

THE DRAYTON FAMILY

The sectional tensions involving states rights and slavery that characterized 19th Century America were also evident in the life of a prominent South Carolina family: the Draytons of Charleston, a family that also had a Hilton Head connection.

The first American Drayton, Thomas, came to this country from Barbados in 1671, and within a century his descendents, having settled on the banks of the Ashley River near Charleston, had become a wealthy and influential South Carolina family.

Particularly notable is William Henry Drayton.

William Henry, a great grandson of Thomas, was born in 1742 and lived in England from age nine to age 21, during which time he studied at Oxford. Upon returning to Charleston about 1763 he practiced law quite successfully. His first political writings appeared in the 1760s under the name "Freeman"; and his most famous early essay was a 1774 letter addressed to the Continental Congress that discussed America's grievances and included a suggested bill of American rights.

William Henry was appointed South Carolina's first chief justice and as such asserted that "under color of law, the King and Parliament have made the most arbitrary attempts to enslave America." He was one of the first South Carolinians to speak openly for a break with England, and was appointed a member of the 2nd Continental Congress; where he is credited with having an influential role. After serving 16 months in Philadelphia, his public service was cut short when at age 37 he died in September of 1779; he was buried in Philadelphia in the same cemetery as Benjamin Franklin and other founding fathers.

William Henry Drayton's younger brother, Charles, purchased Drayton Hall, an

Ashley River plantation, in 1784; he and his wife, Hester Middleton, had eight children, four sons and four daughters, four of whom (three sons and one daughter) predeceased their father. Charles is known as Drayton Halls great biographer, an appellation based in large part on the extensive diary he kept from 1784 until his death in 1820. Charles' diary reveals his keen interest in scientific thought. He corresponded with Thomas Jefferson on such matters as architecture, botony, animal husbandry, and landscape design.

William Henry Drayton's son, John, was born in 1766, was educated at the College of New Jersey and the College of South Carolina (now the University of South Carolina). Upon graduation he practiced law as had his father, was an avid writer, and a successful politician; he was South Carolina's governor twice: 1800 to 1802 and 1808 to 1810, elected to that office by the General Assembly. Before becoming governor he had been elected to the South Carolina House of Representatives (1792-1796) and had served as lieutenant governor (1798-1800).

John was a noted author; among his published works is "A View of South Carolina, as Respects her Natural and Civil Concerns," based on the fact that he had traveled widely throughout the state. He also wrote "Memoirs of the American Revolution from its Commencement to the Year 1776"; it was in part an account of his father's role.

William Henry Drayton's youngest son was born in 1776 in St. Augustine shortly before his father, who served as chief justice of the Province of East Florida, lost his position because of his support for American independence. Young William passed his early years in Charleston, was educated in England, and studied law in Charleston.

He had a successful law practice in Charleston and also managed Drayton property, and in 1804 he married Ann Gadsden. They had four children before her death in 1814:

Emma Gadsden, Thomas Fenwick, Percival, and William Sidney, all of whom lived to maturity. William served in the War of 1812 as a colonel, a rank that he kept and that distinguished him from the other William Draytons, of which there are a number.

Col. William Drayton served four terms in Congress (1824-1833), a position that involved him in some of the sectional conflicts that eventually led to the Civil War. The nullification issue* of 1832 and 1833 was a critical issue for South Carolina and also for Col. Drayton. His views in favor of the federal government were in sharp contrast to the views of his constituents, and the strain of that diversity led him to settle in Philadelphia. He retained his South Carolina property but apparently never returned to the state.

The political division in the Drayton family characterized by Col William Drayton's move to Philadelphia also had military implication as we shall shortly see in the split in the careers of two of his sons.

Thomas, born in 1798, attended West Point and was in the class of 1828 along with Jefferson Davis; the two men became close friends. Thomas was commissioned a second lieutenant in the 6th Infantry from which he resigned after four years and became a civil engineer for railroad construction. After two year in that position, he took up plantation life and politics, being elected to the state legislature where he was an outspoken supporter of states rights and slavery. While a legislator, he was also president of the Charleston & Savannah Railroad from 1853 to 1858.

