George Welshman Owens

Attorney, Planter, Politician, Family Man

1786 - 1856


Ralph Costen

Historical Research 300

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I.

Abstract

George Welshman Owens was an active participant in all dimensions of living - business, political, family, and social-civic. He had a visionary streak, with strong human convictions, which he attempted to translate in action.
II. Introduction

"The ... property purchased in twenty-five years - without a credit, or without borrowing money." 1

John Welshman Owens could be construed as being very proud of his accumulated wealth and of the fact that he was able to acquire it without outside financial assistance.

The leaving of this trace enables current day viewers a glimpse at the man's character as he saw it. The questions are asked, what else can be said about this Georgian? What other legacies has he left for the student of history to discover and interpret about his life and his community? What was his impact - small or great?

The following paragraphs will in a feeble way attempt to respond to those questions. I say feeble, because what has been gathered in is only a small fraction of the information available for scrutiny. Also, as future discoveries are made, my interpretations are then subject to new evaluations which will be welcomed.
Early Years

Owen Owens, the father of George Welshman Owens, resided in Savannah for more than thirty years, arriving in Savannah shortly after the close of the revolutionary war from Denbighshire, North Wales. His arrival places him in Savannah approximately in 1784.

On September 27, 1786, G.W. Owens was born, presumably in Savannah, son of Owen Owens. There is no information yet uncovered stating who his mother was or where he was born. However, in 1796, when George Welshman was ten years old, his father married Catherine Troupe.

Owen Owens died in 1814 on St. Catherine's Island. At his death, he willed to George W. Owens his property and other personal items. The will didn't list any specific property holdings with the exception of the plantation on St. Catherine's Island, 87 slaves valued at $20,215, and his furnishings. At the time of Owen Owens' death, George Welshman Owens was 28 years old and on his way to eclipsing his father's accomplishments both political and financial.

Very little record has been traced concerning his childhood. He probably grew up in Savannah's Trustee Gardens and on St. Catherine's Island. Savannah's 1809 tax digest has him living at Trustee Gardens with his father. At that time, he would have been 23 years old.

However in 1806, G.W. Owens was in England studying law at Harrow and Cambridge, and his father was very concerned about his ability to continue providing for his son's education. It appears that G.W. Owens was in England from 1802-1808. This speculation could be based on the assumption that it took four to five years to complete his course of studies and allow for his return to Savannah. While in England, he apprenticed with
a Mr. Chitty, a solicitor.

George remained with his father until 1812. Upon his return from England, he moved into a home of his own and his father returned to St. Catherine's Island where he died. The home previously shared by the two of them in the city was vacant between 1813-15, apparently St. Catherine's was Owen Owens' second home.

Residences

George moved to a building in Anson Ward in 1813, facing Oglethorpe Square on the N.W. Corner. He had previously purchased the property with improvements in April of 1810 for $1,200. The property was bought from the Steadman family. This appears to be his first home of his own, one of three that he would have purchased. Interestingly, all of the homes were within four or five blocks of each other, with two being in Anson Ward on Oglethorpe Square.

He lived in Anson Ward for six years. In 1819, he purchased his second home in Green Ward, which is adjacent to and to the east of Anson Ward. From newspaper descriptions, one could conclude that the house was substantial. The house was described as being a "two-story house, wooden with basement and stables, with four rooms down and six rooms up."

The house was purchased from the Scarborough family for a sum of $5,500, and was located on the southeast corner of Price and Broughton St. During his stay of ten years at this address, he was to become a well known person in the community. Many references can be found in the daily newspaper to this house.

In 1930, after spending ten years on Broughton St. he purchased his
final home on Oglethorpe Square in Anson Ward. The house was designed by a
William Jay, a well known architect of the period. The house was purchased
from the United States Bank for $10,000.

English architecture in the Regency style, the house was originally
built for the Richardson family. The family fell on hard times it.
Sometime in the mid 1820's, the house was turned into a boardinghouse and
run by Mrs. Maxwell. In 1825, Marquis DeLaFayette and Governor Troup
entertained at the house.

