

SMITH

my copy

A SOUTHERN FAMILY IN TRANSITION,
1830 to 1865

SUBMITTED BY
SUSAN E. GEOFFREY
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Documentation of the history of my paternal ancestors must begin with my great-great grandfather, William Smith, who was born in Dorchester, South Carolina in 1764.¹ Little recorded information exists to substantiate any further regression into the past beyond records of genealogy derived from family Bibles. Indeed, not much is known of William's life before the 1830s. Existing letters, wills and other original family documents and reminiscence dating from the 1830s to the 1860s allow one to form a misty picture of William and his family - a family that was in several ways typical of many families of that era and location. Specifically, in its transition from the Low Country tidewater area of South Carolina to the piedmont region of Georgia, the family was part of a movement of South Carolina families into the former Cherokee Indian lands opened up by the Land Lottery of 1832.² Like others who had moved from the tidewater areas, they increased their land holdings and slave holdings, hoping to make their fortune in cotton, corn or other crops in the new fertile lands; or they planned to participate in successful merchantile ventures in a wide-open state. Like many southerners, they were unprepared for the changes which took place in the 1860s when much their way of life evaporated like the dew with the rising of the sun. The following, then, is an account of that transition.

William Smith settled and raised his family in Beaufort, South Carolina. His ancestors had come to the Low Country of that state around 1695, and had remained in the area for over a hundred years.³ William took part in the U.S. Census of 1800, which listed his household as containing five whites and fifteen Negroes.⁴ The 1830 census showed his residence as being in St. Helen's parish of Beaufort and containing 1 male 20-30 years; 1 male 60-70 years; 2 females 15-20 years; 2 females 20-30 years; 11 slaves.⁵ This count would have been made several years after the death of his wife, Elizabeth Wilson Smith, born in 1770 in Philadelphia. It would not have included his eldest son, Sidney, born in 1803 in Beaufort, since he had married Eliza Lawton in 1829 and had set up a home of his own. The list would have included daughter, Sarah, born in Beaufort in 1804; daughter, Elizabeth Wilson, born in Beaufort in 1807; son, James Laurens, born in Beaufort in 1809; daughter, Hannah Moore, born in that city in 1811; daughter, Mary, born there in 1816. Three other children had died before the 1830 census: Charles Wilson, born in 1800, died 1806; Sarah Sanders, born 1801, died 1802; William Penn, born 1806, died 1806.⁶

William's house still stands in Beaufort on the corner of Wilmington and Bay Streets.⁷ It was built in 1813 in the Greek Revival style with French Colonial influence, which means it has all the marks of a southern plantation, architecturally.⁸ The house tells us little about the man except that he had a comfortable income. Further information derived from his obituary, will and household accounts indicate that he had been a soldier in the Revolutionary War and that he was a lawyer by profession; he also served as a deacon in the Beaufort Baptist Church and as a lay-preacher.⁹

Family legend places William's war service with Frances Marion, but research into this possibility turned up no substantiating material. Since Marion's forces were volunteers and had been promised no pay, he kept no roster. Several years after the war, all men who presented claims for service with Marion were paid and a compilation of names from these pay stubs did not include William's.¹⁰ Still, the legend cannot be totally discounted on this evidence, as it is possible that some men, especially gentlemen of monied families, may not have applied for pay. William would have been between 16 and 19 years old and unmarried at the time of service with Marion and would probably have been living with his parents still. Certainly, the legend is an appealing one - which is why it must be suspect, since unsubstantiated.

Evidence that William was a lawyer is also not firm and rests on family recollection.¹¹ That much of his income came from lending money to other gentlemen - "taking their bond" - is shown in his account books of the 1830s and 1840s, and from an appraisal of his estate made at his death in 1843. The following bonds were listed:¹²

| | |
|---|------------|
| Perry Fripp Bond and Mortgage | \$3,300.00 |
| Sidney Smith Bond | 7,700.00 |
| John M. Verdier Bond & Mortgage | 220.00 |
| James L. Smith Bond and Mortgage | 212.80 |
| William Barnwell Bond now due | 1,400.00 |
| Jno. Richardson & Mary Richardson Joint Note | 262.00 |
| Jno. Richardson Note | 18.34 |
| Joint note of William Fuller & Allen Corkpost | 300.00 |
| William Fuller Note | 42.00 |
| Mr. Campbell's Notes for | 60.00 |

