A Short Biography
of
James Morrison

for
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by
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James Morrison, a native of Londonberry, New Hampshire, was a notable figure in Savannah, Georgia during the second and third decades of the nineteenth century. After graduating from Dartmouth College and Tapping Reeve Law School he went to Savannah and married into the prominent Johnston family. He became involved in such institutions as the Union Society, and The Savannah Poor House and Hospital. Morrison was a City Alderman for eight years and served three terms as the Mayor of Savannah.
Foreword

James Morrison is an extremely difficult fellow to research. There is virtually no record of his career as an attorney (with the exception of several deeds by which he is appointed attorney for various personages - some of them quite prominent - and numerous wills of which he was an executor).

The works of Thomas Gamble have been quoted extensively in these pages due to the fact that the City Council and Union Society Minutes are extremely difficult to decipher or in some cases nonexistent.

In several cases facts concerning Morrison are implied rather than stated by the evidence. In these cases conclusions have been drawn and presented in the body of the paper and noted in the end notes.

Due to the scarcity of time James Morrison is not so completely researched as might be desired. There is a notable lack of evidence on his youth which might be supplied by local sources in Londonberry, N.H., Dartmouth, N.H. and Litchfield Ct. And there is the matter of the suit of the Commonwealth of Kentucky against James Morrison which remains to be dealt with. Should curiosity overcome native indolence and procrastination these vagaries will be dealt with in an appendix at some future date.
James Morrison was born in Londonberry, in extreme Southeastern New Hampshire on March 21, 1789 shortly after the arrival of his twin sister, Sally. Including Sally, James was the fifth child and third son of Reverend William Morrison and his wife of five and one-half years, the former Jean Fullerton of Octoraro, Pennsylvania. Reverend Morrison "... was born about 1748, in the town of Auchlinnes, Parish of Comrey, Perthshire, Scotland. His ancestors had for several generations occupied the same house at that place. His father was an elder in the established church, young Morrison emigrated to America in 1766; studied Divinity with Rev. Robert Aman and was ordained February 12, 1783, to take charge of the second Parish in Londonberry, N.H. where he remained as pastor till his death March 9, 1818, aged 70 years..."²

Reverend Morrison's family became quite sizeable. In addition to James the Reverend had five sons (one of whom died in infancy³) and five daughters. The children, or at least the boys were quite well-educated. James' brother William-Fullerton became an attorney⁴ and James himself graduated from Dartmouth College in 1807.⁵ After graduation James attended law school at Tapping Reeve Law School⁶ - the first law school to be founded in America⁷ - at Litchfield, Connecticut. "Considering the size of its reputation the law school was incredibly small, housed in a white one-story building with four windows and a single fan-lit door"⁸ This unimposing school had educated some of the country's better lawyers including Aaron Burr who was the first pupil at the school⁹
and, shortly before Morrison arrived it had graduated a fiery South Carolinian, one of the ablest lawyers in history, John Caldwell Calhoun.\textsuperscript{10} 

In the summer of 1811 while at Litchfield Morrison made the acquaintance of Mr. George Whitefield of Savannah, Georgia and of Mr. Whitefield's eighteen-year-old cousin Eliza Johnston.\textsuperscript{11} When Morrison learned that Whitefield was "traveling the northern states, merely for his own amusement"\textsuperscript{12} he sent Whitefield and Eliza to Londonberry to meet his father, and asked his father to furnish Whitefield with letters of introduction in Londonberry.\textsuperscript{13} Morrison was quite taken with Miss Johnston, as evidenced by a note he sent to his mother a week later.\textsuperscript{14} 

After leaving Litchfield in August or September of 1811 Morrison went first to Londonberry\textsuperscript{15} and then to Savannah in the autumn of 1811 or perhaps early in 1812.\textsuperscript{16} And on April 23, 1812 Morrison and Eliza were married by a prominent Presbyterian minister, Dr. Henry Kollock.\textsuperscript{17} Morrison had connected himself with some of the most important families in nineteenth century Savannah.

Elizabeth Johnston, known all her life as Eliza, was the daughter of Matthew Johnston,\textsuperscript{18} a wealthy merchant and Elizabeth Whitefield, the daughter of James Whitefield and the niece of the renowned Reverend George Whitefield.\textsuperscript{19} When Matthew Johnston died in 1802, he left the bulk of his considerable property to be equally divided between Eliza and her brother James Thomas Johnston.\textsuperscript{20} The children were raised by their uncle Colonel James Johnston.\textsuperscript{21} 

After marrying Eliza, Morrison stayed awhile in Savannah with Col. Johnston but he planned to leave.\textsuperscript{22} Whether or not he did is
unknown but he remained in Savannah through 1813\textsuperscript{23} and had returned by 1816.\textsuperscript{24}

