Beaufort County 250 Committee
Revolutionary Era Biographies

The Talbird Family: Patriot Stalwarts of the Lowcountry

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The Talbird Family of Beaufort District

Family Origins

The South Carolinian branch of the Irish Talbot family issued from Henry, according to family history the son of a Knight Baronet named John Talbot. Sir John's second marriage to a wealthy heiress relocated him to Dublin, where shortly afterward he was elected its Lord Mayor. John's brother Henry, who had become a wealthy merchant in London, was childless, and Henry asked John to send him his namesake son Henry to be raised by him in London with the promise that Henry would be his heir. Though the family lore may have a basis in fact, a list of Mayors and Sheriffs from Dublin from 1649 to 1823 has no mention of a Lord Henry Talbot.

Henry was four years old at the time and was doted upon by his uncle but was intimidated by his aunt, who resented her husband's affection for him. The aunt would frequently send him out for exercise or amusement under the care of a manservant, but on one of these trips he was taken to a different part of the city and became separated from his caretaker – whether by accident or plan is unknown, but the latter is suspected. Wandering the streets frightened and crying, he attracted the attention of an older man who asked him what was the matter. Henry could tell him his name but not where he lived and only that he lived with his Uncle and Aunt.

As night drew near, the man had no alternatives other than to leave him there or to take him to his own home for the night. He lived in Plymouth, where he was headed by boat, and he took Henry there with him to become a temporary member of the Haylton family. Haylton was Captain and owner of a merchant ship trading between Plymouth and Charleston, and it was the eve of his next Trans-Atlantic voyage, On departure, he told his wife to look for advertisements in all the London papers about a lost boy. On his return, he was disappointed that his wife had not found any such notices, but being childless and seeing the boy was comfortable with them, the elder Hayltons persuaded themselvs that Providence had sent them a bright and promising young boy to love and raise.

The Hayltons preferred to treat him as a grandchild and allowed him to retain his name, Henry Talbot. A few years later they decided to emigrate to America and chose South Carolina as their new home. Since Haylton continued his merchant marine business from Charleston, when Henry was old enough, he accompanied his "Grandfather" on voyages and became a good sailor and excellent navigator. But, when Haylton became too infirm to continue the seafaring life, and since Henry had no interest in continuing the business, he sold the ship and, with Henry, entered into a land-based mercantile pursuit.

After Haylton died a year or two later, Henry and his adoptive Grandmother inherited and continued the business. In a shipment from London, he found a batch of newspapers which he presented to his Grandmother knowing she would delightedly read through them to find news of their former home. One night as they sat together in the parlor, she began sobbing as she read. On inquiring, Henry found she was reading the obituary of a Sir John Talbot, which stated that one of his sons, named John, had lost a son in London some years earlier and that, if the boy still lived and could establish his identity, he would be a Knight Baronet and inheritor of a large fortune. After lengthy discussion with his "Grandmother" he booked passage for London.

The obituary had also mentioned that a sister, Jane, was still living in Dublin, and he went there and found her, still a single woman. When he claimed his identity, she inspected his face and remarked over his uncanny resemblance to her younger brother when they were together, and she also declared he looked even more like her father. Then she stated that, as she was 12 years older and had partially raised him and cared for him as an infant, she knew he had certain distinguishing marks on his body and insisted that he show them to her for final proof. On his doing so, she embraced him as her long-lost brother. But, afterwards, when he went to claim his rightful inheritance from the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, he was told that even though the family might recognize and accept his identity, there was no legal basis for the reclamation of his title and inheritance from a cousin who had, in his absence, been granted it.

On his return to America, his "Grandmother" had passed away and the business had fallen into ruin, so he sold what he could and moved to Port Royal with the one or two thousand Pounds Sterling he had as his sole possession. There he met his first wife, Mary Hannon and founded a brickyard which became quite profitable. They lived at Whale Branch on Port Royal Island on a plantation that cultivated indigo. Apparently widowed prior to 1750, in Port Royal he met and married a young widow from the DeSaussure family, early Swiss immigrants to South Carolina, who had earlier married a man named Doherty. Mary Ann had two Doherty children, one male and one female. At an early age, her daughter married a man named Leaycraft (Le Croft) who had wealth and land in the area. Her son, James, remained single and, even before the war broke out, at age 17, he joined a Patriot Ranger unit and by age 19 had become known as a skilled and ruthless guerilla fighter.