"The house was designed in London by the architect, prior to his
coming to Savannah. Many native materials were used in the construction of
the house. The floors are Georgia pine, with long, single planks with no
lengthwise joinings. Many of the walls are made of "tabby," a mixture of
burnt shells, sand and water, a kind of eighteenth century cement.

The interior of the house is an outstanding interpretation of the
Regency Style: the columned foyer; the unique bridge spanning the stairwell
at the second storey level; the filtered lighting of the dining room; and
the trompe l'oeil effect of the salon are highlights.

The basement of the house contains two kitchens, one of which has
been restored. Other rooms include a completely-furnished laundry, larder
and wine room, as well as a display of examples of the building materials.

The par-terre garden was originally the carriage turnaround. The
side walls are original and are constructed of tabby."

In addition to his main residences, he acquired several second homes
in several Georgia counties. Between 1814-1826, he had a second home on St.
Catherine's Island, 1832-1840, he is listed as living in Upson County, and
references are made in 1832-1854 to a second home in Clarkesville, Habersham
County, known as Quinas.
Family

While living in his first home, he married Sarah Wallace on June 10, 1815. Prior to the wedding, both were single. George was 29 and Sarah was 26. They were married by H. Kollock, minister of Independent Presbyterian Church. During their 41 years of marriage, they produced eight children. Four of them were males and four were females. The sons were Richard W., John W., George S.W., and one unknown. The daughters were Sarah W., Margret W., Mary W., and Elizabeth W. Based on his will, he was survived by six of his children. It is assumed that the W stands for Wallace, maiden name of the mother. Elizabeth was not mentioned in his will of 1856. It is possible that she could have died prior to 1856.

Politics

George Welshman Owens was very active in politics. He held numerous public offices being an alderman, a mayor, a state senator, state representative and a congressman.

He began his quest for political office in 1812, at the age of 26, running for the office of State Representative for Chatham County, which he received 193 votes, not enough to win.

In 1817, he lowered his sights and sought the office of Alderman. He was listed on two political tickets indicating his popularity. He won the election and the right to represent Anson Ward. He served from 1817-1818. He didn’t serve as an alderman again until 1827, although he attempted unsuccessfully in 1819 (proposed on two tickets). Once again in 1827 he returned to the aldermanic board and served for eight consecutive
years ending in 1835. He later is re-elected in 1842 and served until 1843.

As was the practice in 1832 in Savannah, he was elected as mayor of the city by his peers. He did not serve out his full terms, resigning July 1833.

While seeking the office of aldermen during the races held in 1827, 1828, 1831, he was either on an Improvement or Reform ticket. Politically, one can probably assume he was what would be considered in today's political terminology as progressive and possibly liberal. This may account for some of his actions that are on the record while Mayor of Savannah.

During his term as mayor, he showed his progressiveness. He presided over the city donating two lots, one to "Eliza Mackay, Elizabeth Lloyd and Mary E. Demere in trust for the erection of a building for widows, and one to the "Chatham Academy for school purposes, to be completed in two years." In 1837, he again displayed his concern for humanity; he was appointed and served on a committee to set up a grantor tomb to house strangers in the community in the old cemetery to be known as Gaston Vault.

George Owens was not content to be involved politically only on the local level. While serving as an alderman, he sought both state and federal offices. As was the case in 1817, he ran for the office of alderman and state representative winning both elections. He repeated this feat once again, running for both local and state offices during the city’s 38th administration. He sought the state senate office in 1827-1828, losing. He once again sought the very same office while serving in the city's 39th administration (1828-29) winning this time. As a result, he resigned as an alderman to go to Milledgeville as a state senator, serving for a year, while representing the Seventh District of Georgia. 1829 saw him running
again for state senate. However, he withdrew from the race. He tried again in 1831, and 1832, with no success.

He was nominated by his party in 1833 for congressman from Georgia on the Union Democratic Republican ticket. In 1834, he was elected to the 24th Congress and served through the 25th Congress.

