

Life of Nathaniel Heyward

The following is a transcription of a hand-written biography of Nathaniel Heyward (1766 - 1851), South Carolina rice planter. It was found among the papers of Barnwell Rhett Heyward (1853 -1921) at the South Carolina Historical Society at 100 Meeting St., Charleston. It consists of six legal-sized sheets with writing on both sides, but it has no date or signature. The text indicates it was written before 1900 and that the author was a boy in 1845. The latter fact rules out authorship by Barnwell Rhett Heyward.

*The document appears to be the work of Gabriel Edward Manigault (1833 – 1899). Passages from the work match exactly quotations found in Duncan Clinch Heyward's book *Seed from Madagascar*. A citation for one of the quotes (see p. 14) is "Life of Nathaniel Heyward, by his grandson, Dr. Gabriel Manigault, of Charleston, South Carolina, written 1895, but not published."*

The transcription was done by William F. Hamilton, July, 2001

Nathaniel Heyward. Born Jan 1766 Died Apr 1851

Nathaniel Heyward who was a well known and highly esteemed citizen of Charleston during the first half of the 19th century was the second son of Daniel Heyward by his second wife, Elizabeth Gignilliat. He belonged to the fifth generation of the Heyward family in South Carolina, the first emigrant to America having been Daniel also and coming from Little Eaton Derbyshire, England.

Thomas Heyward, the grandson of the immigrant and the grandfather of Nathaniel seems to have been the first of the name who settled on James Island, which borders on Charleston harbor and where he lies buried. He was a captain in the regiment raised in the province for service against the Yemassee Indians during the first quarter of the 18th century, and the Indians had realized by their easy chastisement that it was useless to contend with the white man for possession of their lands, a large part of the territory which had been conquered, extending from the Combahee river westwardly, was divided in the form of royal grants among the offices of the regiment, Captain Heyward from his gallant conduct having received a large share. From then commenced the prosperity and wealth of so many of the name.

Rice culture which distinguished South Carolina at an early period in its history had been introduced at about this time and soon became a paying industry. The large tracts of land acquired by Captain Heyward, at first a wilderness of pine trees and shallow swamps, were well suited to the cultivation of the grain, and the most accessible and available spaces were soon cleared of trees for the purpose. Everything connected with a rice plantation at that early day was doubtless most primitive. The dwelling of the planter was probably quite small and made of logs, as the sawing of logs into boards by hand was most arduous and slow. The heavy timbers for the frame were invariably hewn and the chimneys were of clay. While this was the condition of the planter, the black slaves who did the work had been so recently brought from Africa that they cared but little for even comfort on their surroundings, and it was not until other generations of them were at hand that board houses were eventually provided for them.

Already substantially built dwellings were common in the neighborhood of Charleston, but beyond the Combahee River in 1730 was far away from civilization. Thomas Heyward and his sons soon began to prosper for when he had been succeeded by his son Daniel, his principal heir according to the English law of primogeniture the latter was soon living in a large and comfortable house. This was known as "old House" situated within a few yards of one of the State roads connecting Charleston with Savannah and a few miles west of one of the tributaries of Broad River.

These details as to the military service of Thomas Heyward and the grant of the Yemassee lands explain how it was that the Heyward family were centered in that part of the colony up to the revolution, and that although William Heyward, a half brother of Nathaniel, and eventually, Nathaniel himself became residents of Charleston it was mainly in consequence of marriage in that city, many of the names still remaining in the original region of settlement and possessing both property and wealth. Noted among these were the late Daniel Heyward and whose plantation known as "Heyward Hall" was midway between old Pocotaligo and Garden's Corner and William Heyward his brother whose plantation and residence were near the Pocotaligo station of the Charleston and Savannah Railroad, that station having now been discontinued and Yemassee station having been [?].

Thomas Heyward Jr, the eldest of all the brothers should also be mentioned as having retained landed property in the same region although he soon moved to Charleston as a student of law. His plantation was situated near Hogg's neck on the west side of Broad river and known as White Hall. It was an unproductive place and never yielded either to him or his descendants an income equal to the demands of city life. The rice plantations of Daniel and William abovementioned seem to have been the only ones that were worth cultivating after the general abandonment of the inland swamp plantations of which they were examples for the alluvial tidelands of the neighboring rivers.

