JOSEPH POSTELL WILLIAMSON

1778 TO 1843

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This paper included appendix material
(such as photocopies of letters, diary entries, photos, or legal documents)
that were not digitized. Researchers are welcome to visit the Lane Library
Special Collections division to read such appendix material on site.
Upon moving to Savannah, Georgia in the late 1700's, John Garnier Williamson was extremely active both politically and socially. His activities laid the foundation for his son, John Postell Williamson (1778-1843). Not only was John P. Williamson the Mayor of Savannah in 1808 and a Justice of the Inferior Court, but he was also an Alderman for several years and a member of countless organizations. In addition to the numerous lots inside and outside of Chatham County, he owned the following plantations during his life: Brampton, Retreat, Clifton, and Placentia. John P. Williamson was married twice: in 1804 to Sarah McQueen and in 1821 to Madeline Julia Dennis. Between his two wives, John P. Williamson had 15 children.
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B  Clifton Plantation Map

C  Placentia Plantation Map

D  McQueen - Williamson Genealogy

D Supp  John Williamson, II Genealogy by The Colonial Dames

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F  John Postell Williamson's Last Will and Testament dated June 21, 1836 and his Codicil dated December 28, 1842.
John Postell Williamson was born in Pocotaligo, South Carolina on September 28, 1778 and moved to Savannah, Georgia with his family soon thereafter. He was one of five children of John Garnier Williamson and Jane Parmenter Williamson. John G. Williamson was born on July 13, 1756, married Jane Parmenter on February 8, 1776, and died on April 19, 1814. Jane Williamson died on July 28, 1797. They are both buried in the Williamson Cemetery at the Brampton Plantation on the Savannah River. The elder Williamson was highly respected and held a very prominent position in the Savannah community. He was an Alderman in the 11th, 12th, 13th, and 14th administrations of the Savannah City Council (17-14-1800 to 04-01-1804), a Justice of the Inferior Court, a member of the House of Representatives, a Revolutionary War Veteran, and the owner and planter of the Brampton Plantation.\footnote{William Wayne Williamson MS Collection #1280, [Williamson Collection], Folder #2, Item #44, 11-14-1876, Georgia Historical Society, Savannah, Georgia. Savannah Biography Card File on John Postell Williamson, [Savannah Biography], Chatham County Public Library, Savannah, Georgia. Thomas Gamble, Jr., A History of the City Government of Savannah, Georgia from 1790 to 1901, [City Government], Bounded by the Savannah Morning News, M.D., p. 62-63. Mary Granger, Ed., Savannah River Plantations [River Plantations], The Reprint Company, Spartanburg, South Carolina, 1972, p. 490, 408.}

As early as February, 1792, John G. Williamson began to accumulate lands known as the Brampton Plantation from the Bryan family. [Refer to Appendix A]. This plantation was divided among the children of Jonathan Bryan after his death. At the time that Jonathan Bryan owned and operated Brampton,
many Negroes would come and worship God in an old barn on the plantation. The Brampton Plantation was the "inspirational center" from which the first Negro Baptist Church in America arose. It wasn't until March, 1807 that John G. Williamson acquired the entire 1,250 acre plantation which was located on the Savannah River. In 1796, John G. Williamson increased the Brampton acreage by purchasing an additional 500 acres on the east (The Samuel Barker tract). In addition to Brampton and the Samuel Barker tract, he purchased the Retreat Plantation between the years 1794 and 1801. Because the two plantations adjoined each other, they became known as Brampton. When John G. Williamson died, he left Brampton to his son, John Postell Williamson.²

In 1793 when John Williamson Stirk died, he asked that John G. Williamson and Williamson's wife be the guardians of his son, John Williamson Stirk, Jr., and that the elder Williamson take over the management of his Clifton Plantation. The Clifton Plantation was a plantation that encompassed island, mainland, lowland, and highland. In total, there were approximately 500 acres: 260 acres on Onslow Island which were

used for rice crops and 300 acres on the mainland which was used for cotton and corn crops. [Refer to Appendix B] Clifton was also comprised of 56 Negroes, farming equipment and milling facilities. John Williamson did everything in his power to develop and increase the value of Clifton before turning the plantation over to John Williamson Stirk, Jr. in 1813 when he reached the age of majority. Although Stirk approved of Williamson’s actions, Stirk wanted to rid himself of all property. In December, 1813, Stirk sold Clifton and all other lands, Negroes, and equipment to John Postell Williamson for $73,000.00. At the time Stirk sold Clifton to John P. Williamson, Clifton's acreage had increased to approximately 692 acres. In order for John P. Williamson to buy Clifton, his wife, Sarah, had to relinquish any and all rights she had to this property. John P. Williamson paid his debt to John Stirk in December, 1813.