George W. Owens participated readily in politics on the local, state and federal level. His contributions in this process need further pursuing, which time does not allow in this paper. However, from readily available information, one could speculate that he was politically progressive. His party affiliation with the Unionist is case in point. Amanda Johnson, "describes the Union Party as believing that states have only the right to regulate within its borders, and that a strong central government was essential. She also stated that the party was for the common man and against indian removal." This is in strong contrast to what she says about the Whig Party of that period, "for state rights, against central banking and its group included dwellers of plantations regions in central and coastal Georgia, the conservative professional and propertied men." Owens, being all of the above, naturally fit as a Whig; however, he chose differently. Evidently he had a different vision for Savannah, Georgia, and the United States than his fellow planters and professionals.

Business

George Welshman Owens was a successful business man and attorney, representing clients from the immediate Savannah area, other eastern states and from England. In 1812, he became partners with John Kell. I assume he was practicing prior to their partnership. Their office was on Bay Street,
and remained there until 1823 when it was moved. During the course of his life, he actively practiced law, criminal and civil, while he pursued other business interests. I present the fact that he was an attorney first because when the 1850 census was taken near the end of his life, he listed his occupation as a lawyer although he excelled in other business areas.

He was also a planter. He bought and sold many large plantations. In 1835, while in his 49th year, he took inventory of his property holdings. On the inventory list were five plantations. Satilla, one of his plantations, was valued at $18,000, with a saw mill at the cost of $20,000 and a threshing mill at $6,000. He bought three gangs of Negroes worth $37,000 to man his plantation. His inventory serves as an excellent record to illustrate G.W. Owens as the planter.

Thirdly, he was a banker and insurance developer. In 1812, he was a founder of the Savannah Insurance Company.

In 1818 he was elected to the board of directors of Planter's Bank, which he probably held a financial interest. He served on the board from 1818 - 1827.

It can also be construed that Owens was an investor. He invested in a steamship partnership. And at the time of his death in 1856, he owned numerous stocks and bonds:

a. 20 bonds of the City of Savannah

b. 120 shares of CRR&KKglo

c. 100 shares of the Bank of Savannah

d. land investments - in addition to his home in Savannah, he owned a considerable amount of property in the city limits. Since there was no found record of him selling much of his property, it can be assumed that he still owned it at his
There is also evidence that he speculated in City real estate.

Social/Civic

George W. Owens was just as active in his social and civic life as he was in his business, political and professional life. His first civic trace appears in 1812 when he was appointed as head of the Fourth of July celebration committee. In 1819, he was appointed to a committee to investigate a break out at the jail. He was a member of the 4th Beat Company. In 1832, he was on the selection committee to select representation from Chatham County to a convention. That was followed by him representing Chatham County in the Commercial Convention in Charleston, South Carolina in 1854. He was president of the local Jockey Club in 1832 and 1833.

There are general references to him receiving thanks from people in the need of assistance - 1831 on a relief committee, providing assistance to residents of Fayetteville, N.Y. Also in 1833 he was appointed to the relief committee for Cumberland, Maryland.

Another civic responsibility he took on was to accept the appointment of the Director of the Bank of Georgia. He held this position from 1833 - 1835, at which time he resigned to serve in the U.S. Congress. This appointment fits well with his political beliefs as a member of the Union Party.

How religious George Owens was cannot be determined; however, he and his family belonged to Christ Church of Savannah. Many of his children were baptized, married and eulogized at the church including himself.
At his death on March 2, 1856 of apoplexy, he was survived by his wife, three sons, and three daughters. He was buried on March 3, 1856 in Laural Grove Cemetery, Savannah, lot 595.

He provided for all equally with the exception of his son, Richard. A trust fund was set up for him and his wife to help maintain themselves. This was a very curious action on his part. All indications show that he adored his family. This conclusion was arrived by performing cursory examination of some of his family manuscripts. There are many letters from him to his wife, daughters, and sons. The manuscripts collection contain a wealth of information that requires a full investigation. Unfortunately, the time did not permit such a full investigation of the materials.

His estate which was substantial was shared equally between his wife and children.

