

TALBIRD FAMILY HISTORY

Switzerland, Fla., May 18, 1885

Col. H. H. R. Dawson

Washington, D. C.

Dear Hal:-

You requested me to give you an outline of the history of the Talbird Family. I had once a number of papers relating to this subject, but they were destroyed in the burning of Howard College, Marion, Ala., as far back as October 1854. It was my full intention to arrange them consecutively and write out their contents. I read them over, but with the above purpose fully formed, never with the attention which their importance to us as a family demanded. I am therefore dependent on memory for the information I can give.

The progenitor of the Talbird Family in South Carolina was named Henry Talbot, hence the "H" in your own initials. His history is really a romance. He was born in Ireland, the son of a Knight Baronet named John Talbot. This Sir John Talbot was twice married. By his first wife, so far as I am informed, he had three children: Jane, John and Henry; by his second marriage he had a son named James; possibly there may have been other children. It is my impression that Sir John became involved in debt by extravagant living. His second marriage - an expedient then quite common - was contracted to relieve his financial embarrassment. As Dublin was the place of his wife's residence, he removed to the City and shortly afterwards was elected its Lord Mayor. In the meantime his brother Henry, for whom his second son was named, had gone to London where he entered into some mercantile pursuit in which he acquired a fortune. Being childless, he requested his brother to send him his namesake, then between three and four years old, with the promise that he should be his heir. The childish recollections of the child were that his uncle made a great pet of him, but he was afraid of his aunt. He was frequently sent out under the protection of a man servant for exercise and amusement. Whether by design or accident he could never conjecture, but on one of these he was taken to a distant part of the City, where being separated from his attendant, he was lost. Wandering about the streets affrighted

and crying he attracted the attention of an old gentleman who spoke kindly to him and asked him what was the matter. He replied that he wanted to go home. He could tell his name, Henry Talbot, but was unable to name the place of his residence and could only say that he lived with his Uncle and Aunt. As night was near the Gentleman had no alternative but to abandon the lost child or to take him with him to his own home. He resided at Plymouth whither he was going by water and thither he carried the little Henry. Thus he became an inmate of the family of Mr. Haylton. This gentleman was the Captain and owner of a merchant ship trading between Charleston, S. C. and Plymouth. He was on the eve of his voyage and sailed a few days after finding the child. Before his departure he cautioned his wife to look for any advertisement in the London papers and to inform the boy's friends where he could be found. After an absence of several months he was pained on his return to find that his wife had failed to follow his suggestions. The couple were passed the meridian of life and were childless. They therefore persuaded themselves that a kind Providence had sent them a bright and promising boy to fill the vacant place in their affections. They preferred to treat him as a grandchild and allowed him to retain his name Henry Talbot. A few years after they determined to remove to America and selected South Carolina as their future home. The old Captain continued to follow a seafaring life and when the little grandson had attained sufficient age, he carried him with him on several voyages. The young man thus became a good sailor and acquired considerable knowledge of navigation, but the life was not particularly attractive to him. When, therefore, the old man became too infirm to encounter the hardships of the sea, he sold his ship and with his adopted child entered into some mercantile pursuit. He survived his change of life only for a year or two and at his death bequeathed his property to his wife and adopted grandson who continued the business. While thus employed he received a shipment of goods from England. In visiting the ship he had presented to him several papers which he knew would be quite a prize to his grandmother. At night they were seated in the family room reading these papers when he heard a suppressed sob. Looking up, to his surprise, he beheld the old woman bitterly

weeping. He tenderly inquired, "Mother, what is the matter?" She replied, "My dear boy, I am weeping at the thought of the wrong I have done you." She could say no more but pointing to a column of the paper she retired to her chamber. On looking at the paper he perceived that it contained the obituary of Sir John Talbot. It was stated that his elder brother had died before his father, that his Uncle Henry had died, leaving quite a fortune for the times to Sir John and a handsome legacy to his niece, Jane Talbot, who was still living in Dublin. The paper went on to state that the second son, Henry, had been lost in London when quite a child, that if he was still living and could establish his identity, he would be a knight Baronet and the inheritor of a large fortune. This paper went on to state that the title and estate would be inherited by a younger son, the child of a second marriage. After careful consultation with the old lady and receiving from her a number of the facts related in this paper, he took ship for England. He went to Dublin where he found his sister, Jane, still a single woman. At their first introduction he observed that she carefully scanned his features. On being told that he was her lost brother, she replied that it was a matter in which she could not be deceived. She went on to say, "You bear a decided resemblance to my brother, John, and look still more like my father. Of this you can satisfy yourself by looking at those portraits which hang on the wall. But this is not enough. I am about twelve years older than my brother Henry and was almost his nurse. He had on his person certain marks which cannot be mistaken." She insisted on his exhibiting them and he did so, thus she became fully convinced and embraced him as her long lost brother. The younger half-brother was at the time travelling on the Continent, but his guardians were in Dublin. As the result of the conference with his sister he concluded to consult the Duke of Gmond who was the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland and to whom he was related on his mother's side. He carried a note of introduction from his sister and detailed the facts of the case to the Duke. He also recognized the family likeness; but after careful consideration he frankly told him that there was no chance whatever of his recovering the title and estate of his father. Said he, "There is all evidence necessary to moral conviction, but there is no legal

