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**A NINETEENTH CENTURY MAN:
THE LIFE OF GEORGE ANDERSON NICOLL
(1830-1879)
SAVANNAH CITIZEN, ENGINEER, SOLDIER, AND BUSINESSMAN**

WILLIAM E. CHRISTMAN

HISTORY 300

FALL 1988

DR. ROGER K. WARLICK

GEORGE ANDERSON NICOLL

(1830-1879)

George A. Nicoll was born in Savannah on October 26, 1830. He was the son of United States Judge John C. Nicoll.

Nicoll learned the trade of engineer in New York. He then served as an engineer on several steamships of the Philadelphia line.

Shortly before the war Nicoll returned to Savannah. During this time he married Sallie Parker.

Nicoll fought with the Confederacy during the War Between the States and was captured at Fort McCallister in 1864.

After the war, Nicoll became a Savannah bank officer, a position he held until his death in 1879. He was forty-seven when he died.

Savannah, 1830: A town that was beginning to reap from the benefits of the rise of 'King Cotton'. In 1830, Savannah was Georgia's largest city, teeming and bustling with activity. From all over the state, long laboring farmers and Georgia's specialized craftsmen brought their goods to Savannah to trade.

Imports from all around the world flooded the River Street wharves waiting to be bought by the citizens of this young nation. Buildings were going up as the city began to expand from its original boundaries set up by General Oglethorpe. Cotton, so much in abundance on Savannah's river front, made the docks appear as though snow had fallen on the coastal city. River boats, with smoke billowing from long stacks, crowded the river front of Savannah, with its' same over flooding of cotton on the decks.

Savannah was becoming a major port and city of the United States in 1830. John and Eliza Nicoll contributed to that growth on October 26 of this year. Judge and Mrs. Nicoll became parents once again, at the birth of George Anderson Nicoll.¹

Nicoll's parents were members of the upper middle class of Savannah. John Cochran Nicoll, George's father, was the son of U.S. Army Captain Abimael Young Nicoll, a native of New York, who had been assigned to Fort Greene, the predecessor of Fort Pulaski. Captain Nicoll was one of the survivors of the catastrophic hurricane of 1804 which destroyed Fort Greene.²

With the move to Savannah, Nicoll would meet and marry Caroline Agnes Ledbetter, a Georgia native. This marriage would

keep the Nicoll family in Savannah.³

John Nicoll was born in Savannah on October 7, 1793. He grew to become a prominent citizen in Savannah and his accomplishments can attest to that. He was a lawyer, Recorder of Savannah, a member of the Georgia House of Representatives(1820-1821), Captain of the Republican Blues, Judge of the City Court of Savannah, Mayor of Savannah(September 12, 1836-September 11, 1837), Alderman(1836, 1837-1838), Judge of Superior Court, and Judge of the U. S. District Court(1839-1861). With the outbreak of the War Between the States, Nicoll became the Confederate States District Attorney, a position he held until his death on November 16, 1863. He was sixty-nine when he died.⁴

Nicoll's mother was Eliza Mary Anderson, who was the daughter of George Anderson and Eliza Clifford Wayne Anderson. She married John Nicoll on January 9, 1823, in Savannah.⁵ She died on March 22, 1865 of Erysipelas. She was sixty-five years of age.⁶

There were three children from the Nicoll marriage. The first was Georgia Clifford Gilliam. She was four years older than George, who was the second child.⁷ She married James Shippan Gilliam, M.D. who was a navy doctor who drowned shortly before the war. She died on August 2, 1863.⁸ After George there was Caroline Agnes Nicoll, who married Charles Augustus Lafayette Lamar in 1846.⁹

Young George grew up in Savannah, where he received his secondary education. He went north to Lawrence, Massachusetts

then to Mattewan Works, New York where he learned the trade of machinist, both theoretically and practically. Nicoll then served on the steamship **Keystone State** of the Philadelphia Line.¹⁰

Young Nicoll then returned to Savannah to work for his uncle, John W. Anderson.¹¹ This position that Nicoll held while he worked for his uncle may have been a clerk in the Common House.¹² It was during this time that Nicoll married Sallie Parker, eldest daughter of Dr. Brendon S. Herdon, on January 28, 1858 at the St. George's Church in Fredricksburg, Virginia, in a ceremony conducted by the Reverend E. C. McGuire, D.D.¹³ Mrs. Nicoll would outlive her husband, dying in 1881.¹⁴ This marriage suffered a hardship on May 17, 1859. John Anderson Nicoll, then the seven month old son of George and Sallie, died of Cholera Infantum.¹⁵

The year 1860 not only brought in a new decade, but a time of great national strain. Joyous Savannahians paraded at Johnson Square on the night of December 27, 1860, to celebrate the secession of South Carolina. Georgia was considering secession also. It appeared on that night the secession fever had crossed the Savannah River and affected the citizens of the Forrest City. The incubation period of the fever was short lived. Less than a month later, January 19, 1861, Georgia became the fifth state to secede from the Union. Two months later the North and the South were at war.