Upon the outbreak of war, Jefferson Davis, then president of the Confederacy, appointed Thomas a brigadier general in September of 1861 and made him commander of

*Nullification was the view that states had authority to nullify, discredit, a U.S. law.

the Port Royal Military District, a district that included two key forts, Fort Walker, located in an area that is now Port Royal Plantation on Hilton Head, and Fort Beauregard on St. Phillips Island; the forts were meant to control the entrance to and from Port Royal Sound. Thomas established his headquarters in Hilton Head's Fish Haul Plantation, the property of Catherine Pope, a member of a prominent Hilton Head family, whom Thomas had married in 1832.

Percival, born in 1812, attended the U. S. Naval academy, entering Annapolis at the age of 15 and serving in the U. S. Navy until his death in 1865. In the 1830s he served aboard the USS Constitution, then the flagship of the Mediterranean Squadron. As a junior officer his facility in the French and German languages made him an important interpreter and gave him opportunities to travel in Europe and to meet high-ranking European officers. He became a lieutenant in 1838, served in California during the Mexican War, became a commander in 1855, and participated in a Paraguay Expedition in 1858. He was assigned to ordinance duty at the Philadelphia Navy Yard in 1860. To the Ft. Sumter action he responded by sending a statement of loyalty to the secretary of war and by volunteering for sea duty and received it by being assigned as captain of the gunboat Pocahontas.

With the onset of war in 1861, an immediate Union objective was to prevent Confederate coastal states from exporting goods, particularly cotton, and thereby raising funds for the support of the military. With that goal in mind, a Federal naval force under the command of Captain Samuel F. Dupont set sail from Hampton Roads, Virginia on October 29 for the purpose of taking control of South Carolina's Port Royal Sound, the

sound guarded by Ft. Walker on Hilton Head and Ft. Beauregard to the north on St. Phillips Island.

The Union fleet, at that time the largest ever assembled, lost a number of ships to a heavy storm as it sailed toward the South Carolina coast; even so, when it reached the sound and began action on the morning of November 7, it was capable of firing 153 guns against the two forts while the forts were capable of firing but 39 guns. Moreover, the forts were firing at steam-powered ships, moving targets, while the fleet was aiming at stationary targets and firing from calm waters on a calm day. The Pocahontas, under the command of Percival Drayton, was one of the attacking ships that compelled the Confederates to abandon first Ft. Walker then Ft. Beauregard. Casualties in the Battle of Port Royal Sound were relatively light, a rare statistic for the horrendous Civil War. Eight were killed in the fleet and 23 were wounded while in the forts 11 were killed and 47 wounded.

The successful naval attack was followed at once by an amphibious operation by a Union expeditionary force of 13,000 troops under the command of Brig. Gen. T. W. Sherman (no relation to General William Tecumseh Sherman) that occupied Hilton Head, Port Royal, Beaufort, and St. Helena Island.

Percival Drayton became a captain in the navy and was subsequently assigned to Admiral David Farragut's squadron and commanded his flagship, the USS Hartford, in the naval assault and capture of Mobile Bay in 1864. When the war ended he was appointed Chief of the Bureau of Navigation but he died shortly thereafter, in August 1865.

Brother Thomas' career, however was not successful. He commanded a brigade at

the second Battle of Manassas that suffered heavy casualties, and his depleted brigade saw action at Sharpsburg. His superiors, however, questioned his tactical abilities and he was removed from command. During the last two years of the war he mainly performed administrative duties in the Trans-Mississippi Theater. And after the war he lived briefly in Charlotte, N.C. and sold insurance. He died in Florence, S. C. There is no record of Thomas and Percival ever meeting face to face in their careers during the war but there was some correspondence between the two and Percival's will assigned \$30,000 to Thomas, a significant sum which Thomas sorely needed.

Magnolia Plantation and Drayton Hall, properties of the Drayton family through several centuries, came through the Civil War with only minor damages, and by 1870 Magnolia Plantation and the magnificent gardens that had been begun as early as the 1840s were open to the public. On Drayton Hall, adjacent to Magnolia Plantation, its historic mansion was one of several in the area that was not demolished by the invading Federal army, probably because it had been converted into a hospital. It became a National Trust for Historic Preservation in 1974 and is open to the public; Magnolia Plantation is governed by a Board of Directors consisting of Drayton family members. The Historic Society of Pennsylvania has an extensive collection of Drayton family papers dealing with the Philadelphia branch of the family.