

Westville and the Civil War

By Thornton F. Jordan, Ph. D.

Trustees Andy Moye and Thornton Jordan recently took a Civil War battlefield tour with History America Tours. The itinerary included First Manassas, Antietam, Chancellorsville, and Gettysburg. Their tour guide was Edwin Bearrs, retired historian from the National Park Service, who conducts Civil War tours all over America.

When they described Westville to him, Bearrs said, “You know, there is no other place in America like Westville where people can go to see what life was like for the average Southerner before the war. Westville needs to advertise itself as a pre-Civil War town.”

Westville is not the moonlight and magnolia south. As an entire dirt street town which represents all social classes and a cross section of trades, Westville’s authenticity is its greatest asset. The buildings span the whole range of social history, from log houses built as early as 1810 before the Indian removal in 1836 to a columned home with formal gardens of a prosperous merchant.

Although Westville’s chosen period stops short of the Civil War, the fact is that families who lived, worked, and worshipped in Westville structures sent their sons off to the Mexican War, the Civil War, the Spanish American War, and all the wars of the 20th century. As such, Westville is historically connected to the Civil War. It offers a unique opportunity for students of the war to experience the living history of the period when life depended on animal power and human skill.

Stimulated by Ed Bearrs’s remark, we have dug into the archives and county histories and have discovered that several buildings and families have direct connections to the Civil War. We now include this information on the website, with a link to Port Columbus, the National Civil War Naval Museum.

The builder and first owner of **Bryan House (1831)**, Loverd Bryan (1804-1877), was the uncle of **Clement Evans (1833-1911)**, the most famous Civil War veteran from Lumpkin.

After serving as a local judge and a state senator, Clement Evans enlisted in November 1861 and fought with the Army of Northern Virginia on the Peninsular, at Fredericksburg, Gettysburg, the Wilderness, Petersburg, and Appomattox. Promoted to brigadier general in 1864, he commanded J. B. Gordon’s old brigade both in Jubal Early’s Washington raid and during Philip Sheridan’s Valley Campaign. At Appomattox, when Lee ordered Gordon’s brigade to attack, Evans led an ambush and captured guns and 78 prisoners before a courier arrived to announce Lee’s surrender to Grant.

After the war, Evans returned to Lumpkin. Disheartened by what he had seen at Fredericksburg, he entered the ministry and preached in the North Georgia Conference for 27 years, in Cartersville, Athens, Augusta, Atlanta, and Rome. Emory College awarded him an honorary doctorate of divinity. He was active in Confederate veterans’ affairs and edited a 12-volume *The Confederate Military History* (1899). At age 75 he gave the invocation at the unveiling of the Confederate monument on the courthouse square in Lumpkin on April 16, 1908. He died in Atlanta 1911 and lay in state in the Capitol before he was buried in Oakland Cemetery.

After Evans’s uncle, **Loverd Bryan (1804-1887)**, built the Bryan-Worthington house in 1831, he served as a State Senator (1838-1839 and 1849). Bryan’s ancestry went back to the Governor of Ulster, Ireland. The first immigrant, Needham Bryan I, born 1690, came to North Carolina. Both his son Needham Bryan II and grandson Needham Bryan III served in the Provincial Congress in 1775. Needham Bryan III’s son Clement (born 1770) moved from North Carolina to Randolph County, took part in the Indian war of 1836, and died three years later. Of Clement Bryan’s eleven children, Loverd Bryan was the youngest.

Prentiss Stanley Bryan, Co. D, 12th Bn. Ga. Cavalry, son of Loverd and Elizabeth Bryan, died from wounds in the battle of Griswoldville, Ga. In 1864.

The **Singer Shoemaker's shop (1836)** made footwear for the Confederacy. Twenty-four-year-old **Johan George Singer**, from Stuttgart, Germany, married Louisa Messner of Baden-Baden, Germany in Baltimore and brought his new bride to Lumpkin, Georgia. He built a shoemaker's shop to make fine boots and shoes. During the Civil War he supplied shoes to the Confederate government.

Two years later he built **The Singer House (1838)** and raised a family of eleven children. The boys slept upstairs in the shoemaker's shop and the girls upstairs in the Singer House. Three of the Singer sons served in the Civil War (**Joseph E.** and **George** in the Stewart Grays, Co. K, 2nd GA Regiment; and **John** Co E. 31st GA Reg.). Louisa Singer lived to be 100 years old, and died in 1916.

(Descendants, the Julian Singer family, donated the land for Westville).