George Nicoll obviously felt sympathetic to the Southern

Cause: on May 30, 1862 he became a second lieutenant in the Savannah military organization, the Republican Blues. Nicoll was most likely chosen an officer because he was qualified, but also because of his father's influence (who had once been a member of the Blues himself) and his family's high social status. Nicoll's enrollment was the beginning of a versatile three years as a Confederate officer. Nicoll was at Fort Pulaski with the Republican Blues, but was rotated out of duty there before the fort fell in April of 1862.¹⁶ He also saw duty at the Confederate defenses at Fort Jackson, St. Catherine, Wasaw Island, and Fort McCallister.¹⁷ Nicoll would rise in rank from a second lieutenant to first lieutenant and finally to captain. According to Confederate pay vouchers, Nicoll served in infantry, cavalry, and artillery. He was listed as a second and first lieutenant (promoted December 1, 1863) in the Republican Blues,¹⁸ while being listed as a captain in the Hardwick Mounted Rifles on December 31, 1862.¹⁹ From January to February, 1863, Nicoll was an inspecting and mustering officer.²⁰ On January 31, 1863 Nicoll was listed as captain of the Gwinnett Rifles.²¹ At the reorganization of the Emmett Rifles in 1862, Nicoll was elected captain of the unit²² (Company F, 22nd Battalion, Georgia Heavy Artillery)²³ on November 8, 1863.²⁴ Nicoll spent all of his military career around Savannah. He was part of the city's defenses.

Fort Pulaski's fall in 1862 virtually cut off Savannah as a viable Confederate seaport. By 1864, Georgia was choking under

the wrath of the great Union Army of Tennessee under the command of Major General William T. Sherman. Sherman had left his indelible mark on Atlanta and was laying waste to Georgia as he cut his way through the state to his objective, Savannah. To take Savannah, Sherman had to neutralize the Confederate Fort McCallister, the defensive stalwart of the Great Ogeechee River that had thwarted all of the Union navy's attempts to destroy it since its construction in 1861.²⁵ If Sherman were to capture Savannah, he would have to knock out Fort McCallister first because it was the last fortification of Savannah to be taken out. Secondly, the only way Sherman could be supplied was by sea. As long as the fort dominated the Ogeechee River, Sherman's troops were unable to obtain supplies from the union vessels waiting off shore.²⁶ Captain George Nicoll and the Emmett Rifles were part of the garrison at Fort McCallister.

On December 13, 1864, the Second Division of the Union Army of Tennessee began its march down the Bryan Neck to attack Fort McCallister.²⁷ The union army got there late that afternoon and began an assault on the Confederate fort.²⁸ The attack only lasted for fifteen minutes, but there was heavy hand to hand combat.²⁹ Finally, the Confederate garrison succumbed to the overpowering Yankees.³⁰ Casualties were light on both sides.

The fall of Fort McCallister marked the end of Sherman's "March to the Sea." Communications were opened, via the Ogeechee, between the Union army and the fleet. The loss of the Confederate work rendered the further defense of Savannah

useless. Seven days later the city was evacuated.³¹

George Nicoll emerged from the fight without a scratch. Unfortunately for Nicoll and the Confederacy, though, he was captured, so ending his tenure as a military man. Captain Nicoll was sent north to Fort Delaware where he remained as a prisoner of war until his release from there on June 4, 1865.³²

After the war, Nicoll returned home to Savannah and went back to work as an engineer, working on the steamer **William Gibbons** and then for a short time in the Atlantic and Gulf Railroad.³³ Nicoll was engineer on the riverboat, **King Cotton**, which defeated **Veto** and **Victoria** in a boat race on June 27, 1868 as part of a city of Savannah festival that was going on at the time.³⁴

In the summer of 1868, Nicoll was offered a position as an officer in the Central Railroad Bank and Trust Company, a position he held until his death.³⁵

Captain Nicoll had the honor of being one of the twelve reorganizers of the Republican Blues, which had disbanded after the war.³⁶ Nicoll was a member of the organization until his death.

The captain developed Tuberculosis during the late 1870's. It worsened in 1879, and caused him to be bed ridden. Nicoll's health progressively degenerated and he never fully recovered. After six weeks of battling the disease, Nicoll died at his residence on 115 Congress Street on the morning of May 26, 1879.³⁷ He was forty-seven years old.³⁸

Nicoll's funeral was held the next day at Independent Presbyterian Church with the Reverends Dr. I.S.K. Axson, Thomas Boone, and E.C. Gordon conducting the service.³⁹ A color guard of forty-three men of the Republican Blues under the command of Lieutenant D. Dixon escorted the captain's remains to Laurel Grove Cemetery.⁴⁰ There, George Anderson Nicoll, a nineteenth century man, was buried in lot 506.⁴¹

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17. "Savannah Morning News", May 29, 1879., p. 3
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31. Pamphlet on Fort McCallister
32. Roster on the Confederate Soldiers of Georgia p. 138
33. Savannah Morning News, May 27, 1879., p. 3
34. "Daily Herald News", June 29, 1868., Savannah Newspaper Digest: Jan. 1-Dec. 31, 1868 (Georgia Historical Society)., p. 230
35. "Daily Herald News", September 1, 1868., Savannah Newspaper Digest: Jan. 1-Dec. 31, 1868 (Georgia Historical Society)., p. 371
36. The Republican Blues Minute Book, 1872-1884 (Georgia Historical Society Manuscript Collection)
37. "Savannah Morning News", May 27, 1879., p. 3
38. Workers of the W.P.A., Laurel Grove Cemetery, Savannah, Georgia-General Index to Keepers' Record Books, 1852-1938 (1939) volume III (N-V). No page numbers given.
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