Down to the time of Daniel the father of Nathaniel the family lived almost exclusively on their plantations during the entire year and the move to the city as a permanence was first made by his sons. That the father visited Charleston occasionally is proved by the fact that the portraits of himself and wife which still exist were executed by Theus the local portrait painter whose studio was in that city from 1750 to about the commencement of the Revolution. The style of the paintings proves beyond a doubt that they were by that Artist.

Thomas as the eldest son, afterwards a signer of the Declaration of Independence and later still, a State Judge, was the first to make the move to the city. He probably did so in 1765 or 66 in order to study law under some practicing lawyer, although it is quite likely that he had been at school there before those dates. He is registered among the American students at the Middle Temple, London, in 1768.

His youngest full brother followed him to Charleston soon after and there married a daughter of Thomas Shubrick. That family possessed wealth at the time, their property consisting of rice plantations at the headwaters of the Ashepoo River in a section of country known as the "Round O." Their city residence was the dwelling in Legare St now owned by Mr. Augustine T. Smyth, probably the oldest one in the street, and it was there that Nathaniel Heyward while on a visit to his brother William and his wife at about the age of 9 or 10 first had the opportunity of observing what the elegances of city life were in comparison with the plain country life of boyhood, which he had hitherto led. He more than once mentions this incident of his early days in the domesticity of home.

The only other event of his boyhood was that during the engagement between Sir Peter Parker's fleet and the fort on Sullivan's Island on the 28th June 1776 he was still in Charleston and witnessed it from the roof of the house where he was staying. His age was then ten, having been born in 1766, and soon after he was taken to his father's plantation where he remained until the war was over. When he had reached manhood he was allowed to go to Europe with one of his cousins for a year and the two spent most of their time at Dijon in France. They staid a short time in Paris while returning and while there a visit was made to Versailles on a Sunday, which was so timed that they saw the King Louis XVI and his Queen Marie Antoinette pass the large corridor of the palace on their way to the chapel. While in London he saw the Prince Regent in a carriage in one of the Parks accompanied by one of his boon and prophigate companions. His trip to Europe made but little impression on him from his conversations in old age. He was too young and unprepared by reading for lasting impressions and he doubtless sighed for the day when he would be back in South Carolina.

His father had died during the Revolution, and, without having inquired, he believed that he had received by his will a fair share of this estate. On his return however from the European trip he found to his surprise that what

had been left him was the smallest of the subdivisions, and that his traveling expenses had been paid by his brothers. The favored one of these was his elder full brother James.

Immediately on his return he took possession of his property which consisted of a small inland swamp plantation near Grahamville and another smaller still near the east bank of Combahee river but not flowing from the river. Those two little plantations were a small beginning to start life with, but he was full of energy and confidence in himself and he undertook the Grahamville place only the first year. Everything went on well until August and his crop was very promising when a heavy fall of rain covered the rice completely when it was in blossom. This was entire destruction and it was so evident to him that such a disaster might occur again during any subsequent year that he abandoned the place altogether and never went to it again during the rest of his life.

The move had already generally been made from the inland plantations, which consisted of swampy tracts scattered through the seaboard region of South Carolina to the richer tidelands of the adjoining rivers, and one or more of his older brothers, especially James, was doing well on the Combahee river.

The methods of cultivation in the interior swamps consisted in first removing all the growth of the low lands and dividing the area into two parts by a high embankment having a floodgate or sluice in its middle. In the upper half all the rain that fell was retained and in the lower half the rice was planted, the water in reserve being used for irrigation. It was a primitive process and attended with great labor, especially in removing with the hand the grasses which grow in the furrows in the midst of the rice soon after it came out of the ground. The yield per acre in those lands was about 25 bushels of unhulled rice, but it was seldom that the average reached that quantity on any plantation.

The cultivation in the tidelands was entirely different from this, for the water was obtained from rivers and in such quantities that the fields could be flooded to any depth. As the possibilities which opened up through the large supply of water became apparent it was found that the laborious removal of the grasses could be done away with and accomplished by means of the water. This was a great discovery which soon ended in making the alluvial tidelands of South Carolina and Georgia rivers the producers with certainty of more grain to the acre than any area equal in size throughout the world. An average of 50 bushels to the acre on many plantations was not uncommon, and it was safe to say that by cultivating the river lands with the improved methods twice the quantity of rice was made with half the amount of labor than on the inland swamp lands.