The same appraisal also listed: " 10 shares in the S.W. Rail Road and Bank at \$50.00 per share: for a value of \$500.00. The liquidable assets of the estate, excluding house and property, was totaled at \$26,411.64.¹³

William probably had a small plantation outside of Beaufort in the 1830s as a letter mentions his giving "79 of [his] people" to his son, James Laurens as part of his inheritance when he left Beaufort in 1837.¹⁴

Remarks in William's will and in a letter to his younger brother, James, a planter in Darien, Georgia, seem to show that William considered farming to be an inferior occupation for a gentleman. A profession, such as law or medicine was his ideal for his sons.¹⁵ Consequently, according to unproved family legend, both of William's sons were sent to Yale College. Sidney obtained a degree in medicine and soon fulfilled his father's expectations. Since Yale's medical program was begun in 1813, it is possible that Sidney could have attended school there.¹⁶ Seemingly, he did become prosperous enough to begin paying his father for a loan secured in 1832.¹⁷ The U.S. Census of 1830 lists his slaveholdings at 34, which would have been enough labor to work a small plantation.¹⁸ His plantation was called Gravel Hill and was located in Brighton, South Carolina near Beaufort. A number of letters written from Gravel Hill are among those documents which have survived the years. William, in his will, proudly referred to this son as "my son the Doctor,"¹⁹ and in a letter wrote, "As it respects the part that the Doct. has in this arrangement [selling his slaves to his sons], it is fixed and settled and it does not create much concern; because he himself has a handsome capital and the bond is otherwise well secured."²⁰

James Laurens, however, disappointed his father by deciding to take up farming as his sole profession. The disappointment is evident in the letter William wrote to his brother in Darien: "O, how I lament he [James Laurens] did not take a different turn: Had I the Law Knowledge that he possesses, I can at this day become independent of man, in the profits of that profession. This statement also seems to lend credibility to the story that James Laurens did receive some kind of formal college training in law, instead of merely reading law with a man established in that profession, which was a common method of becoming a lawyer in that time."²² James Laurens did apply for and receive a license to practice law in Cobb County in 1855, though he never actually served in that capacity, as far as is known.²³

From William's letters and other writings, it can be concluded that he was an educated man, as well as a religious one. Several sermons in his handwriting are in the possession of his great-great granddaughter, Mrs. Ruth Lacy of Decatur, Georgia. A careful reading of the hand-bound documents reveals a man who was able to express his ideas with logic, force and scholarship in a handwriting small and precise.²⁴ His sermons also show a man whose religious beliefs were deeply rooted in Puritanism.²⁵ He mentioned in a letter to his brother about preparing a publication "...in pamphlet form on the subject of the doctrine of New Testament 'Divorce and Marriage' and the Divine rite of marriage in contra distinction to the Modern Idea - Anti-Christian and Vulgar opinion of its being a [hole here] Rite...."²⁶

Though holding many severe religious beliefs, William must not have given attention to the strict Baptist warnings against "strong spirits," because his household account book of 1840 lists, "By cash, on W.S. to settle his a/c for Still, Rum, freight Savannah \$7.37."²⁷

It would be logical to conclude that William and his family had strong ties to South Carolina, since their ancestors had been in the area for a century and a half. Yet, by 1849, six years after William's death, all of the children had left the state. A number of factors probably influenced their move, and they were not the only South Carolinians to be affected by the changes that were taking place in the state.

An account on page 37 of Frances Anne Kemble's Journal of a Resident on a Georgian Plantation, written between 1838 and 1839, relates: "In walking about Charleston I am reminded of some older country towns in England - of Southhampton a little, highly picturesque but with an air of decay: a little gone down in the world." By 1830, Charleston and all of South Carolina had begun a downward swing economically. During the decade of 1820-1830, there was a noticeable decline in commerce which has been attributed in part to the abandonment of an internal improvements program which would have included the building of a better railroad system. Also better port facilities were needed so that goods could be transported into and out of the state. The improvements program was abandoned because Low Country planters felt threatened by the possibility of increased manufacturing developing in their area. They feared that high tariffs would result that would undermine the plantation culture and the very institution of slavery itself. The tidewater planters glorified agriculture as being "morally superior" to any other venture and were determined to discourage the development of any other form of commerce.²⁸ One newspaper of the day illustrated the existence of this prejudice against manufacturing in the account of a fracas between two gentlemen. One man had threatened to horsewhip the other for telling slanderous lies about him - that he had stock in a factory.²⁹