proof of your identity." He advised him to see the guardians of his half-brother and gave him a note of introduction; but without looking at the facts they charged him with being an imposter and he thought prudent to leave Dublin. He had, however, spent much of his time with his sister and had won her warm affection. During their first interview the Duke of Ormond was pleased with the young American and requested him to visit him again before his return to Charleston. At this juncture the Duke was spending a brief period at one of his estates in Ireland. As Lord Lieutenant he had several young Englishmen with him. Both he and they contracted "a partiality for Henry Talbot" which was of service to him in later years. Including his double passage across the Atlantic he was more than a year away from home. During this time occurred the decease of the aged woman who had tenderly watched over his childhood, but whose misplaced affection robbed him of his estate and inheritance. While absent his business had fallen to confusion and he sold out. With one or two thousand pounds sterling in money he left Charleston and went to Fort Royal where he again engaged in business and prospered.

He there married a Mrs. Doherty, her father was from Switzerland with an unspokeable Swiss Sir-name, which I cannot recall. He had been an officer in the Swiss Guards of an European potentate. For some political offence he was driven to seek refuge in America. Being a brave and experienced soldier he found it possible to render considerable service to the colonists in their disastrous conflict with the Tuscarora and Yemassee Indians. Probably considerations of prudence kept him from accepting a command, but he attached himself to one of the companies of the Colonial Army as a gentleman volunteer and military advisor. He there formed the acquaintance of a subaltern officer named Doherty. He was so well pleased with the young officer as to encourage a match between him and his daughter who had just completed her sixteenth year - his only child. Doherty died young, leaving a widow about 21 or 22 years of age and two children, a son and daughter. The daughter married when quite young a gentleman of education and property named Le Croft. The son remained unmarried. When the struggle of the Colonies with the mother country was inaugurated, he was known as a decided

whig and acquired a noble local reputation as a partisan leader. He was killed in the war. His sister's son, John Le Croft, was commissioned Captain by Gen. Greene. The history of these two men furnishes one of the most interesting local episodes in the struggle of South Carolina for liberty. My information in reference to them is more authentic than that which related to ^{the} progenitor of my immediate family. Capt. Doherty was the half-brother of my Grandfather; Capt. LeCroft in fact raised and educated my father. Henry Talbird had four sons and two daughters by his marriage with Mrs. Doherty. Before telling you of these it is necessary to mention further incidents of the father's history. Henry Talbird lived at Whale Branch on Port Royal Island and was a prosperous planter. He had a brick yard which was quite profitable. Foreseeing the importance of it he had several of his Negro men instructed in the trade of brick laying. Meanwhile he kept up a regular correspondence with his sister still living in Dublin. He had become the father of two or three children and had their names recorded in the family register together with his own and his wife's names. The record was in his own handwriting, written Talbot. This register fell into my hands and was destroyed as stated above. About this time he received a letter from his sister informing him that she was dying with rapid consumption. The letter apprised him that she had made him her heir, but ^{as} her property consisted of money, he would hardly derive any benefit from her will unless he could be present. She expressed an earnest desire to see him once more before her death. It so happened that it was both possible and convenient for him to sail to Europe a few days after the reception of the letter. Fortunately his voyage was rapid and in little over a month he was by the bedside of his dying sister. There for the first time he met his younger half-brother who had inherited the title and estate of his father. They had a free conversation in which he showed his brother that he had full and clear moral evidence of his identity. "But", said he, "I have no legal evidence and I shall never disturb you by any claim to our father's title and estate." He did not, however, form a favorable opinion of his brother. In defiance of the earnest protestations of the sister, this brother had him arrested and imprisoned as an impostor. He was able to pay for it and he obtained the best legal advice in the City. Happily, the Court before which the preliminary