As an interesting side note, preceding Johan George Singer to Lumpkin was Johan's uncle, John Singer (1784-1855), of Ruhr, Oberant Stuttgart, Germany, who had served in the Prussian army fighting against Napoleon. After settling in Bibb County, he married a half-Indian woman, **Temperance Carr**, and in 1833 moved to Stewart County. The great-great-great-great-great granddaughter of Temperance Carr is First Lady **Rosalyn Carter**.

Johan's brother, John Singer II, came with Johan to Lumpkin in 1836 and opened a tailor shop (now the Westville Cabinet Shop).

The Singer House, the Shoe Shop, and the Cabinet Shop at Westville represent typical housing and shops in frontier Georgia before the Civil War.

The **McDonald House (1843) and formal gardens** are typical of the life prosperous upper middle-class merchant planter before the Civil War. Edward McDonald (1812-1878), son of a Scottish immigrant from the Isle of Skye, moved south from North Carolina and built a small dwelling in Cuthbert, Georgia in 1843, later to be enlarged with a second story and two front parlors as the McDonald House. He and his wife, Hannah Ross, also of Scottish ancestry, had nine children, three of whom died young. After working for a merchant, he built a cotton warehouse when the railroad came to Cuthbert and prospered before the Civil War. Opposed to secession, when the South seceded he nevertheless sided with it. Left impoverished after the War, he eventually recovered.

His eldest son, **James John McDonald** (1845-1909) served as aide-de-camp to Col. C. C. Crews of Cuthbert in Iverson's Brigade. Crews' small detachment of cavalry captured Union Cavalry General Stoneman near Sunshine Church, Georgia in Jasper County during Sherman's March to the Sea. With Crews' permission, McDonald took possession of Stoneman's sorrel horse with black mane and tail and secured a matching horse from the Federal ranks. Both horses were shipped to his father, Edward McDonald, in Cuthbert and were named "Stoneman" and "Eddie." They were later bought by another Cuthbert citizen for his carriage. After the war, several notable Confederate officers rode in this carriage behind these two matched sorrels, including Generals John B. Gordon and Alfred H. Colquitt. After the war James John McDonald prospered in the mercantile business, real estate, and banking in Cuthbert.

John Word West's paternal great-grandfather had immigrated to North Carolina, possibly from Ireland. After fathering nineteen children by two wives, he died in 1837 in Fayette County, Georgia. West's grandfather (1808-1894) and his grandmother (1812-1896) lived in the **West Cabin** this cabin near Jonesboro, and West's father, Willis Harmon West, was born there in 1832. West's mother, **Missaniah**

Catherine Morris West (1833-1922) was thirty-four when Sherman's troops came through Jonesboro on the March to the Sea. She confronted them to get them to release her confiscated milk cow to feed her children.

At the entrance to Westville stand the **Singer Gates**, replicas of the Gothic Style capitol gates at Milledgeville, which served as the Georgia state capitol from 1804-1868. The capitol was rebuilt twice after fires and became part of the campus of Georgia Military College in 1879. Though the capitol gates now standing were constructed after the Civil War from bricks from an arsenal destroyed by Sherman's troops, they are in keeping with the Gothic style of the original capitol building, a style inspired by the popular romance novels of the era by Sir Walter Scott. As such, they are typical of what was appropriate to a monumental public edifice in the South at the time.

Though **William Rawson** of Westville's **Rawson House (1850)** didn't fight in the war, his connection to it, both personally and through his in-laws, makes an interesting story.

Like many others in early Stewart County, the Rawsons were immigrant Yankees. Clara Rawson came to Lumpkin from Craftsbury, Vermont with her husband, Hollis Boynton, in 1833 to open a store. Two years later Clara's brother, William Rawson, followed to work as a store clerk in Boynton's store. Soon William set up his own store and invited his brother Edward Elijah to leave Vermont and come to Lumpkin to clerk for him. Then William traveled back to Craftsbury, married Julia Root, and returned to Lumpkin (1839). He ran his store until he sold it out to his partner, Sidney Root, in 1855. When the War started, William raised money to outfit a unit called "Rawson Rangers."

As a member of the Georgia General Council in 1863-1864, William's brother, **Edward Elijah Rawson**, accompanied Atlanta Mayor James Calhoun to meet with Sherman to protest the forcible removal of the inhabitants of Atlanta. General Clement Evans presided at the funeral of Edward in 1883.

The story of William Rawson's business partner and in-law, **Sidney Root**, is even more fascinating. Root's story put him in personal contact with Lincoln, Davis, Lee, and Grant, though not on any battlefield.