The destruction of the grasses by water was effected in the following way. As soon as the plant was well out of the ground and from 1 1/2 to 2 inches high it was covered a second time with water which was usually kept for a fortnight. At the end of that time the plant had grown sufficiently under the water for its leaves to be resting on the surface while the growth of the grasses had been arrested by the layer of water covering them like a blanket. When the field was then drained only the rice was to be seen and thus was accomplished what had previously been done entirely by human hand.

A dry growth of some weeks was then allowed the plant to give it a chance to recover from the immersion and before the fields were covered again with water the soil between the furrows was stirred with the hoe to stimulate the growth of the rice as well as to check the growth of the grasses which were ever ready to spring up.

These several covering of the fields with water were known as "flows" and the one which was so fatal to the grasses was called the "point flow."

When Nathaniel Heyward abandoned his little plantation near Grahamville he moved to the Combahee river and at first overlooked and directed the work on the plantations of his brothers. This occupied him for a few years and he also cultivated his little plantation already mentioned nearby notwithstanding his energy and close application to business he occasionally visited Charleston and there soon married Miss Harriet Manigault, a granddaughter of Gabriel Manigault the rich merchant of the Revolutionary period who advanced large sums of

money to the patriotic cause-an early period in the struggle. Harriet was then an heiress in her own right and contributed as capital to the rice planting industry about \$50,000.

The sum was large for the times as the country had not yet fully recovered from the prostration of business caused by the Revolution. It was of vast importance to the future of Nathaniel for it enabled him to launch out into rice planting on a large scale. One of his first purchases was a tract of uncleared river swamp, on the same river at a good location for tides, from his brother Thomas, then a Judge, and when it was brought into condition for cultivation it proved to be the most productive of the 4400 acres which he eventually planted. It was divided into four separate plantations of from 200 to 250 acres each and thus made a total of almost 1000 acres. Those places were always known as the Swamp Plantations.

But before clearing those lands for cultivation he acquired by purchase certain plantations higher up on the river which were owned by members of the Gibbes family. These were gentlemen who [?] the world easily and did not worry much about looking after their business as planters. They therefore soon fell into debt and were very glad to dispose of their plantations to Mr. Heyward who soon caused them to yield what could legitimately be expected of them. Two of those places, the Bluff and Rose Hill, had fine residences upon them. The first became immediately the home of Mr. Heyward and remained so for the rest of his life, the second was for a time the dwelling of his elder son William and afterward of his fourth son Charles.

Other important purchases that his success enabled him to make were of newly arrived African slaves. The trade was very active then-the last decade of the last century-for the losses of slaves from various causes by the war of revolution and the increased demand for them in consequence of the activity in bringing into cultivation the tidelands of the rivers had made the necessity for large importations very urgent.

The interests of the Southern States at that time were exclusively agricultural, the laborers for which were altogether negroes from Africa. The tobacco of Virginia, North Carolina and South Carolina, the rice of South Carolina and Georgia and the small quantity of cotton produced then was all the work of Africans. There was a large proportion of the population who were small farmers and who did their work themselves in those states, but they were unimportant politically and the wealth was necessarily confined to the planters. It was a state of things that had been brought about by the British Government during the colonial period and, especially in South Carolina, although some uneasiness was felt at the news of the terrible atrocities committed by the negroes in San Domingo, and the agitation which was commencing in England for the suppression of the slave trade. There was no other industry to follow outside of the cities but to be the owner of a plantation with the necessary number of slaves to cultivate it if anyone with sufficient means wished to locate there.

All the planters who required slaves then bought them without hesitation. There was no alternative, for without them, their lands would be valueless, and the slave trade was regarded by most men as a perfectly legitimate branch of commerce. If the Constitution of 1787 under which we are still living had ordained the immediate cessation of the trade the states of Virginia, the two Carolinas and Georgia would not have entered the Union, and the Convention was obliged to extend the time to 1808.

