GEORGE H. ASH, MASTER BUILDER

By

Lindsey P. Henderson Jr.

Few men who left so great an impression on their day and generation are as little known as George H. Ash. According to Waring and Bartridge(1) "In the fifties, sixties and seventies the most prolific builders were George H. Ash, Adam Short, and William L. Vroom. They were essentially skilled craftsmen who used the current plans and designs to be found in the building manuals of the time, but their adaptations of these to their clients' taste and pocketbook as well as to the needs of the climate made them what we would consider architects, though they themselves would hardly have presumed to that status. They advertised themselves as 'master builders' or 'master masons'. They were also speculative builders in that they often built on their own credit for sale or rental."

George H. Ash was born on 25 May 1828 in Savannah, Georgia. He was the son of George A. and Eliza Gorham Ash.(2) Little is known of his early life except that he "came of a family of builders".(3) He is alleged to have followed in the footsteps of his uncle, John A. Ash (1792-1822) who had "prospered in the building trade and been an honored citizen (Alderman, Deputy Marshall, Port Warden) and who in turn had learned his trade from his stepfather, William Burnside, carpenter." George Ash's brother in law, Edward J. Henderson (1842-1930) was apprenticed to him and also became a builder"(4)

George Ash built a variety of houses, Large and Small, Expensive and Inexpensive. They were all characterized by sound construction, fine brickwork and refined interior trim.(5) Some of his known houses are as follows:

128 East Taylor Street 1860
223 East Jones Street 1867 (1866?)
220-22-24 East Taylor 1869
216-18 East Taylor 1869
206-08-10 East Taylor 1854
426 Abercorn Street 1855
313 East Liberty Street 1851-52 (6)

George H. Ash died at his home, 70 Taylor Street, 12 February 1885 and was buried in Laurel Grove Cemetery, 14 February 1885. (7) He was followed by his wife some thirtytwo years later. Her obituary follows:
"Mrs. S.J. Ash dies after long illness

Following an illness of several months, Mrs. Sarah J. Ash aged 80 years died at her home, No. 218 Taylor Street East, this morning at 1:20 o'clock. She was a native of Savannah and the widow of George H. Ash. She leaves a brother, Edward J. Henderson and a nephew George H. Miller of Savannah. Four nieces, Misses Lilly and Elbie Miller of Savannah and Mrs. John Carpenter of New York (the name of the 4th niece not available) two grandchildren, Edward Ash Everett and Mrs Walter Berry of Columbus, Georgia. and three greatgrandchildren. Funeral arrangements are incomplete."

That is the life of George H. Ash, Master Builder whose fine buildings are becoming a legend in our time, a time of the resurgence of history and "Old Savannah". More could be made of the information available, but he lives and breathes in the gracious homes restored and being restored in Savannah today. Thus it seems appropriate that we go further into the life of this builder who left so much for posterity. So, let us begin at the beginning as it is known and recorded.

Records of the Salzburger Society (9)indicate the following: "Matthias Ash crossed the Savannah River at Purysburg and took up residence at Ebenzer in 1734." The Royal Georgia Gazette and the Georgia Gazette make many references to him. (10) According to Mrs. Thad B. Welch, in a telephone discussion, Matthias Ash had no children. On or about 1790, he sponsored, George Adam Ashbacher, his brothers son and brought him to Savannah. (11) When George arrived and at approximately the time of his naturalization, he changed his name to Ash. (12)

George Adam Ash married Elizabeth (Eliza) a daughter of Joseph and Elizabeth Gorham of New Haven, Conn. in 1814. She died 23 November 1839 at age 45. Sometime after this, he married Susannah Burnside, a Widow. (13) Susannah Burnside Ash (1824-1907) married Charles Braddock Patterson in 1838. They are buried in lot 651 Laurel Grove Cemetery. He died in 1858 and she died in 1907. (14) There son, Charles Braddock Patterson (1845-1920) married Annie Maud Lester (1851-1896). Their son George Randolph married Alice Sauls. Their daughter Thelma, Mrs Thad B. Welch is a source for this paper.

George H. Ash had a brother, John who moved to Oliver Georgia shortly after the War Between the States and became a Methodist Minister, and farmer. His Grandson, George B. Ash has the original papers of George Adam Ash(bacher) and will make copies available to this writer. The gap discovered during the preparation of this paper causes many questions.
There is no question as to George H. Ash's existence. Nor is there a question as to the buildings he left for posterity. The writer can find no fault with his family name being changed from Ashbacher to Ash as did his great great grand uncle Matthias Ash, the Salzburger. His marriage is recorded in the Daily Morning News of 9 October 1851 to Miss Sarah L. Henderson by Rev. Conner on Thursday 2 October 1851.

However, it is thought expedient to check more thoroughly the gap that seems to exist between Matthias Ash, George Ash and George Adam Ash. When this is done, both the Salzburger line through Ash(bacher) and the Mayflower line through Gorham may be traced with impunity.

Lindsey P. Henderson Jr.
NOTES


2. Cemetery Records
   Laurel Grove 1853 to present and Tombstones lot 404 in the Cemetery.

3. Note 1, para 6.b.

4. Ibid. para 6.b.

5. This writer has been active in the downtown restoration movement having assisted or consulted in over 46 restorations since 1945. During this time he has examined a number of the Ash homes and has done some consulting work in their regard.