Manufacturing had just begun to develop in the piedmont area of South Carolina - needing only a little legislative approval to give it impetus. Instead of giving manufacturing a boost, the legislature tried to hamper its growth. Reminiscence of Charleston, by Jacob Cardoza, published in 1866, reported, "In 1823, the Legislature imposed onerous taxation on the mercantile body." Because the tidewater planters held much of the wealth in the state, they made up 2/3 of the delegates to the state legislature. They represented a small segment of the population, but they carried political clout.³⁰ Again and again they voted on measures that would stifle

the growth of factories. This same view of manufacturing as a threat to Southern plantation culture, existed throughout the South, with the result that by 1860 only 8.8 % of manufactured goods in the United States were produced in the South.³¹

Unfortunately, by 1830, cotton cultivation and rice cultivation were becoming less profitable. States to the west began to glut the market with cotton and prices fell; Louisiana began to surpass South Carolina in rice production.³² In addition, the soil along the coastal areas was becoming depleted, because for many years it had been misused and overplanted. "Summer Absenteeism" was partly to blame for the poor treatment of the land. Unhealthy conditions in the low country, resulting in yellow fever, commenced in April and ended in September, forcing prosperous planters away to their summer homes in the higher areas.. Lands were left in the hands of careless and ignorant overseers.³³

Undeniably, the low country was not healthy. All along the South Atlantic and Gulf Coast, the outbreaks of yellow fever increased devastatingly between 1800 and 1850, reaching their peak in the 50s.³⁴ In 1858, 178 people died in Charleston of yellow fever. The U.S. Census of 1850 listed May as the month in which the maximum number of deaths from fevers occurred.³⁵

William had a summer home in Sheldon, near Charleston, where the family would spend the unhealthy season. Still, in 1806, two young sons had been lost to yellow fever.³⁶ A letter from William's brother-in-law, a doctor in Steubenville, Ohio, pointed out the unhealthiness of Beaufort:

I think it probable that a change in climate would be of great benefit to your health. Could you not possibly pay us a visit about the opening of Spring and return in the Autumn? Would it not be better for you to remove to a country more healthy than the one you live in: You could purchase a farm in the neighborhood of Wheeling, Virginia from \$30 to \$40 Dollars pr. acre according to improvements.... The weather in this country has been uncommonly fine and the crops unusually abundant and the country at this time pretty healthy.³⁷

The effects of South Carolina's increase in deaths from yellow fever; the decrease in agricultural productivity and profit; the discouragement of a diversified economy began to be felt ^{early as} the late 1820s. A committee of the City Council of Charleston reported in 1828, "Charleston... has for several years retrograded with rapidity unprecedented. Her landed estates have within 8 years depreciated in value one-half. Industry and business talent, driven by necessity have sought employment elsewhere."³⁸ Between 1830 and 1840 the white population increased by only .5% and blacks soon outnumbered whites 59% to 41%.³⁹ Fear of slave insurrection arose. A conspiracy led by a freed slave, Denmark Vesey, had been uncovered in

Charleston in 1822, and the white citizenry had since suffered a form of paranoia, seeing black plotters behind every bush.⁴⁰ Frances Anne Kemble reported in her journal that a 9 PM curfew was strictly enforced on the slaves in Charleston. Each evening, bells rang out the warning that none were to be out on the public highways.⁴¹

White citizens began leaving the state in large numbers. By 1860, of the 470,257 white citizens born in South Carolina, 193,389 had left the state - a 41% loss. Georgia received the greatest number of South Carolina immigrants, with Alabama, Mississippi, and Arkansas gaining large numbers also.⁴² Unfortunately for South Carolina, those who migrated were predominately the most enterprising and best educated people.⁴³ It was a loss the state could ill afford. [Even in this century, the effects can still be seen. A drive through the state affords one a view of small depressed towns, surrounded by farm land. Industrial development seems to be spotty. Blacks outnumber whites still in the coastal towns like Beaufort.]