George Welshman Owens appeared to have lived fully his 69 years. He led an active political, business, social, civic, and family life. One could also possibly conclude that he was also a visionary. During his administration, as Mayor of the City of Savannah, work was started on connecting Savannah with Augusta and Macon by rail and canal. G.W. Owens, although not a well known figure from the 19th Century, appears to have been in a position to have shaped and influenced Savannah, Georgia and the United States. He actively participated in all facets of life. Surely, if he was a contemporary, he would be known by many.

Areas For Additional Research

There still remains unanswered questions about G.W. Owens. Some of
those answers can possibly be found in existing manuscript collections, political records and examination of public documents not available in Chatham County.

Manuscript collections exist in Savannah, Georgia and Chapel Hill, North Carolina, and extensive research will probably reveal additional ones. His congressional record should be analyzed to determine how he viewed issues on a national perspective. His state record needs scrutiny as does his local record.

Closer examination on how he interacted with his family is another avenue to follow. What of his childhood? Is it reflected somewhere? What was the full relationship between himself and his wife and children?

How extensive was his business holdings? Are they restricted to what was reported or do they go further?

Were all of his travels both domestic and international pleasure, business or governmental?

These are questions facing the next researcher of George Welshman Owens.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date of Purchase</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1810 - 1814</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 12, 1810</td>
<td>71st Tything</td>
<td>$1,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Anson Ward</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Oglethorpe Square</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1st Home)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 7, 1814</td>
<td>W1/2 Lot #2</td>
<td>$350.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2nd Tything</td>
<td>Tax Sale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Anson Ward</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 5, 1814</td>
<td>500 Acres</td>
<td>$150.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Effingham County</td>
<td>Tax Sale</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Matthews Parrish</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1815-1835</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 5, 1815</td>
<td>1/2L #10-182a</td>
<td>$1,705</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3rd of Eastern</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Division of Ossabaw</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Price</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 16, 1819</td>
<td>Island 500-682 acres and adjoining marsh</td>
<td>$260.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 12, 1819</td>
<td>1/3 part of Land Mout with in Effingham and Chatham counties 5,000 acres</td>
<td>$5500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 25, 1825</td>
<td>Lot 7&amp;8 Green Ward (Second Home)</td>
<td>$3500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 2, 1827</td>
<td>Lot #1 Ellis Ward and improvements</td>
<td>$3000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 2, 1827</td>
<td>Silk Hope Plantation 7,000 acres on Ogeechee, and Beverly Road</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 3, 1830</td>
<td>Lot Letter &quot;X&quot; Anson Ward (Third Home)</td>
<td>$10000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dates Unknown</td>
<td>Water Lot in Thunderbolt</td>
<td>$100.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Lot Bull St. - $5,000
Monument Sq. and
Improvements

Satilla Property $18,000

Property Habersham County $5,000
1,000 Acres

Lots on Oglethorpe Sq. $10,000

Western Property $10,000
Michigan and Wisconsin

1832

40 Acres Cherokee Co. $100

1835 - 1843

Dates Unknown

4,600 acres of Tide Swamp

350 Acres of PineLand
Liberty County

1 Lot, Edinburgh $300

1 Lot, Jekyll $3,000
Springhill,
Egypt Plantation
Bryan County $1,000

1835
Oakland Property $22,000
Chatham County
1,000 acres
150 Negroes

1856
350 Negroes $20,000

The above data is from a variety of sources, newspapers, and deed records and should be viewed as only a partial listing.

Records show that very little of the property was sold, with the exception of two large parcels of Ossabaw Island and the Silk Hope Plantation. However, one must keep in mind that much of the property was outside of Chatham County and those records were not readily available for evaluation.
John D. Weed - 20th Century Descendants

- Lloyd
  - Thomas
    - Wayne
      - William
      - Julia
      - SJr
      - Arch
  - George W. Owens
    - James
      - Elizabeth
      - George Savage
      - Sarah W.
    - George W.
      - Sarah Wallace Owens

- William
  - Mary
    - William
      - John W.
      - Sarah L.
      - Richard
      - Paul Haskell
      - Death B.
      - Sarah W.
      - Richard
      - Sarah W.
      - Richard
      - Sarah W.