On August 8, 1803, at the age of 25, John P. Williamson bought the 850 acre Placentia Plantation from Alexander Netherclift for $3,000.00. The Placentia land was described as being bounded on the northeast by Thunderbolt, on the south by marshes of Wassaw Island, and on the southeast by Skidaway.

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4 Deed Book - Folio: 2E - 381; 2F - 407, 409, 410, R.R.C.C.C.H.

5 Deed Book - Folio: 8 - 524; 2L - 441, R.R.C.C.C.H. River Plantations, p. 408.
(Refer to Appendix C).

On January 4, 1804, he married his second cousin, Sarah McQueen. John and Sarah Williamson had eight (8) children: William Bowen, Jane, Ann McQueen, John P., Eliza, Mary, Sarah McQueen, and a stillborn baby. Sarah Williamson died on October 25, 1819 while giving birth to their stillborn child. (Refer to Appendix D, Supplement B, and Appendix E).

Having come from a politically oriented family, John P. Williamson entered politics at a young age. In 1803, he ran for Alderman of Darby Ward. Although he didn't win this particular election, he did serve as an Alderman in the 16th, 17th, and 18th administrations of the Savannah City Council (07-08-1805 to 09-12-1808).

In 1804, not only was John P. Williamson a Director of the Office of Discount and Deposit, but he was also a co-owner with John R. Morel of a Factorage and Commission Business on Morel's Wharf. It was in October of this same year that the copartnership between these two was dissolved because John Morel was retiring. John P. Williamson continued the

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5 Genealogy of John Williamson II, The National Society of the Colonial Dames of America in the State of Georgia, [Colonial Dames], A copy is in the possession of Ruth Espy and Cornelia Groves, p. 3. Williamson Collection, Folder #1, Letter W.C. Elliot to cousin dated 05-26-1883, Folder #2, Item #44 & 47, Folder #3, Item #52.

For additional information on the children of John Postell Williamson, please refer to Appendix D, Supplement to Appendix D, and Appendix E.

7 Columbia Museum and Savannah Advertiser, [CMASA], 06-15-1803 p.2c.2; 06-07-1807 p.3c.3. City Government, p. 63.
Factorage business with a new partner, Mr. Cowling.  

In 1806, he was a member of the Committee of Finance and in 1807, he was elected as a Director on the Board at Planter's Bank. In 1808, he was elected as a Trustee on the Exchange, a Director of Planter's Bank, the Mayor of Savannah (September 12, 1808), and a Justice of the Inferior Court (November 5, 1808). During this same year, he served on the Grand Jury and as a member of the Poor-House and Hospital Society. In November, the City of Savannah was trying to push a bill through the Senate that would increase the number of commissioners of pilotage for Savannah to nine (9) members. John P. Williamson was on this list. These commissioners decided the rules and regulations of pilotage, the business of taking ships in and out of a port.  

As Mayor of the City of Savannah, John P. Williamson and the City Council passed several ordinances. On January 7, 1809, an ordinance was passed involving taxes. This ordinance

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8 CHnSA, 03-03-1804 p.3c.3, 10-31-1804 p.2c.1, 11-03-1804 p.3c.5.


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of color 16-45 was taxed $5.00 over and above all tax on property. 10

A second ordinance was passed on February 21, 1809 that prohibited horses and all other animals from running wild in the city between the first of November and the first of May of each year. The fine for having an animal run wild was not to exceed $5.00. A third ordinance was passed on April 17, 1809 that prevented anyone from smoking in the streets, lanes, squares, wharves or any other public place. For white people, there was a fine of $2.00 for each offense and for colored people, there was a fine of $1.00 for each offense. If a colored person failed to pay the fine, he was administered thirty-nine (39) lashes. 11

During the year of 1809, someone was deliberately setting fires all over the city. To try and stop the fires, John P. Williamson as Mayor and the City Council posted a $500.00 reward for any information leading to the offender. The citizens, who were very concerned for their families and their properties, posted an additional $500.00 reward. 12 Besides passing ordinances and posting bonds, as Mayor of Savannah, John P. Williamson had the duty to advertise any city lands for sale, approve the records of the City Treasurer, and numerous other jobs. In addition to serving as Mayor in 1809, John P.

