: Today as I was overhauling Alex's and Winny's clothing my heart became very sad at the sight of all of their things. How long since I have seen dear Alex, and I was shaking one of Winny's coats when I felt a roll of something in one of the pockets; thinking it was a dried flower I was about to throw it out, but as I chanced to look at it I saw that it was money which he had forgotten there. I think I will send it to him in a letter. I am about to write for the Christian Index. I received a letter from Winny today.

May 11th: Sabbath afternoon. None of the family attended Church today as there was no preaching anywhere except at the Methodist Church, and my carriage driver is down with the measles. I read a beautiful sermon aloud to the children, the text was from Job: "I would not live always". I have gotten hold of an old volume which I intend reading. I think it replete with instructions to the inquirer after truth. It is called, "Cases of Conscience". May God help me to profit by the close examination and the hold teachings which it inculcates. Oh, Holy Spirit, direct me, open my understanding, grant me dear Lord spiritual wisdom, grant me solid heart religion, help me to take up my cross daily, let not Satan get the advantage of me at any time, help me when I am tempted to remember Christ, and right then to put up a fervent prayer for help. Be