It was during the same last decade of the 18th century and almost up to 1808 that Mr. Heyward was a large purchaser of slaves. During the European wars of that time all the cereals sold well, and in 1805, the year of the battle of Austerlitz rice brought higher prices than ever before or after up to 1860. At the time of his death he was the largest slaveowner in the State and probably in the entire South, the total number being over 2300.

A careful estimate by his executors at his death in 1851 of the value of his entire property including lands, slaves, residences in Charleston occupied by his children and grandchildren, stock in banks and insurance companies, cattle, mules, horses, etc. on plantations, [?] and wines, made it reach a total of \$2,018,000.

His income varied from year to year. It is known to have been \$90,000 for 1818, and at his death there were

\$80,000 to his credit in the hands of Factors, proceeds of sales of his rice. His largest income in any year was \$120,000. This was probably the year 1805 and it was mentioned to the writer by the late Mr. Alfred Huger who was intimate in early manhood with the two eldest sons from whom the information was derived.

His abundant means enabled him to have erected on his plantations several large mills for preparing the grain for market. These were built by a young English millwright names William Lucas who in later years acquired considerable wealth himself and became a large rice planter on the Santee river. Many of his descendants are now living in South Carolina and it is a name well known there.

Those mills were for the times the best that could be constructed but as time went on and the cleaning of the rice on the plantations was generally given up, that part of the work being then done by mills in Charleston the efficiency of which could be more easily maintained, Mr. Heyward's mills gradually fell away from their capacity to do the thorough work of former days, and towards the close of his life the rice that was hulled and cleaned in the few mills which he still kept at work was so badly milled as to be classed as inferior. The mills were all worked by water power.

It was a long time before he would make any change in the old ways of threshing the grain by hand. At last after most of his neighbors had had steam threshing mills erected on their plantations he had two made in Savannah Ga by a firm of machinists named Lacklison. They were built regardless of expense and the rapid way in which the crops of two plantations were threshed [?] was a marvel to the old fashioned old planter. He had often said when discussing the steam thresher question that if he should adopt them he would not have any work for his negroes until planting time after the threshing was over. No one however ever heard of the darkies being idle through the winter after the first two threshers were built. There was always work for them to do on a well-organized place. This was in 1849.

It should be stated here that intelligent and observant as Mr. Heyward was as a rice planter, it was to be expected that when he had established himself in the midst of the tide lands he should have improved the methods of cultivating the growing rice. It was he in fact who among the very first saw the possibility of using the long point flow on the young plant for the destruction of the grasses, and when first generally used he was recognized as its originator. That truth was lost sight of afterwards by a modification of that point-flow when it was called the "stretch flow" and continued on the rice somewhat longer than the first one had been.

Mr. Heyward was never in public life beyond being a member of the State Legislature in 1782 and later from the St. Thomas parish where he owned a rice plantation on the eastern branch of Cooper river. He took an active interest in the great political discussions in the United States Senate which preceded and followed Nullification in S. Carolina in 1832, and in 1822 when the negro conspirator Denmark Vesey was tried for his life he was chosen as one of the five distinguished citizens to compose the Court. He more than once presided at important public meetings in the city of Charleston and when the first cotton factory was started there in 1847 he subscribed \$50,000 to its stock.

As a large slave owner whose most valuable property was in his slaves he naturally was made uneasy by the antislavery agitation the bitterness of which had not reached its height before his death. He read attentively in the daily papers the proceedings of a Convention in Kentucky in 1849 which deliberated whether emancipation was advisable in the near future and at the dinner table with his family he made some remarks indicating that if emancipation had been favorably considered his opinion that it would be the entering wedge for general emancipation. Beyond that the writer never heard him say anything else on the subject-the possibility of such an event as the United States government decreeing emancipation never having been dreamed of then.

Mr. Heyward was a man of few words and even taciturn at times. He was however a good listener and always ready to appreciate a well told anecdote or joke. In old age when confined to the house he was much of reader of books and inquired often of those around him for the latest that had been published. As a rule his conversation

did not include those subjects of which he had been reading. It was confined mostly to events which had occurred in his life and to the many phases of the industry of rice planting.