10 River Plantations, p. 67.
River Plantations, p. 76.
12 Rep. & Sav, 03-21-1809 p.3c.2.
Williamson was elected as a Trustee on the Exchange, a member of the school committee, a member of the Savannah Chapter of Commerce, and was one of twelve managers for the Poor-House and Hospital Society.¹³

Although John P. Williamson ran for Alderman in 1810 and 1811, he never served as Mayor or Alderman again. However, during this time, he was still a Justice of the Inferior Court of Chatham County. In September, 1810, John P. Williamson failed to serve as a juror after he had been "drawn and summoned to serve". Unless he showed sufficient cause within thirty (30) days as to why he failed to serve as a juror, he would be fined $10.00.¹⁴

In 1811, John P. Williamson and several other men were the new superintendents of Planter's Bank which reopened on February 1, 1811. For seven (7) years, Williamson and Cowling operated a grocery and liquor store on Morel's Wharf, but in June of 1811, the copartnership was dissolved and John P. Williamson continued the business. Also in 1811, John P. Williamson was involved in a legal action against James White wherein the outcome of the case resulted in Mr. White's slaves being sold by virtue of a mortgage foreclosure.¹⁵

¹³ Reg. & Sav, 01-05-1809 p.3c.2, 02-07-1809 p.1c.3, 03-09-1809 p.3c.3, 04-25-1809 p.3c.2, 05-04-1809 p.3c.3, 05-24-1809 p.2c.4.

¹⁴ Reg. & Sav, 08-10-1810 p.3c.2, 09-20-1810 p.3c.3, 09-22-1810 p.3c.4, 01-05-1811 p.3c.1, 08-24-1811 p.3c.1.

¹⁵ Reg. & Sav, 01-17-1811 p.2c.3, 02-28-1811 p.2c.4, 06-29-1811 p.3c.3.
In 1812, John P. Williamson was elected to serve on the Board of Directors for the Planter's Bank. His name was again submitted in 1913. On December 24, 1812, John P. Williamson and some other men ran an advertisement in The Republican and Savannah Evening Ledger indicating their intentions to incorporate "The Insurance Company of the City of Savannah to insure property and effects against sea risques, fire, and other casualties."16 In the beginning of the year of 1813, John Postell Williamson resigned as Ensign to Lieutenant George Anderson in the United States Navy. On February 01, 1813, the Savannah Fencibles advertised an election to be held to fill the positions of both Ensign and Lieutenant in the United States Navy.17

The 1820's proved to be a disastrous time for John P. Williamson. Because of the "great fire of 1820" in Savannah, John P. Williamson had to borrow on December 3, 1821, $41,829.60 from John Potter of Charleston, South Carolina to cover his losses. As security, John P. Williamson named the Clifton Plantation which now consisted of 468 acres on the mainland, 224 acres on Osslow Island, and 36 negroes (deeded over 12-12-1822). The increased acreage on the mainland could have been a part of the Annandale Plantation that was sold. John P. Williamson made partial payment on the loan and then he

16 Rep & Say, 01-02-1812 p.2c.1, 01-09-1812 p.3c.2, 01-14-1812 p.3c.2, 12-10-1812 p.3c.1, 12-24-1812 p.2c.2.
17 Rep & Say, 02-04-1813 p.3c.4.
defaulted. During the May term of 1828, John Potter obtained a judgment against John P. Williamson which allowed Potter to receive an eight (8%) percent annual interest rate on the loan. John Potter received this amount until John P. Williamson's death in 1843. In 1827, Potter prosecuted Williamson for the repayment of the loan. He obtained a second judgment which provided for the repayment of the loan plus interest from December 3, 1824 (may be 12-31-1824). Potter's interest in obtaining the judgment wasn't so much in getting his money back, but as a protection on the mortgage. In other words, Potter didn't want Williamson to obtain any liens on the land for which he still owed Potter some money. Again, Potter did not foreclose.\textsuperscript{18}

However, John Potter did foreclose on all claims against the Clifton Plantation in February, 1845 causing the plantation to be sold at auction. One year later, Clifton was sold by the executors of John P. Williamson's estate to James Potter, John Potter's son, for $25,700.00. Partial payment had already been paid to John Potter. In February, 1846, James Potter obtained another judgment against John P. Williamson's estate in the amount of $83,659.28, the original loan amount plus interest since December 3, 1824 (may be 12-31-1824). In addition to Clifton, James Potter also received through a foreclosure against John P. Williamson approximately $15,000.00 in May of

\textsuperscript{18} River Plantations, p. 208-210, 229: Deed Book-Folio: 2L - 52, 239, R.R.C.C.C.H.
1847. The foreclosure was on 140 acres (may be 160 acres) of pine barren lands in the District of Cherokee Hill. 19