In 1816 James Morrison was admitted to the Union Society\textsuperscript{25} (while James Johnston was president\textsuperscript{26}) and for a time held the office of Steward.\textsuperscript{27} On April 23, 1818 Morrison was elected the Secretary of the Union Society\textsuperscript{28} a post which he held for two years.\textsuperscript{29} The Union Society was a collection of prominent men who took over the running of Bethesda and also contributed to most charities and public instutions, among them The Chatham Academy (The Society held its meetings in the east wing of the Chatham Academy after 1819), and the Savannah Poor House and Hospital.\textsuperscript{30} Consistent with his work in the Union Society Morrison was made a trustee of the Chatham Academy\textsuperscript{31} and in 1819 was constantly called upon to supervise the elections and lotteries of the Savannah Poor House\textsuperscript{32} and Hospital and he was repeatedly made one of its managers, responsible for its daily operation.\textsuperscript{33}

Morrison was also a trustee of the Bank of the State of Georgia\textsuperscript{34} and on February 16, 1818 he was elected Director of the Marine and Fire Insurance Company.\textsuperscript{35}

Though not wealthy James Morrison was possessed of a fair amount of property in Savannah, much of which he received upon marrying Eliza. On October 1, 1815, when her father's will was settled, Eliza inherited 4 negroes, a house and an entire lot in Reynolds Ward at the corner of Broughton and Drayton Streets, property in Decker Ward, and Stock in the Planter's Bank. The total was valued at $8010\textsuperscript{36} to be used for the benefit of James and Eliza
and to be inherited by Eliza's children but under the control of
the executors of Matthew Johnston's will.\textsuperscript{37} March 6, 1822 Morrison
purchased from James T. Johnston lot number one in Wilmington
tything of Darby Ward (upon which he already owned buildings) for
$12,000.\textsuperscript{38} Three weeks later James and Eliza sold to her brother
two wharf lots numbers one and sixteen west of Bull Street for $10.\textsuperscript{39}
In return Morrison was given control of Eliza's property.\textsuperscript{40}

During the Fire of 1820, which came within a half a block
from Morrison's home at Broughton and Drayton Streets,\textsuperscript{41} several
tenements in Darby Ward were burned to the ground, though at num-
ber one Bull Street a brand new brick building he had built in
1819 survived.\textsuperscript{42} (The building is there today.)

On September 13, 1819, Morrison was elected to the city council\textsuperscript{43}
receiving the third highest vote total in the election.\textsuperscript{44} And
Morrison was reelected September 12, 1820.\textsuperscript{45} On February 28, 1821
the popular Morrison was unanimously elected to serve out the un-
expired term of Thomas U.P. Charlton\textsuperscript{46} who resigned upon being
appointed Judge of the Superior Court.\textsuperscript{47}

Savannah under James Morrison was much healthier than it had
been earlier. In 1921 two days of thanksgiving were declared for
the unusual good health.\textsuperscript{48} In May of 1822 Morrison appointed a
Dry Culture Committee to investigate the planting of rice and the
enforcing of city ordinances against it. On January 24, 1824 the
Committee reported.

"six years have passed under the operation of
the dry culture system. Imperfectly as that
system has been enforced it has given evidence
the most conclusive of a favorable influence
upon the health of Savannah.\textsuperscript{49}"

During the 1820's there was marked improvement in the Police and Fire Depts.\textsuperscript{50} There also was passed a new set of building codes which saw the construction of brick buildings to reduce the risk of fire.\textsuperscript{51}

During Morrison's period as Mayor of Savannah (Feb. 1821-September 1824) the city's finances were in a bad state because of the War of 1812 and earlier loans for internal improvements.\textsuperscript{52} Poor finances stopped the construction of a city water works system and prevented Morrison from acquiring for Savannah the Poor House and Hospital. Instead Morrison sold bonds on the Hospital to help.\textsuperscript{53} In December of 1822 there was also controversy concerning the city Jail. Despite a State Statute which required it Morrison refused to yield control of the jail to Chatham County until the city was reimbursed for some $30,000 it had spent in maintaining the jail. Morrison finally acquiesced on February 20, 1823 when the Superior Court issued a writ of Mandamos and the City Council ordered him to Comply.\textsuperscript{54}

During his tenure as Mayor, Morrison had the honor of receiving visits to the City by General Winfield Scott and Commodore David Porter.\textsuperscript{55}

In September of 1824 Morrison ran for city Alderman and was elected and he was replaced as mayor by William G. Daniel. And in 1825 Morrison served on a special committee which recommended that Savannah buy and operate the Savannah Poor House and Hospital.\textsuperscript{56} (This was not done until 1835.) In the Spring of 1827 Morrison, Morrison, along with several other gentlemen, resigned from the City Council.\textsuperscript{57}
In October 1831, Morrison's eldest brother William-Fullerton Morrison visiting from Connecticut, was struck by fever and died on the 28th. A month and a half later James Morrison died at his home on December 17, 1831 apparently of unknown causes. Eliza's widowhood lasted 41 years, succumbing to paralysis on August 9, 1872 at the advanced age of 79.

