

## Biography of James Barnwell Heyward (1817 – 1886)

Excerpt from *Ancestors and Descendants of Nathaniel Heyward (1766 – 1851)* by Thomas DeSaussure Furman (2003)

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James Barnwell Heyward, like his brother Nathaniel, spent his early years in the home of his grandmother, Esther Hutson (Wigg) Barnwell, in Beaufort, SC. He received his early education at a preparatory school known as Beaufort College. He was a good student and in 1828 received as a reward a small leather bound book entitled *P. Papinil Statil, Opera* on the back of which is inscribed in gold letters the following, “Presented to James Barnwell Heyward by the Trustees of The Beaufort College as a Testimony of his scholarship.” He attended the College of Charleston for two years and then entered Harvard College, graduating in the Class of 1838. James Russell Lowell was a classmate. On returning to South Carolina he probably lived with his grandfather, Nathaniel Heyward, and assisted him with the management of the Combahee plantations.

In March 1845 he bought a four story house on the North side of Broad Street as his Charleston residence. After the death of Susan (Cole) (Heyward) Baring in Sept 1845 his grandfather obtained possession of the plantations Hamburg, Copenhagen and Antwerp from her estate and turned them over to James and Maria to manage. The house on Hamburg plantation was in a sad state of repair and James had it demolished and constructed a new two-and-a-half story house about 200 yards south of the old residence. He had the old rice mill torn down and built a new mill at the head of a canal located between Hamburg and Copenhagen plantations. With the help of a landscape gardener he planted a garden on the south side of the property bordered by live oaks and magnolias interspersed with other plants and flowering shrubs. The paths through the garden were bordered with boxwoods, jonquils and narcissus. The north garden contained a curving avenue of oaks running to the east with two shorter intersecting avenues.

James and Maria were very devoted to their grandfather and as he grew older he depended more and more on them for personal assistance and attendance. After Nathaniel's death in 1851 James inherited Rotterdam plantation. He bought Myrtle Grove Plantation from his uncle Charles. He also bought an interest in The Grove plantation and a plantation known as Fike on the Savannah River. At the beginning of the war James owned some 500 slaves, most of them on the plantations of Hamburg-Copenhagen. He never sold a slave except with the transfer of property and only bought one, a crippled boy named William.

At the outbreak of the War his two oldest sons joined the Confederate army and shortly thereafter James transferred his family to Columbia where he rented a house on Blanding Street for the duration. This move was necessitated in part because of a great fire which occurred in Charleston in December of 1861. Starting in a cotton warehouse at the east end of Pinckney Street near the Cooper River and fanned by a strong northeast wind, the fire swept southwest across the city to the foot of New and Savage Streets on the Ashley River, burning everything in its path. Among the buildings destroyed were James' house on Broad Street, The Circular Church, Institute Hall, St. Finbar's Roman Catholic Cathedral, St. Andrew's Society Hall and St. Peter's Episcopal Church, where James was a vestryman.

James continued his rice planting operation throughout the war years. When the buildings on the Beaufort side of the river were being torched by Sherman's troops, he was in the Hamburg barnyard supervising the threshing of the last of the harvested rice crop. The rice was loaded into boxcars and

shipped to Columbia, where it arrived just in time to fall into the hands of the Federal army. As the Federal troops moved North from Savannah they burned every residence, barn and rice mill, leaving only the slave quarters intact. During the war years James Barnwell Heyward did what he could to ameliorate the inevitable destruction. He saved what gold he could, a belt of which his wife wore around her waist while the Federal troops passed through Columbia. He also bought shoes of all sizes, and after the War, when many were shoeless, his people were provided for. He arrived in Columbia just ahead of Sherman's army and, leaving behind his wife and the smaller children, some of whom had measles, took his children Caroline, Emma and Charles to Charlotte, carrying with him the old hall-marked silver. The house on Blanding Street, where Maria and the younger children stayed, was not burned. The story is that when she saw the neighboring houses going up in flames, she went out into the street and finding a Federal Officer, who she thought to be General Sherman, went up to him and said in effect, "I am alone in this house with only small children, some of which are sick with measles. Your men are burning the houses all around. I must have help." He replied, "Yes, I am now trying to get this stopped and I will give you a guard." Just then a soldier threw a burning torch onto the porch of the house. The General turned to his Aide and said, "Shoot him down!"