trial must be had was in session and the Judges, after hearing the case, dismissed it. The cruel conduct of the brother hastened the death of the sister. Before her death she used the precaution of drawing her money from the bank and had it placed to the credit of her brother Henry. By this expedient the efforts of the younger brother to seize it were frustrated. After paying the funeral expenses, house rent and other debts of his sister, he found himself possessed of something over 3,500 pounds sterling. He had kept up an irregular correspondence with the Duke of Ormond and he wished to see him before his return to America. The British Parliament was in session and he thought that he would find the Duke in London. On his arrival there he found that the Duke had incurred the displeasure of the King of England and was then a refugee on the Continent. But he easily renewed his acquaintance with the gentlemen with whom he had years before become acquainted and they treated him with kind consideration and assisted him in some matters of business. One of them said to him, "Mr. Talbot, from what you have told me you have a respectable knowledge of navigation and surveying, you have a brickyard in actual operation and have contrived to make several of your Negro men rough bricklayers. The Home Government in connection with the Government of South Carolina and Georgia have determined to erect light houses on the Coast. Would it not be a good thing for you to take the contract for their erection?" He admitted that it would and confessed that one object in coming to London was to secure it if possible. Through the influence of these friends the contract was obtained.

He returned to South Carolina and entered upon this work with the energy for which he was distinguished and made it profitable. In my boyhood one of the lighthouses was standing on Tybee Island on the Georgia side of the Sound of the same name, called Talbot's Light. In part payment of his contract he received grants of land. One or two of these were located on Hilton Head Island. One of them he gave to my Grandfather and there both my father and I were born. By some clerical error in the certificate of these grants sent all the way from England, the name Henry Talbird instead of Henry Talbot was written. In the punctitiousness of the times the papers would have to be sent back to England before the correction could be made. He supposed that he was the

last of the name except his half-brother in Ireland and he was completely disgusted with him as to induce the willingness to adopt the name thus accidentally given. Thus you have the history of the progenitor of the Talbird family and origin of the name.

My great-grandfather was a whig in our Revolution, but too aged and inactive to be a soldier. He lived several years after the war and at his death was buried at Whale Branch on Fort Royal Island. I cannot recall the year of his birth or death. I only know that he was near ninety years of age when he died. As already stated he had two daughters and four sons. One of the daughters married a gentleman named Bush. I never knew what became of the family. The other daughter, Mary, married a Dr. Rhodes, an English gentleman of education and refinement. He and his wife lived in Beaufort and were buried in the Episcopal cemetery of that place. Dr. Rhodes was your great-grandfather. You are probably better acquainted with the history of the family than I am.

The sons as I remember them were named Thomas, William, John and Richard. The last (Richard) was killed in a skirmish between the Whigs and Tories at a point between Beaufort and what used to be called the Ferry. William was a cripple and could take no part in the war. Thomas and John were good soldiers during the entire conflict. You may remember that Ramsey in his history of South Carolina gives an account of the distinction of a Whig Regiment on Johns Island near Charleston. Thomas Talbird was Captain of a company in that Regiment and was left on the field as dead. He recovered but was lame for life. He was afterwards known as Col. Talbird. He built a family vault in the Episcopal Graveyard in Beaufort where he and his family are deposited. The male members of his family died with issue. The descendants of his daughter, or some of them, are still living in Beaufort. John Talbird, my grandfather, was a lieutenant in his brother's Company. His life was saved by an English Captain who had married my grandmother's sister. He received several slight wounds and was taken prisoner. He was retained in captivity until the English Army was driven from Charleston. About that time he effected his escape and returned home to find every house on his plantation was burned and a number of his Negroes carried off and shipped to the West Indies where they were sold by the English. The officer in command of the soldiers detailed to destroy the plantations on the Coast between Savannah, Ga. and Beaufort, South Carolina,

happened to be acquainted with my grandmother's two sisters. They had both married Captains in the English Army. He told her that he was obliged to obey orders in burning the houses, but he made the soldiers take the furniture from the dwelling house and pile it under a large oak tree, about 150 yards from the house. The tree used to be my playground in my boyhood. My grandmother was a woman of decided character and energy. She knew that the English had failed to capture all the Negroes. Some twelve or fifteen had escaped to the woods. She was confident that after the departure of the enemy they would return to know what had become of their mistress to whom they were tenderly attached. It all happened as she anticipated and going to the edge of the forest so as to be out of sight of vessels and boats passing along the river, she had erected cabins with the leaves of the cabbage palmetto as shelter for herself and Negroes. These cabins can be made quite comfortable and here my grandmother remained until the close of the war. In one of these cabins my father first saw the light. His birthday was the one on which Lord Cornwallis surrendered to General Washington at Yorktown. My grandmother's maiden name was Ladson. Mr. Ladson was an Englishman, the only one of his family in America. He came to this country with some wealth. He and Mr. Conyers (whose daughter Ladson married) purchased a cargo of Africans brought to South Carolina by a ship sent from Boston. If my family records had not been destroyed I could give names and dates. Mr. Conyers came to America a man of considerable wealth. He claimed to be the lineal descendent of a Sir John Conyers who was appointed Commander of the Tower of London during the reign of Charles First. He acted in sympathy with Cromwell and on the Restoration of the Stuarts the family of the Conyers fell into obscurity except that they contrived to retain some portion of their wealth. The last of the family emigrated to America. He was accidentally drowned while fishing. The place where the accident occurred received the name "Conyer's Hole". I have seen it hundreds of times. The plantation on which he and his wife lived adjoined my grandfather's place. At the death of the old lady it was inherited by my grandfather and ultimately descended to my father. I have retained a distinct recollection of my grandfather. When he became infirm from an injury he made my father's house his home. I was the first born of my father's