Also in 1820, John P. Williamson, owner of the Placentia Plantation, had a dispute with Capt. Robert Flourney (1763-1825), owner of the adjoining Bona Bella Plantation, over the swamp that laid on both plantations. According to Dr. S. P. Dugan as quoted in the Savannah Morning News on June 26, 1890, Flourney and Williamson had a long lasting feud between them. One day Flourney sent Williamson a covered dish of sheep intestines. After infuriating Williamson, Flourney then exercised his "riparian rights and drain[ed] his part of the swamp and thus [brought] ruin on his foe." To accomplish this task, Flourney brought over 200 slaves from his Washington County plantation in middle Georgia to dig a canal thirty feet wide at the top and fifteen feet wide at the bottom. Of course, one cannot drain one-half of a swamp. Flourney's canal started at the Placentia line and extended all the way to the Warsaw River. This swamp was of all importance to Placentia because Placentia was a rice plantation, a plantation that was dependent on the swamp water for its irrigation. Flourney's actions completely destroyed any value Placentia may have had and almost ruined its owner. Because Flourney's canal did not completely drain Placentia, the plantation and the surrounding area became malarious. This poor condition of the land

continued until 1962 when the county took steps to completely drain Placentia by the original canal, not Flourney's canal. 20

In 1820, the year after his wife Sarah died, John Postell Williamson built a two-story brick home for him and his family. The house was built facing Liberty Square, on the northwest corner in the Georgian style of architecture. Liberty Square was located where the current Chatham County Courthouse and Parking garage are now located. The middle of the park would have been where Montgomery Street and President Street would intersect. Liberty Square was named for the everlasting "dawn of freedom and independence." 21

On December 03, 1821, John Postell Williamson married Madeline Julia Dennis and they had nine (9) children: Madeline Julia, William Henry, Cornelius, Harriet Ann, Eliza Anderson, James Potter, Florence, Richard Dennis, and Jacob R. Williamson. Madeline Julia Dennis was born in 1806 in Pennsylvania and died on April 12, 1895. 22

On December 13, 1822, John Postell Williamson put up the

20 Savannah Biography. Savannah Morning News, 06-26-1899 p.8c.5.

21 River Plantations, p. 408. Savannah City Map located on the inside cover. City Government, p. 35.

22 Marriage Records, Probate Court, Chatham County Courthouse, Book 1806-1851, [P.C.C.C.M.H.], Page 229, Savannah, Georgia. Williamson Collection, Folder 42, Item 44.


For additional information on the children of John Postell Williamson, please refer to Appendix D, Supplement to Appendix D, and Appendix E.

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50 acre Placentia Plantation, 460 acres located adjacent to Lacentia, and the 840 acre Brampton Plantation which was located on the Savannah River as security on three (3) promissory notes he took out with Fannin and Company. The mounds of the three notes were $3,070.00, $5,900.00, and $2,500.00.23

In 1823, John Williamson loaned $8,098.00 (2 promissory notes (2-6-1823 $5,598.00 and 3-6-1823 $2,500) to Edward Harden who in turn secured the notes with one-half (1/2) of Oakgrove plantation (1000 acres). John P. Williamson gave Harden his choice for repayment - the $8,098.00 or the land. Williamson left the decision up to Harden.24

In March, 1824, John Williamson loaned $18,111.55 to his relative Jacob Read, Jr. Failing to repay the loan, Williamson brought an equity suit against Read for payment in 1829 and by 1831 Read was unable to hold onto his land, the Drakies plantation. Drakies was sold at auction for $112,500.00, equipment, slaves, and all). On February 16, 1829, John P. Williamson granted the Directors and the President of Planter's Bank $20,000.00 on a judgment he obtained on the equity side of the Court in Williamson vs. Jacob Read, executor of James Read. Jacob Read was also indebted to John P. Williamson for a note

23 Deed Book - Folio: 2L - 441, R.R.C.C.H.
24 River Plantations, p. 102. Deed Book - Folio: 2L 537, 539, R.R.C.C.H.
he signed on January 23, 1823 in the amount of $2,000.00.\textsuperscript{25}

In 1826, John P. Williamson conveyed parcels of land to the Savannah, Ogeechee and Altamaha Company, a canal corporation, so that a transportation canal between the Ogeechee and Savannah Rivers could be made.\textsuperscript{26}

On January 13, 1834, John P. Williamson sold 265 acres of Placentia Plantation to Edward Jones for $798.00. Also in 1834, John P. Williamson leased Twiggs Wharf for $350.00 per year.\textsuperscript{27}

From this point in time until his death in 1843, John P. Williamson lead a retired life. No longer were any stories, political moves, or even any land and business advertisements written about in the papers. John P. Williamson faded from the public's eye.