During his convalescence from a fit of illness in the early months of 1846 which made it necessary for him to come to the city for medical treatment his son in law, Mr. Charles Manigault, while visiting him, had several interesting conversations with him which he noted down and which are still preserved. His brother James who had inherited the largest share of his father's estate had made a very improper and unfortunate marriage while spending some years in England between 1790 and 1794. He was a foolish young man with a great deal more money than brains and he was inveigled into the marriage with an adventuress who styled herself the widow Edge by a man from Boston, Mass named Cutting who represented himself to be her brother. Cutting came with the newly married pair to Charleston, still styling himself the brother of the bride and spent the winter there. He proved himself to be a most entertaining and amusing fellow and beyond the rascally deception he had practiced, there was nothing severely to his discredit that was remembered against him. The new Mrs. Heyward was seen at a glance upon her arrival to be a woman of doubtful reputations and her husband having sense enough to see that also, soon gave himself up to drinking and died in Philadelphia in 1796 after two years of marriage. By his will he left his entire property to his widow for her life and in this way the best part of Daniel Heyward's rice plantations was suddenly transferred to an English woman who had first married a poor foolish fellow through a scandalous piece of maneuvering and afterwards exerted her influence over him in the writing of his will so that he left her a life interest in the whole of his large possessions.

The mourning of the widow did not last long and she was soon surrounded, while still in Philadelphia, with other suitors. The most favored of these was Charles Baring of the distinguished banking family of that name, who had recently returned from Mexico where he had been sent by the London firm to look after their interests in certain silver mines. The courtship was short; for Charles was a handsome young fellow and the next thing that Mr. Heyward heard was that Mr. and Mrs. Charles Baring would soon be his neighbors on the Combahee river.

The two arrived in due time and it was not long before Baring behaved towards Mr. Heyward with the superciliousness of an Englishman who fancied that he was merely an inexperienced provincial with no knowledge of the proprieties and amenities of life. In this he soon found himself mistaken for it was not long before Mr. Heyward sent him a challenge which he was obliged to accept, and the duel which consisted of two exchanges of shots occurred in the immediate neighborhood of their residences. Both sides gave proof of perfect coolness and the bullets whizzed very near to both, but neither of the two was hurt. Without that opportunity to find out that Mr. Heyward was as much a man as any Englishman, Mr. Baring was satisfied never to play the supercilious again for the long period of fifty years which his wife's life lasted.

The couple never had any children and always spent their winters on the Combahee plantation where they seemed to realize that they were interlopers, for they never improved the dwelling house and saw but little company. When the writer visited the place as a boy in December 1845 soon after the death of Mrs. Baring he looked in vain for a decent dwelling. There was nothing visible but a little old house scarcely fit for an overseer.

It was at Flat Rock that the two laid themselves out to entertain their friends and their hospitalities were so lavish there that those who have enjoyed them were very outspoken in their admiration. The latter however could not help feeling that the Baring house with Mrs Baring at its head was a doubtful place for their wives and daughter to be at. It was the host though and not the hostess who was so charming for he had had from boyhood through association with the distinguished members of his family and their friends the certain opportunity of becoming an elegant gentleman also. Whereas Mrs. Baring was of common origin, her father having been a butcher, and never during her long life in America was she able to assume completely the manners and deportment of a lady. She had a younger sister whom she deliberately sold to the eldest son of the then Earl of Berkeley, near whose country residence in England her father plied his calling, and when the innocent heir to the title, the fruit of that liaison, expected to step into his grandfather's shoes the House of Lords interposed and finished by abolishing the title¹.

With such a wife Mr. Baring could not venture to return to England where she was known, and that was the explanation of his having been the pioneer of the low country planters in search of a summer home in the mountains of North Carolina. When he married a second time, Miss Constance Dent, of a good South Carolina family, and took her to England the two were well received by his entire family there.

The disputes with Mr. Baring and the duel which followed were stirring events in the early manhood of Mr. Heyward, and in his conversations with his son in law while seated in his bed room he returned frequently to certain details which he had forgotten to mention.