James Doherty, who lived on Bear Island in the area known today as Colleton River Plantation, would later become Captain and Commander of the Southward Regiment of Foot in the Beaufort District Militia, in charge of all militiamen south of the Broad River. His brother-in-law, John Leaycraft, who lived on Hilton Head Island, and his cousin, Thomas Talbird, would receive field commissions in the Continental Army from General Nathanael Greene.

In the brickyard business, Talbot had taken pains to train several of his Negro men in the brick mason trade and had them employed in a brick construction business as well. One day he received a letter from his sister in Ireland that she was dying and needed to see him before she passed on, so she could give him the cash she was bequeathing him. It happened that he could leave for Ireland within a week, so he booked passage and was able to reach her in time that she could hand him 4,000 Pounds Sterling and ask him to settle her estate before he returned to America. She soon died, and after Henry had paid all debts, he was left with about 3,500 Pounds as an inheritance. Before his return he was approached by a representative of the Home Government on behalf of the Governor of South Carolina, who offered him the contract to build several lighthouses along the Southern coast.

On his return, Henry accorded priority to the contract work and erected a number of light towers in the Southern Parishes. The light on Tybee Island, built in 1742, was known as Talbot Light for nearly 50 years. In part payment of the contract, he was awarded grants of land, one or two of which were on Hilton Head Island. One of them he gave to his son John, who located his homestead there along Skull Creek on an abutment of land across from Bull Point on Pinckney Island. In the deeding of the land, the certificates had to be originated and sent from England and, by some clerical error, the last name was transcribed "Talbird". Since the transfer of land would have to

await the sending of the erroneous documents back to England for correction and then awaiting their return to Port Royal, and since he thought he was the last of the males legitimately named Talbot in the family lineage, and since he detested his greedy half-brother he decided to adopt the name as written on the certificates. Thus creating the variation we know today.

Talbirds In the Revolution

Henry Talbird Sr was a staunch Whig, but too old to serve actively in the war, so he quietly supported the patriot cause from his plantation at Whale Branch and the brickyard at Clarendon Plantation. There were four sons and brothers: Thomas, John, William and Richard. William was crippled so he could not serve. The other three were enlisted early in the war, and Richard was killed at the Battle of Port Royal Island in February of 1779. Thomas and John served through the end of the war.

Henry's stepson, James Doharty, was a member of the first local Committee of Correspondence for the Revolutionary Party in Beaufort District. Commanded Fort Lyttleton from March to June of 1779, served with William Harden's Partisan Rangers in 1781 and was commander of district military forces South of the Broad until his murder in January 1782.

Three months after Richard's death, in a surprise attack on the Patriot Regiment encamped at Ravenwood Plantation, also known as Mathews Plantation, on Johns Island, Thomas Talbird was severely wounded in the leg and left on the field for dead. Thomas was a company Captain in the Beaufort District Regiment led by Edward Barnwell, and, while Barnwell was absent visiting a relative three miles distant, the command had been delegated to Captain John Leaycraft of Hilton Head, an uncle of the Talbirds. Heavy casualties were sustained by the Patriots, and many were captured, but Thomas survived and returned to duty though he was lame in his wounded leg. By the end of the war, Thomas had become a Lieutenant Colonel, and he was known as Col Talbird for the rest of his life.

John Talbird was a Lieutenant in his brother's company, which had been in NC Gen John Ashe's force at Brier Creek and had been routed to shelter with Gen Moultrie at his Black Swamp HQ. Withdrawing toward Charleston, they were then involved in the dreadful Patriot defeat at Coosawhatchie before arriving at the Mathews Plantation on Johns Island. In the skirmish there, Lt Talbird suffered several slight wounds and was taken prisoner. Poor care was taken of John in prison until a Loyalist Captain, who had married John's sister-in-law saved his life by relieving him of severe confinement. That Captain was none other than Isaac Martinangel from Daufuskie Island, a man who would, about two years later, burn John Talbird's house on Hilton Head to the ground.