The South Carolina citizens who left between 1830 and 1860, spreading into other southern states, took more than their skills and possessions. They carried with them South Carolina politics - the sentiments of secessionism was spread throughout the South and most certainly effected political thought.⁴⁴

William's sons and daughters, then, joined the movement of people from the tidewater area of South Carolina. Family legend gives James Laurens the credit for influencing the group to choose Cobb County as their destination. The story is told of a trip James and his friend, John Glover, made through Georgia in 1828 on their way to Knoxville, Tennessee to see an amazing scientific phenomenon - a large lake newly formed on the Tennessee River by an earthquake. Heading north from Beaufort into Georgia, they stopped and visited some of Glover's relatives in Decatur, Georgia, continuing north through Cobb County, then Cherokee territory, to Tennessee. No letters or other documents exist to substantiate this tale which was told to my uncle, James Smith, by his father who was James Laurens' son. A map of Cobb county showing the division of lots for the 1832 land lottery does show a road called Tennessee Road running through the middle of Cobb County.⁴⁵ If James Laurens and his friend did make the trip to Tennessee, they may have traveled this route.

James Laurens' traveling companion, John Glover, did move into Cobb County and opened a tannery in 1848.⁴⁶ James arrived at about the same time having farmed for some years in Darien near his uncle's rice plantation, while learning the running of a large farm.⁴⁷ His brother, Sidney, bought

a 900 acre plantation just outside of Marietta in 1850.⁴⁸ The three sisters, Sarah, Elizabeth, and Hannah Moore, moved to Marietta in the late 1840s and purchased a house adjacent to James Lauren's second house site in Marietta. Dr. Henry J. Nicholes, also from Beaufort, set up his medical practice in Marietta after 1846. He was a close friend and colleague of Dr. Sidney Smith's.⁵⁰ A rundown of information gathered from grave markers in Cobb County cemeteries establishes that more than ten families came from Beaufort to Cobb during the same decade, and more than twenty-five families from Charleston and other parts of South Carolina also came to the area.⁵¹

Most of these South Carolina immigrants, like the Smiths, relocated to Cobb County about 10 years after the land had been formally opened for settlement. By that time it was a settled, but still vital and growing, ~~community~~^{community} with its seat of government in Marietta.⁵² The state census of 1845 counted 10,518 inhabitants in Cobb - 1,474 of which were slaves. The amount of state taxes paid by the citizens of Cobb for that year totaled \$2,691.61.⁵³ Extracts from the U.S. Census of 1850 listed 1,918 dwellings; 5,872 white males; 5,696 white females; 1 free negro male; 2 free negro females; 2,272 slaves; 931 farms; 10 manufacturing establishments.⁵⁴ By 1853, the county had an impressive columned two story brick courthouse.⁵⁵

Dr. Sidney Smith called his plantation outside of Marietta "Rockford." The house, which still stands on Manning Road in Marietta, was built in 1841 in the Greek Revival style. It has a first floor with walls 24 inches thick constructed of rock quarried near the house. The second floor is frame. [It served as U.S. Army headquarters during the Battle of Kennesaw and survived the war].⁵⁶ The doctor's medical office occupied two downstairs rooms in the front of the house. At the same time, Sidney had a home in town on what is now Powder Springs Street, and he kept his plantation, Gravel Hill, in South Carolina working under an overseer - not too successfully according to a letter written to his sisters from there in 1850.⁵⁷

His eldest son, Southwood, who was sent to Paris to study medicine, lived and practiced medicine in Brighton, South Carolina where he had a plantation adjoining Gravel Hill. Arabella and Julia, Sidney's unmarried daughters lived at Gravel Hill until their marriages. The property was apparently divided up and sold at that time as it was not mentioned in his will of 1855.⁵⁸