The large sums of money that he had advanced to several of his impecunious nephews and nieces and which they had never troubled themselves to return was another subject which he jokingly mentioned. But he was spared by his death the mortification of being obliged to pay the same sum of money twice, the second payment being made by his executors. It occurred this way. The will of his brother James required him to pay to their elder brother Thomas, then a State Judge, a small sum, about \$8,000, when he should come into possession of his estate at the death of Mrs. Baring. The Judge then being in an embarrassed condition begged of him to pay it immediately, which he readily did, and when Mr. Heyward's estate was being wound up a claim was made by Mrs. Decima Heyward of Wilmington Delaware, the widow of a grandson of Judge Heyward, for her husband's share of the bequest with interest. The executors refused to pay and the court to which the matter was referred ordered it to be paid on the grounds that when first paid it was not at Mrs. Baring's death as the will called for. To the credit of Judge Heyward's other descendants they all refused to be parties to that claim.

Mr. Heyward having reached manhood shortly after the Revolution was intimate with most of the men who had taken part in the conflict. He sat along side of Marion in the legislature that met at Jacksonboro on the Edisto River before the British had evacuated Charleston, and he said of him, when asked what he remembered of him, that - "he was a small man who seldom spoke." He never knew the other partisan generals, Sumter and Pickens, but he knew Moultrie, Edward Rutledge and generals CC and Thomas Pinckney, all of whom were residents of Charleston. He never mentioned John Rutledge in the hearing of the writer.

In speaking of the Revolution on one occasion he said that the desire for separation from England was encouraged by many of the young Carolinians who had been educated in England and who, upon returning, found that there was no opportunity for them to reach important political and other positions as long as South Carolina was only a colonial province of England. Daniel Heyward, his father, remonstrated with his eldest son Thomas in strong language when he observed that he was one of the agitators in favor of separation, and it is well known that large numbers of those who had no particular grievance against England were averse to any change of government. As long as the colony was ruled by a Royal governor, each for example as Lord William Campbell, the last one, who obtained the position through the powerful influence of his father or elder brother the Duke of Argyle, and the minor officers consisting largely of native born Englishmen, the capable and well educated Carolinian stood no chance of preferment and was obliged to be content with being only a provincial as long as he lived. The dissatisfaction caused by this state of things was natural and it is not surprising that it was so strong.

Mr. Heyward at his death and for many years previously was known to be the richest man in South Carolina and it is important to be able to give the exact figures of his wealth, as has been done for future comparison. The subject was a vague one during his life, for he was averse to any public estimation of the value of his property and it was not known until the appraisement by his executors how many slaves he had owned. It was a common saying that many a negro would pass him when on his way to his different plantations and remove his cap to him, calling him "master" as he did so, without his owner being aware that he was one of his slaves. This was perhaps more so in his old age when, exclusive of his house servants, the ordinary laborers were not so much under his eye.

The period of his life was one of transition from customs that were English to customs that are American, and one of the strongest of the former with him was the desire to build up his family and perpetuate his name, which he was prevented from doing in the English way by the laws of primogeniture having been abolished. In the final distribution of his property therefore he gave his best plantations to those of his children who had been dutiful sons and those of the next generation whose minds were best balanced. The respectability attached to a name through the ownership of land was a strong feeling with him which came to him as an inheritance from the colonial period, and with the exception of certain city lots in Charleston which had come to him by marriage, it was quite the exception for him to part with any of his land however valuable it might be to him.

It was a subject of remarks at his death that, rich as he was, he left nothing whatever by his will to any charitable purpose. This sounded as a severe rebuke, but it was easily explained by the sufferings of the poor never having excited his sympathies to the same degree that they would have done if he had been in early life a poor boy by himself. All of his associations throughout life had been with the well-to-do and prosperous and the poor to him were the slaves for whom all their owners were obliged by law to provide. A broken down gentleman whom he had known in better days was always an object of sympathy with him, and several of such could be named to whom he lent large sums of money which they were never able to return. If all that he thus gave away outside of his immediate family could have been brought together, it would have been amply sufficient to endow an orphan house or a hospital. Apropos of the latter, when the Roper Hospital was being projected the Roper fund having accumulated only sufficiently to defray a part of the cost of construction, he said to the writer one day that, creditable as had been the bequest, it was only a part of what was required and not enough for the charity to be thus named, the city having supplied the balance.

1. This damaging evidence against Mrs. Baring was brought out in the examination of her sister the Countess of Berkeley in the celebrated case of the Berkeley Peerage before the House of Lords.