Talbird was released from prison with the general parole of the Charleston captives in later 1780 and he returned to Hilton Head. There, after only a few months at home, he was pressed to join a British military unit to fight his own countrymen, and he refused, fleeing inland to join Col Harden's regiment under General Marion's command. In the highly mobile Ranger unit, they engaged the British several times in March 1781, and in the actions at Salkehatchie Bridge and Causeway, Talbird was captured again.

In the Mathews Plantation fight, Edward Barnwell's brother, Robert, was stabbed by bayonets seventeen times after he had surrendered to a British NCO. Robert was carried from the field by Edward's body servant, Harry, who took him to the home of the same relative Edward had been visiting when the surprise attack took place. Hearing the sounds of battle, Edward rode quickly to the Ravenwood camp, only to be captured when he arrived. Edward Barnwell, John Talbird, and John Leaycraft, along with about 30 other Beaufort District prisoners, were taken to Charleston and imprisoned on the prison ship *Packhorse* in Charleston harbor. After recovering in his aunt's care, Robert Barnwell returned to Beaufort to resume service in the Beaufort District Militia, later becoming the Cavalry Regimental commander.

Months after imprisonment in the filthy, disease-ridden prison ship, a prisoner exchange was ordered by General Clinton, and the *Packhorse* sailed with its load to New York. An incident occurred enroute that allowed the prisoners, led by Edward Barnwell and William Elliot, to rise up and take control of the ship. They sailed it to Halifax, NC and, along with the other prisoners, escaped into the pine barrens. Barnwell, Elliot, Leaycraft, and John Talbird, headed south through the pine forests and evaded British and Loyalist patrols for nearly six weeks to arrive back in Beaufort District in very poor condition. All of them resumed service and would continue to fight, and John Talbird later received a field commission as a First Lieutenant in the Continental Army from general Nathanael Greene.

<u>Talbots After the Revolution</u>

While John was in prison the second time, his pregnant wife, Mary Ann Ladson, was at home on Hilton Head Island managing the plantation and expecting the birth of their second child. On October 19, 1781, a British raiding party appeared in the distance. After sending her household slaves to hide in the woods nearby, nine months pregnant, she went to confront the column. The officer in charge, a Captain of the Daufuskie Island Royal Militia unit was none other than Isaac Martinangel, the Loyalist officer who had saved John's life during his first imprisonment and the husband of her sister. Mary Ann pleaded with him to spare their home, but Martinangel asserted he could not given his orders. Noting the orders did not specify belongings, Martinangel had his men remove the Talbot belongings and furniture before he torched the house. When the British departed the area, the slaves returned to their mistress.

She took them to the edge of the forest to be out of sight of the ships and vessels passing along Skull Creek and had them build shelters out of palmetto leaves for themselves, and then they built one for her under the limbs of the live oak tree that stood 150 yards from where their home had been. It was in that hut, on that day, that she gave birth to her first son, Henry Talbird. Henry, named for his paternal grandfather, would be given the nickname "Yorktown" Henry as he was born on the sane day of the British surrender. Henry would go on to have Henry Jr in 1811 and four other children, two of whom died in their first year of life, and he would live as a planter on Hilton Head until he died in 1866.

His father John and Mary Ann would live in Beaufort on Port Royal Island, and they became wealthy owning several plantations on Hilton Head. John was elected to serve in the House of Representatives in 1796 but declined to serve. Yet, in his old age, John lost his wealth to security debts and a poorly managed lawsuit. The family would later have the faulty lawsuit judgment reversed, and the property that had not yet been dispersed was restored to the family.

(Colonel) Thomas lived at Clarendon, managed the brickyard business, had a highly successful tabby construction company, was a planter of sea island cotton, and left a considerable estate to his four children. He built the Beaufort Arsenal, a tabby wall and parsonage for the St Helena Parish Church, and the initial Beaufort College, as well as many homes in the area, and served in State government from 1783-1801 and was active in local civic affairs until his death in 1806.

"Yorktown" Henry's son, Henry Talbird Jr, would become a chemist and a professor living in AL, GA and FL, and would die in 1890 in his eightieth year.