Sidney's first wife, Elizabeth, had died in ^{March 1845} January of 1846, and he immediately married Mariah King of Savannah ^{Jan. of 1846} two months later. Their first son, William King Smith, was born in December of 1846. Three other sons, Walter, Eugene, and Sidney followed.⁵⁹ The immediate remarriage of Sidney

apparently caused resentment among his older children. In his will, written in 1855, he warned his older children not to protest the division of property or they would be cut out of the inheritance altogether. The will listed his town residence, a town lot on which a blacksmith's shop stood, another town lot containing a tanyard and a strip of vacant land near the tanyard. These were divided among the older children. Rockford plantation and all pertaining to it was to be kept together for the support of the young second family. Both Sidney and his wife died in 1856, leaving the four youngest boys to the guardianship of James Laurens, Sarah and Hannah Moore [Elizabeth died some years before].⁶¹ *Elizabeth died in Feb. of 1857.*

James Laurens and his wife, Caroline, on first coming to Cobb County, purchased a farm to the extreme southwest of Marietta on Nickajack Creek. The area was undeveloped at the time and far from neighbors; the family soon decided to move into Marietta. James bought a lot on what is now Whitlock Avenue and built a victorian style house which stood until 1889 when it ^{burned} ~~was~~ during a fire which started in the Whitlock House, a large hotel nearby. His farm lands consisted of about 800 acres of land that was located southwest of Little Kennesaw Mountain or Pidgeon Hill. He had a grape orchard of ^{which} ~~was~~ he was proud.⁶² It is not known what other crops he grew, but he is said to have taken great interest in modern farming techniques. He had a large collection of pamphlets and books on the subject.⁶³ James may have followed the work of John Taylor of Virginia, who published a collection of essays in 1812 on the benefits of deep plowing, a four-field system of crop rotation, composting and manuring to restore worn-out lands. Or he may have read the journal, American Farmer, or Edmund Ruffin's book published in 1832, An Essay on Calcareous Manures, or subscribed to the journal, Farmers' Register.

By all accounts from various sources, James Laurens was viewed as a planner and a dreamer - interested in many different subjects and pursuits but unable to give necessary attention to day-to-day business affairs. His farming venture was, consequently, not as profitable as it should have been. He several times required loans from his two sisters.⁶⁵ We can only speculate at his success in taking care of his brother's plantation. It is possible that even if the Civil War had not intervened, both plantations, under James' care, would have eventually been broken up for needed capital to support the two families. Sidney's son, William King Smith was a cadet at the Georgia Military Institute in Marietta until 1864 when it closed and he and his brother Walter joined the Confederate Army.⁶⁶ William had had no experience in running a plantation and would have been unprepared to take over for some years. James Laurens died in 1865, leaving his wife, a 13

year old son and two daughters to survive somehow after the war.⁶⁷

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The sisters, Sarah and Hannah Moore, both lived to be 83 years old and were repositories of much family history gleaned by Irvin Smith and passed to his older son, my uncle, James L. Smith. Their income was chiefly derived from the interest on bonds, interest in the Roswell Manufacturing Company which consisted of two cotton mills, one wool factory and one flour mill, and the rent on several properties in Marietta. They owned five slaves.⁶⁸

Sidney, James, Sarah and Hannah seem to have been reasonably humane to their slaves according to the standards of their society. I could find no mention of their thoughts on slavery. Their mother was a Quaker from a Philadelphia family that did not own slaves and she must have had some doubts about the rightness of owning other human beings. Possibly it was due to her influence that Sarah and Hannah developed an interest in educating the children of their brothers' slaves. Accounts given by Irvin Smith, recall the time when he was a small boy and attended school at his aunts' along with slave children. One of the children, Jonh Box, had an aptitude for music and he was given piano lessons. As an elderly man, he visited Irvin and told him that the lessons had allowed him to obtain a position with a band in Detroit.⁶⁹

Though William's children left no evidence of their feelings toward slavery, William's brother, James, in Darien did. A portion of his will written in 1853 stated his views:

As my mind, has long been exercised not from any view that slavery is to be considered a Sin but otherwise fully justified from the Oracles of truth - that - I, James Smith - Wills, that provision for them that their situation might be measurably meliorated, or make better their situation, gradually - that will prove in time a better condition for them.