At the beginning of 1866 James announced that he was going back to the plantations on the Combahee. His friends warned him that he would likely be killed by the Negroes. He replied that he had a large family to support and that if he didn't, they would all starve. So, taking his sons Francis William, Robert and Charles he returned to Hamburg plantation. There he found utter desolation and ruin. The house he built in 1851 was gone so he and his sons moved into one of the double slave houses on Copenhagen. About this time the crippled slave boy William came back into the picture. He had been sent to Fike plantation on the Savannah River where James thought he would get the best care and every time he visited that plantation he would ask William how he was getting on. William always wanted to go to Hamburg and when the Federal troops came by and told the Negroes that they were free and could go where they pleased, William leaped up, clapped his hands and said "Tank God, now I's guine to ma mossur." After James and his sons returned to Hamburg, they were eating dinner and through the open door they could see William coming down the road. When he got to the door he said, "Well Mossur I come." His former master said, "Well, William I am glad to see you, but I have no money with which to pay you and not too much to eat." To which William replied, "Well sir, if you only gives me what you leff on your plate. I be satisfy." Then he said he wanted a surname and Charles said, "Well, we will name you for the great Scottish chief, William Wallace." That became his name and he lived on Hamburg plantation and died many years later.

The problem facing James and his sons was how to get the plantations back in working order. Two things were needed: money and labor. Many of the ex-slaves still lived on the plantation and at first they gave no particular trouble, but the carpetbaggers from Beaufort began circulating among them and telling them that the land belonged to them and they didn't have to work and could live there as long as they wished. To settle this contention the planters worked out an agreement with the Freedmen's Bureau in Walterboro, which said in effect that the Negroes would agree to a contract wherein they would furnish the labor and the plantation owners would supply the land, farming equipment seed and free housing with penalties if the work was not done. With the exception of one man and his wife, none of the Negroes would agree to the contract and refused to move off the property. James Heyward went to Walterboro and laid the case before the Freedmen's Bureau. The Bureau sent a Federal officer to Hamburg who told the Negroes to either sign the contract or get off the plantation. The Negroes left in mass with the exception of one man and his wife who had agreed to the contract. In a few weeks the Negro families began drifting back and signing their contracts so that sufficient labor was obtained for a small planting operation.

With the labor problem under control, money was the next problem. When he was at Harvard he became acquainted with Charles P. Williams, a wealthy Connecticut man, and earned his friendship and confidence. James contacted him and in December 1866 he agreed to provide James with \$59,000, \$25,000 the first year and \$17,000 the next two. No interest was to be charged, but after repayment of the principal, Williams was to get one half the net profits of the operation. James Heyward proceeded with the renovation of the plantation and in 1867 planted 500 acres of rice. About this time the price of rice soared to unprecedented levels, and at the end of the three years, he had paid off the loan and was planting with his own money. In 1872 he built a new residence on the site of the one destroyed by the Federal army. In 1875 he bought for his wife the three story house at 10 Legare Street to which he added a fourth floor to accommodate his large family.

By this time he had sold off Fike and his smaller plantations and restored the plantations of Hamburg, Copenhagen, Antwerp, and Myrtle Grove to first class conditions. He had made rice planting a financial success and had regained some of his former wealth.

In the fall of 1886, while in route by train from Charleston to Hamburg he suffered a severe paralytic stroke. He was returned to Charleston, but did not recover and died on 26 December 1886.

His nephew, James Barnwell Heyward II, has this to say about him. "Geemes, as he was called, was innately a superior character. Tall and handsome, he was of commanding presence that was accentuated by a superbly gracious manner. With a fine education, which he improved all through life by constant study of the best classical literature, he fulfilled the ideal that 'man exists for culture'. This made him a delightful companion especially with his younger relatives, to whom he typified 'old times, old manners, old books and, old wine.' Even tempered, truthful and loyal, he was both unselfish and unsuspecting. As he advanced in life he became very deaf, and was thus deprived of full enjoyment of the social circle which he was so well fitted to adorn."