

Biography of John Grimball (1840 – 1922)

From *The Story of an American Family* by Stephen B. Barnwell (1969), pages 246 – 247.

Born in Charleston, April 18, 1840, he graduated from the Naval Academy at Annapolis in June 1858. One of his classmates was Admiral George Dewey. For two years, John was a midshipman on the *U.S.S. Macedonia* in the Mediterranean, but he returned to South Carolina in July 1860 and resigned his commission as soon as war was declared.

John was in Fort Moultrie when the *Star of the West*, attempting to reinforce Major Anderson on Fort Sumter in January 1861, was fired upon. He was then assigned to the *C.S.S Lady Davis*, commissioned a midshipman in April, and took part in the defense of Port Royal in November under Commodore Tattnall. In the spring of 1862 he was transferred to the ram, *Arkansas*, and on her daring passage down the Yazoo and Mississippi rivers through the combined fleets of Farragut and Davis, Grimball commanded the main guns. “When the steam had gone down,” the account of the battle read, “and on account of defective construction, the fire room was a hell of red-hot iron, the heroic Grimball headed a party to relieve the exhausted and almost roasted firemen.”

After the *Arkansas* was burned in August to prevent her falling into enemy hands, John was transferred to *C.S.S. Baltic*, Admiral Buchanan's flagship, and in May 1863 was sent to England in charge of a detachment of officers to take over one of the ships then under construction. When these were confiscated, he was made one of the first lieutenants of the famous Confederate raider, *C.S.S Shenandoah*. Sailing from England in 1864, they went to Australia and up to the north Pacific where they destroyed the American whaling fleet in June 1865. They did not learn of the end of the war until August 2nd. The *Shenandoah* struck its guns and sailed for Liverpool as a merchantman, preferring to surrender to the British.

While in England, John took the precaution of obtaining his captain's papers, but instead of making the sea his life, he went to Mexico to work on a ranch near Cordova. A year later he returned to Charleston, read law, and was admitted to the bar in 1867. He practiced there for a year and then for fifteen years in New York City. Returning to Charleston in 1883, he retired from the law and planted rice on the Edisto until his death on December 25, 1922. His first wife, Catherine Moore of Huntsville, Alabama, died in 1875, less than a year after their marriage, without children. His second wife, Mary Georgiana, died in Charleston February 13, 1920, leaving four sons....