6. Info from Mary K. Cast. Mathew Hogan bought the house in 1870 for $5,000.00. It cost $3,500.00 when built. Her source was Charles Perry, Perry Realty 26 July 1977

7. Laurel Grove Cemetery Records and Tombstones, lot 404.

8. Savannah Morning News 12 February 1885, Obituaries, Microfilm, Savannah Public Library.


10. General Index to Savannah Georgia Newspapers 1763-1799 under "A"

11. Confirmed by Salzburger Society Records, Mrs. Thad B. Welch

12. Original Birth Certificate, Baptisimal Certificate, Naturalization Papers and other family documents have been promised on loan by an anonymous member of the family.

13. Something is wrong here. I must get with Mrs. Welch and Mrs. Schuster and go over the Salzburger and Mayflower Papers again. Also will recheck Lutheran Church Records.

14. Mrs. Welch is George Patterson's daughter. Tombstones in each of the following lots in Laurel Grove Cemetery have members of this family.
   Lot 404, 406, 226, 651, 853 and 301.

These have all been checked and rechecked by this writer.
Bibliography

Georgia Census 1850 Compiled by Mrs. Walter Otto in Georgia Historical Society, Ref. 929-358 C-O (Chatham County) Gaston at Whitaker St., Savannah, Ga. Census of Population (microfilm) 1820-1880 Georgia Historical Society

Cemetery Records
- Bonaventure 1850-Present
- Colonial 1750-1850
- Laurel Grove 1853-Present


Marriages and Deaths 1763-1820, abstracted from Georgia Newspapers by Mary B. Warre, 1968 Ref. 929.358 G-W

Deeds; Superior Court, Chatham County Court House.


See also microfilms of Savannah Newspapers in HHS and SPL

City Directories 1800, 1866, 1867-present GHS

Church Records: Lutheran Church of the Asseniton

Society and Organization Records: Salzburger Society, Mrs. Ernest Schuster, End Road, Savannah, Georgia.

Society of Mayflower Decendants,

Mrs. Thad B. Welch, 1016 Welch Street, Savannah, Georgia

The Development of Calhoun Ward 1851-1900


Historic Savannah, Copyright 1968 by Historic Savannah Foundation Inc.

Vital Records: Chatham County Public Health Department, Eisenhower Drive.

Living Decendants: Known and talked with about this Biography are

Mrs. Thad B. Welch, (see above), Children of Edward Ash Everett and Mrs. Walter Berry of Columbus Georgia (Great Grand children), and Mr. George B. Ash of Oliver, a greatgrand nephew. Only Mrs. Welsh was available to talk up to this deadline. The others will be followed and reported at a later date.
George H. Ash

George H. Ash, 57, died at his home, 70 Taylor Street, after a short illness. He was a native of Savannah and had lived here all of his life. He came from a line of builders, both in the field of politics and construction. He followed in the footsteps of his uncle, John A. Ash who had prospered in the building trade and had been an honored citizen of Savannah as well. He owned much property in Calhoun Ward and will long be remembered for the gracious homes, large and small, that he built for some of Savannah's citizens, there and in other parts of the city.

He is survived by his wife, Mrs. Sarah J. Ash, two sons, Edward G. Ash and Frank G. Ash, both of Savannah and a number of nieces and nephews, aunts and uncles.

Friends are invited to call at the residence. Burial will be in Laurel Grove Cemetery in this year of our Lord, February 14, 1885.

This was the information available for an obituary. However, only a short funeral notice was published.

Lindsey P. Henderson Jr.
History 500
1. Thelma Patterson Welch (Mrs. Thad) Born Savannah, Ga. Daughter of
2. George Randolph Patterson (b. 1878; m. Alice Souls) Son of
3. Charles Braddock Patterson (b. 1845; d. 1920) Married Annie Maud Lester (b. 1851; d. 1896) Son of
4. Charles B. Patterson (b. 1809; d. 10 April 1858) Married Susannah Burnsides Ash (b. 1824; d. 13 May 1907) Daughter of
5. George Adam Ash (b. 1793; d. 23 May 1861) Married Elizabeth Gorham (b. 1797; d. 23 Nov. 1839) of New Haven, Conn. Son of
6. George A. Ash (Ashbaker) Born Germany Died Savannah, Ga. Married Susannah Burnsides (Died 12 March 1920) Nephew of
7. Matthias Ash - Salzburg 1734 Known alive 1775 No descendents except 6 above

Above information from Laurel Grove Cemetery and Mrs. Welch.


2. Edward G. Ash and Frank G. Ash Moved to Columbus, Georgia
Excerpt from letter of Eleanor Kinzie Gordon to Juliette Gordon Low, late July, 1886 (Hogan died on July 12th). Taken from a transcription by Stephen Bond, in the possession of JGLGSNC; the location of the originals is currently unknown.

CPH, 8/77

You father is simply worried to death about the house because of Hogan's sudden death. Now you see, after all the work is begun, he has to make a new contract with someone else, and no one is willing to take up another man's unfinished job. Papa says the workmen having no boss stop working every time there is a shower, and when the go off the don't return that day! And he has to put up with it because he can't help himself!