Thus, for that end - I, James Smith for their gradual emancipation the following provision do hereby make for them, in this my Will - to wit - that after my desease an annual register be kept of all Births occuring on s'd estate - the same being recorded in the annals of the County - that every tenth (10th) birth, at the age of eighteen (18) years of age, shall have faithfully made known to him her - this arrangement or provision made for carrying out this my object, and in the event of such accepting of it, such shall be made known or reported to the Society called the Colonization Society in the United States of America, for the purpose of providing and arranging for their freedom....⁷⁰

[It is interesting that in the opening paragraph of the provision for emancipating his slaves, James made clear that he believed slavery received Biblical support, but he felt the provision would improve the situation of the slave. He seemed to be apologising for the provision. His purpose in using that tone might have been to avoid antagonizing his contemporaries who would have felt that he was a threat to their way of life.]

The threat to that way of life had been brewing and simmering since the 1820s, and it finally rose to the boiling point in 1861. As the guns of the Battle of Kennesaw grew more deafening in June of 1864,⁷¹ the threat to that way of life became a reality to the people of Marietta. Many packed up as much of their household good as they could transport and refuged to Atlanta and southward, away from Sherman's advancing army. Two letters written by Sarah Smith after she fled her home represent the time when realization ^{finally} came that the cause was lost and that a way of life had come to an end:⁷²

Atlanta July 3, 1864

Dear William:

Yours of the 16th Ult. has just come to hand and I hasten to reply. It is rumoured last night and this morning that our army is falling back--so in the night here comes the balance of our family from Marietta, all except James, who we are looking for every moment on his wagon. A great deal of excitement in Marietta. The place, they say, shook with the roaring of the cannon and musketry and fearful was the prospect. They could scarcely get off and the cars nearly broke through with the weight of the wounded and people fleeing. It is surely a fearful time withal, and what will become of us the Lord only knows, for if we cannot hold the strong position in check we cannot hold this place. Sherman's forces are an overwhelming one. Johnson cannot force him into a general fight, though he has thrown out the gauntlet time after time. He means to take Atlanta by flanking operations, and as he has the men to spread out to a great extent, Johnson it seems cannot prevent his flanking. Our soldiers have no idea of being whipped, if Sherman would only give them an opportunity of showing their metal. But he is too shrewd for for he has already tested our army's ability to fight in the various skirmishes he has had from Dalton onwards. I gave up my home with great reluctance, but when I recollected that I could not live without money and servants, I thought it best to leave. The idea is to find another home. All at present is dark, dark, and I know not whither to turn, for the whole country is so filled up with refugees that one can scarcely find a hole to hide in. If I only had a little quiet retreat how glad would I be, but transportation is so hard to be got now, next to an impossibility, and the expenses so great that I am afraid we will yet be caught in Yankey's lines. It cost me upwards of \$600 to reach this place and before I leave it again I will have to get more.

- July 4, 1864

The enemy took possession of Marietta yesterday morning. Johnson is on the road to the Chattahoochee river now. The Enemy trying to flank all the time, so he has to move as they do. They will soon I am afraid be here in Atlanta. Walter with the other cadets are on their way to the Chattahoochee to assist in guarding the ferry. He is very anxious to get a discharge, but the times are so critical that they wont grant it, poor boy. I am sorry for him but cannot help him any way. He sent his trunk, with all the cloth for his clothes to Milledgeville, and Wilcox says they are all ruined by mildew. If he had not volunteered, all this difficulty would not have occurred. [Walter is 14 years old]. We hear the cannon distinctly this morn from the army. The enemy shelling, I expect, warning us to be off,

but I am afraid they will catch us yet. I do not know what to do, but hope the Lord will make clear our way. How grieved I am that our pleasant home is now in the possession of the enemy. I have been hoping that we would run no farther, but by the sounding of the artillery I would suppose they were near the river. I am so afraid that Walter will get hurt. Tell your friends to remember him in their prayers. We are truly refugees now. James came on yesterday in his wagon--the road he says so thick with our pickets falling back that he could scarcely get through. I hear that the Military Institute is burnt and the Sweetwater factory also Denmeads Mill in Marietta. The booming of the cannon sounds in the direction of Roswell, that I suppose is gone too [The Roswell Manufacturing Company]. Our interest in that factory chiefly supported us for the past three years. It is a great loss to us. Also our two stores and house, so we have lost a great deal in Marietta, you see. James' two men Andrew and Stepany are gone over to the enemy, also William the son of Dora. James had him hired here, but he stole off to Marietta. A great many servants are gone over. Indeed James had a great deal of trouble with them all.

Aunt Sarah