children and was the pet of my grandfather. Much of what is here stated has grown out of the recollection of what he told me. He died in his sixty-sixth year and his remains were deposited in the family burial place at Whale Branch. He left four children: John, Henry, Thomas and Ann. He was a man of wealth for the times. He divided his property to his children sometime before his death, giving to each the handsome nucleus of a fortune. My aunt married a physician from one of the New England states, named Fyler. He inherited an estate there and at his death his widow with their only child, a son, removed to that country. I have lost sight of the family. My two Uncles, John and Thomas, lived and died in Beaufort. Both of them became wealthy, but in his old age my uncle John lost his wealth by security debts and a badly managed law suit. When your honored father came to Beaufort District, he by his clear and discriminating legal knowledge saw the injustice that had been done. Without charge to the family he procured the reversal of the previous decision, and the property that had not been squandered was restored to the family. My Uncle Thomas left a considerable estate to his children. He was in many respects one of the most perfect characters in the relations of this life I have ever known, and a pious member of the Episcopal Church. He was universally popular and commanded the respect and esteem of the entire community. Both of my uncles died during the period of my residence in New York and I am not informed of the place of their burial. It is now considerably over half a century since I left my native state. The descendants of my uncles were much younger than myself. We did not correspond and thus I am a stranger to my own family. I know that my uncles left children and have reason to believe that some of their descendants are still living in Beaufort. This is the extent of my information as relates to them. My father, Henry Talbird, was born and lived until he died on Hilton Head Island. He possessed one of the most original minds I have ever encountered. He was not in any sense of the word eccentric, but he loved his books and his Chemical Laboratory. He was universally respected and regarded by those who knew him as a man of great breadth of views and extensive knowledge. He was not ambitious and the insularity of his life, joined with his excessive modesty, furnished no opportunity for exhibiting his really eminent abilities. He also died in his 66th year and while I was still in New York. His remains were taken to

Whale Branch. My mother's maiden name was Blackwood. Her father was of Scotch descent. He was the only one of his family of whom I have ever heard. He was a man of some education and known as a Whig soldier of the Revolution, notorious for his reckless bravery. By the female line my mother was nearly related to the Pelots and DuPonts, French Huguenots who came to America by way of Holland. In all the relations of life, as wife, mother and friend, she was as nearly perfect as she could well be in this imperfect state of being. Such, at least, was the universal judgment of those who knew her intimately. As a rather strange coincidence, she also died in her 66th year, and was interred by the side of my father. My parents had five children: Henry, Eleanor, Richard, Mary Ann and John. Two of these died when young, Mary Ann living only one year after her marriage and left an infant daughter of a few days old; the daughter is still living and is in Florida. My sister Eleanor married into the Scriven family of Georgia. She has four children, one son and three daughters. The son is now a practicing physician in Texas. One daughter is the wife of Judge Bansey of Georgia. The other two are respectfully married. My brother John, the youngest of my father's children, is also a physician of considerable ability living in Florida. This is about all the information I can give you of the Talbird family. My Grandfather's brother mentioned as a cripple married and left a son who was the father of a large family. All I know of them is that they are industrious and energetic men and women of good reputation.

By the way, while we were living in Cartersville, your excellent mother sent me a document containing a brief history of the Henry Talbot of this paper. In it Sir John Talbot is mentioned only as the Lord Mayor of Dublin. The visit of Henry Talbot to his sister Jane is as it is here related except that he received 750 pounds sterling from his sister instead of 3,500. This discrepancy can be accounted for in this way: my great grandfather never spoke of his Irish relatives. He seemed to desire that his children should remain in ignorance of them and of his early life as connected with them. It was only to his sons, Thomas and John, that he ever spoke freely on the distasteful subject. Even they were enjoined not to mention these things to the other children and it was not until years after his death that my grandfather related them to me. My health has

been feeble and I have been subject to frequent interruptions in writing this paper. My mind is nearly as active as it ever was, but my vision is greatly impaired. Writing is now a kind of guess work to me. I cannot see to correct errors and you must excuse them. If you ever succeed in deciphering these hieroglyphics and find points upon which you desire explanation, inform me.

With sincere affection and esteem,

Your kinsman,

Henry Talbird