The children of James and Eliza Morrison were: Eliza who became Mrs. Eliza Jackson; Jane who became Mrs. Jane F. Grigg; Marion who became Mrs. Marion Bruen, the wife of Charles W. W. Bruen; James J. Morrison, William Morrison who died at the age of two during the yellow fever epidemic of 1820; and Anna who died at the age of 9 of inflammation of the Brain.
End Notes

1. History of the Morison or Morrison Family by L.A. Morrison
   Published in Boston, Massachusetts by A. Williams and Co.

2. Ibid

3. Ibid

4. Ibid

5. The James Morrison Papers - a collection of 3 letters written
   by James Morrison; one is from Dartmouth, N.H. Known hereafter
   as Dartmouth letter; two are from Litchfield, Connecticut,
   dated July 12 19 known hereafter by their origins and their
   dates. This note uses the Dartmouth letter.

   As Morrison was a lawyer, and once lived in Litchfield, Ct.
   I have assumed he was attending law school there.


8. John C. Calhoun By Margaret C. Colt: The Riverside Press,


0. Ibid and Common Knowledge.

1. Litchfield, July 12 see note 5.

2. Litchfield, July 19 see note 5.

3. Ibid

4. Ibid

5. Litchfield, July 12. I have interpreted Morrison's intended
   actions as actually carried out.

6. This is the only possible period of arrival.

7. Chatham County Marriages 1806-1851, Chatham County Probate Court.
   Letter written from Savannah in 1812 (from Colonial Dames).

8. The Will of Matthew Johnston.


10. Will of Matthew Johnston.

22. Ibid.

23. There are various deeds which place Morrison in Savannah at this period as well as the settlement of his wife's inheritance. The Case Commonwealth of Kentucky v. James Morrison must have been initiated in 1814 or 1815 if the James Morrisons are the same. See Deedbooks 2D p423, 2E p401, 2E p532, 2F p95, etc.

24. This is when Morrison joined the Union Society so if he had ever left he must have returned by 1816.

25. An abstract of the minutes of the Unoin Society at Georgia Historical Society - p13 in the appendix.


27. Columbian Museum and Savannah Daily Gazette April 23, 1818, p. 3 column 2.

28. Ibid. April 29, 1818, p.2 column 1.

29. Ibid. April 27, 1818, p. 2 column 3


32. Ibid. December 10, 1819, p. 3 column 1; April 6, 1819, p. 3 column 2-3; December 7, 1820, p. 2 column 4.

33. Ibid. January 6, 1819, p. 2 column 2.

34. The Daily Georgian November 27, 1819, p. 4 column 3. This gives more credence to the possibility of Morrison's banking experience in Kentucky.

35. Columbian Museum and Savannah Daily Gazette February 17, 1818, p. 2 column 1

36. Deedbook 2E p. 536.

37. Deedbook 2D p. 423.

41. Great Savannah Fires by Remer Yardlane, Evans Printing, Co.

42. Great Savannah Fires and the Georgian January 17, 1820, which stated that several buildings in the area survived. This building was built in 1819 and still exists today therefore logic dictates that it must have survived the fire of 1820.

43. History of the City Government of Savannah, Georgia 1790-1901 by Thomas Gamble, Savannah, Georgia 1900, p. 140. According to the Daily Georgian Morrison was appointed to the city council on July 26, 1819, to fill the unexpired term of T. V. P. Charlton who became Mayor upon the resignation of James Moore Wayne.

44. The Daily Georgian September 19, 1819, p. 2 column 4.


46. The Daily Georgian March 1, 1821, p. 3 column 2.

47. History of the City Government of Savannah, Georgia by Thomas Gamble, Savannah, Georgia 1900, p. 140.

48. It is a remarkable coincidence and worthy of note that during the term of James Morrison as Mayor death rates in the city declined and went up markedly within a year after Morrison left office.

49. City Council Minutes as quoted in History of the City Government of Savannah, Georgia by Thomas Gamble Savannah, Georgia 1900, p. 144.

50. Ibid. p. 141.

51. Ibid. p. 144-150.


55. Ibid. p. 161.

56. Ibid. p. 151.
57. Ibid. p. 140.

58. The Daily Georgian October 29, 1831, and Death Record from Chatham County Health Department of Vital Records.

59. The Daily Georgian December 17, 1831, and Death Record- Chatham County Health Department, Department of Vital Records.

60. Will of Eliza Johnston.

61. Ibid.

62. Death Record- Chatham County Health Department, Department of Vital Records.

63. Ibid.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


2. The James Morrison Papers.


4. The Savannah Morning News.

5. The Columbian Museum and Savannah Daily Gazette.


8. General Index to Savannah Newspapers 1811-1835.


11. Great Savannah Fires.

12. Death Records—Chatham County, Georgia, Department of Vital Records.

13. Abstract of the Minutes of the Union Society.


15. Chatham County Marriages 1806-1851—Chatham County Probate Court.


17. Will of Eliza Morrison.
The following were examined but did contribute directly to this biography.

1. **Historical Record of the City of Savannah** by F. D. Lee and J. C. Agnew: J. H. Estill 1869


3. **The Chatham Academy Papers.**