On January 3, 1843, John Postell Williamson died at the age of 64. There was a funeral held that morning at his home on Liberty Square and all friends and acquaintances were invited to attend. Soon after John P. Williamson's death, an appraisement of his estate was conducted which showed that the estate's value was approximately $18,719.14 and a second appraisement was conducted in 1844 showing an increase to $17,289.62. The increase in the estate's value was due to the sale of agriculture products such as rice and cotton that was

\textsuperscript{25} River Plantations, p. 156. Deed Book - Folio: 2P - 54; 2M - 135, R.R.C.C.C.H.

\textsuperscript{26} River Plantations, p. 408-409.

\textsuperscript{27} Deed Book - Folio: 2V - 24, 407, R.R.C.C.C.H.
grown on the Brampton and Clifton Plantations, rents and storage of goods in his warehouse. John P. Williamson's establishment in Savannah was "luxuriously furnished", and he even kept 11 slaves at his title residence in town. Sometime during his life, John P. Williamson had a street in Savannah named after him. The Street was called Williamson Street, and it was located between Bay Street and River Street on the west side of Savannah intersecting with West Broad. On January 24, 1843, John P. Williamson, Jr. had the corporation of Williamson and Son dissolved because of his father's death and he continued the factorage business on his own account and name.28

John P. Williamson did not leave the Brampton Plantation to any particular heir, but to the support and maintenance of his wife, Madeline Julia Williamson and his children. In his will, he made a specific request to the executors of his estate, one of which was his son, John P. Williamson, to sell "400 barrels of rice to pay off the incumbrance of [his] dwelling house." In addition to Brampton as support Mrs. John P. Williamson, she was left a legacy of $1,000.00 per year. For his surviving daughters, John P. Williamson left a legacy of $1,600.00 plus the necessary amount of money needed for an education. For his surviving sons, he left the stores, rental property, and all of the back rent due him. All of his children received their share of negroes. It took over 54 years for John P.

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Williamson's estate to be probated. According to Harriet Ann Booth's answers to interrogatories dated February 20, 1897, Anderson Williamson, Madeline Julia Rankin, Cornelia Beckwith, and herself never received their legacy.

Brampton was not kept by the estate because a controversy arose between the executors and the beneficiaries of the estate causing Brampton to be sold at public auction in 1848. John P. Williamson, Jr. bought the 840 acre plantation for $5,500.00 (there is also a reference to John P. Williamson, Jr. paying $9,500.00 for the plantation in Savannah River Plantations). John Williamson, Jr., for the following year and one-half, mortgaged Brampton numerous times in attempts to restore the buildings and fields. In 1848 and 1849 John Williamson continued to take loans against Brampton.29

In 1864 when Sherman burned Savannah, the plantation system had reached its peak and then suddenly fell to destruction. John P. Williamson, Jr. was financially ruined because Sherman and his men trampled and burned his fields, destroyed the dams built to keep the tides from washing over, and put a torch to his home. The only things John Williamson was able to salvage were two fine old mantels. From a balcony, Madeline Julia Rankin watched Sherman burn a carriage in front of her house. This same balcony is now on Mrs. Cornelia Groves' home in

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Savannah, Georgia. More than likely, Madeline Julia Rankin’s son and his wife, James Lee and Susie Rankin, also watched this tragic event. John Williamson never planted Brampton again. On January 01, 1967, he sold the remaining 665 acres of the Brampton Plantation to his cousin, Dr. James Bond Read, his sister’s (Ann) son, for $11,000.00.  

The only part of the Brampton Plantation that was “reserved forever” was the Williamson cemetery on the northeast corner of the plantation near the Savannah River. In this cemetery, Mr. and Mrs. John Carniar Williamson are buried. John Postell Williamson is probably also buried there since it was the family cemetery and that he was not listed in any of the other cemetery records, i.e. Laurel Grove Cemetery, Colonial Cemetery, Bonaventure Cemetery, and the Catholic Cemetery.  


** John P. Williamson’s granddaughter, Nina Anderson Pape, was a co-founder with Juliette Lowe of the Pape School, which was located on Bolton and Drayton Streets, Savannah, Georgia. Nina Pape remained Principal of the school until her death in 1944, the same year that Cornelia Groves graduated from Pape School. Mrs. Groves played a major role in getting the Pape School changed over to the Savannah Country Day School in the early 1950’s. One of her many reasons for changing the school was to allow boys to attend the school through high school. As the Pape School, boys were only allowed to attend through the 6th grade, which few of them did. Mrs. Cornelia Groves, personal interview by author, 11-10-1988, Savannah, Georgia.

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