Sidney Root, father of the famous architect John Wellborn Root, moved to Lumpkin in 1843 from Craftsbury, Vermont to work for his sister's husband, William Rawson. He soon became his partner and eventually bought Rawson out in 1855. He married the sister of Edward Rawson's wife. One of the young Boyntons became his clerk and was later killed at Sharpsburg. Root moved to Atlanta in 1857 and set up a store.

In the autumn of 1857, Root was traveling by rail from St. Louis to Chicago when the train wrecked. His right arm and hand were broken in five places. He was bedridden in Lexington for seven weeks and was paid \$6,700 by the railroad for his medical expenses. He sued the railroad and was represented by Swett and Lincoln—that is, **Abraham Lincoln**—who secured a verdict of \$1,000 for him.

Of his allegiance to the South, Root writes: "In 1850 I had been an intense Union man and welcomed the Compromise Bill of Henry Clay with satisfaction, but after ten years' experience of constant intimidation and aggression from the North, I concluded the two sections could not live in harmony and had better separate. So, after much thought and prayer, I became a Secessionist in the Spring of 1861, to the great surprise of my friends and family, except my wife."

Because Root was a native Vermonter, **Jefferson Davis** questioned his loyalty, but when he was satisfied that Root would serve the Confederate cause, he invited Root to travel with the committee that accompanied Davis from Ringgold, Georgia to Montgomery, Alabama for his inauguration.

Throughout the War, Root and a partner owned a warehouse in Charleston, then Wilmington, as well as several steamships which ran the Union blockade to export cotton and import English goods.

When Sherman's Army occupied Atlanta, Union General Beckwith took over Root's house for his headquarters. When Atlanta was burned in 1864, Root and his family became refugees in Cuthbert.

The most interesting part of Root's Civil War story occurred in the last months of the Confederacy in his dealings with Davis and Lee. "As the cause seemed to be in peril, I conceived a plan for the gradual emancipation of the Negroes, from whom our armies could be recruited, the good will of foreign nations secured, and our independence achieved. . . . I had several conversations with **President Davis** about it. He approved the project, asked me to see General Lee about it, etc. I visited **General Lee**, then near Orange Bluff, and was courteously compelled to spend the night with him in his tent. He approved the plan, and it resulted in the introduction of a bill in Congress to that effect," though the bill was defeated.

Davis then sent Root to Europe to inform their governments of the plan. In London, Root met with a dozen members of Parliament, including Lord Derby, who quoted from Root's plan in a speech in the House of Lords. In Paris, Mason took Root to meet Napoleon III. His European visit was cut short by news of Confederate disasters, and he returned to America. The Confederate government collapsed in May 1865.

After the War, in 1865 in Atlanta he once accompanied "a rather rough looking military man" and several others to a bar and restaurant. It turned out to be **General U. S. Grant**.

After the War Root moved to New York, where thirteen Southern born blacks asked him to take charge of a mission they had established, and he helped them organize it into Mt. Olivet Church on 53rd Street. The Roots moved back to Atlanta in 1878, and Root became a trustee for Spellman Seminary.

His only official service for the military was when he volunteered for special service to guard Charleston, and another time when he was appointed Major in a special service to hunt and capture deserters in the mountains of North Georgia. (Source: "Memorandum of My Life." Feb 1894. Unpub. Westville archives)

The **Masonic Lodge** on the second floor of the **Stewart County Academy** is soon to be opened for public viewing. Founded in 1838, Cross Lodge #12 began meeting in this building. It lost its charter in 1885 during Reconstruction and was reformed as Cross Lodge #173 in 1889. Seventeen members of the Masonic lodge served in the Civil War, including Clement A. Evans, who later became Brigadier General in Army of Northern Virginia.

On July 4, 1976, as a candidate for President, Jimmy Carter dedicated the **Chattahoochee County Courthouse (1854)** at Westville. Some of his ancestors had served in the courthouse. His great-grandfather James Thomas Gordy (1828-1898) was a tax collector beginning in 1854 when the courthouse was built. His great uncle, Dr. Frank M. Gordy was both Clerk and Ordinary. His grandfather, James "Jim Jack" Gordy, was a revenue agent who broke up stills.

Several of President Carter's ancestors served in the Civil War. His great-great grandfather, Wilson Gordy, sent five of his sons. **James Thomas Gordy** enlisted in 1864 during Sherman's campaign and served as a wagon master. **Gilbert Perry Gordy** enlisted in the Chattahoochee Rangers in 1861 and died from wounds in 1864. **William Gordy** was killed. **Henry M. Gordy** served in Semme's Brigade and was wounded. **George G. Gordy** enlisted in 1864.