- Martha Pearson
  - John Wallace
    - 1866-1870
      - 1851-1865
        - Richard
      - 1849-1869
        - Martha B.
1
Memoranda of property, Manuscript Collection; Colonial Dames Folder -
Georgia Historical Society of Savannah, Georgia.

2
Mary B. Warren, Marriage and Deaths - 1763 - 1820, Heritage Papers,
Danielsville, Georgia, 1968) p. 88.

3
Ibid.

4
General Index to Keepers Record Books - Laurel Grove Cemetery, Savannah,
Georgia, 1852-1938, Volume N-V, p. 24 - September 27 is an estimated date
used on his date of death and listed age.

5
Georgia Gazette, December 1814

6
Will, Owen Owens, Superior Court Chatham County Folio #18, pp. 220, 221

7
Ibid
This conclusion was arrived at based on the review of information found from several different sources. A letter sent to John Wallace in 1808 from St. Catherine's and that Owen Owens resided permanently in Savannah at Trustee Gardens - MSS Collection, Colonial Dames, Georgia Historical Society, Savannah, Georgia, and tax records of Chatham County, 1809 - Georgia Historical Society, Savannah, GA, micro-film.

Owens Family Papers - MSS Collection

Owen Owens' letter to John McKay from the Colonial Dames - MSS Collection item #66, Georgia Historical Collection, Savannah, GA

Walter Hartridge, The Letters of Robert McKay to His Wife (published under the auspices of the Georgia Society of Colonial Dames of America - University of Georgia Press, Athens, 1949) p. 278

Based on Tax Digest records of Chatham County, 1812-1813
14
Tax records, Georgia Historical Society, 1813-1815

15
Tax Records, 1814

16
Grantee Records, Superior Court, Chatham County - Book 2d, p. 394

17
Grantee Record, 2D, p. 394

18
Grantee Record, 2I, p. 403

19
Daily Georgia, October 17, 1834, p. 2, Col. 6

20
Grantee Record, 2I, p. 403

21
Such notices appeared in the Daily Papers of his time
1825 - May 31, p. 3 Col. 1
1827 - January 13, p. 2 Col. 5
1829 - June 25, p. 3, Col. 6 - etc.
Grantee Book, 2Q, p. 50. The house still stands, today as it did when purchased by Owens. Today it is commonly known as the Owens-Thomas House. His granddaughter donated the house to the Telfair Museum upon her death in 1951.

Harry A. Chandler Guide to Chandler's Map of Historic Savannah - 1917

Pamphlet, Telfair Museum and Art Museum, 121 Barnard St. - Savannah, GA.

Savannah Republican, January 4, 1814, p. 2 Col. 3

This based on comparing the 1820, 1830, 1840, 1850 census. He was survived by seven children, but the census records between 1810-1830 show the birth of eight children. It is possible that one could have died while very young. The 1820 census show two sons under 10 years of age, probably between 1-5. In 1830 census showed two males under five and one between 5-10 and one between 10-15 - total of four male births. However, he was only survived by three sons.
United State Census, 1820 - 1850, Microfilm.

Will, George Welshman Owens, Probate Court, Chatham County, Georgia, Folio 587

City of Savannah Council Minutes, Georgia Historical Collection, Microfilm

Ibid

Savannah Georgia, October 9, 1828, p. 2, Col. 5

Congressional Globe, 1835

The Republican and Savannah Evening Ledger, September 29, 1812 p. 3

Daily Georgia, August 12, 1817, p. 3, Col. 2
Ibid

Daily Georgia, August 16, 1817, p. 3, Col. 3

Gamble, p. 140

Daily Georgia, September 4, 1819, p. 2 Col. 4

Gamble, p. 140

Gamble, pp. 140, 166

Daily Georgian, September 13, 1842, p. 3, Col. 3

Daily Georgian, August 31, 1843, p. 2, Col. 7

Gamble, p. 3
52
Gamble, p. 4

53
Savannah Georgian, August 23, 1827, p. 3, Col. 3 - August 5, 1828 p. 2, Col. 1 - August 8, 1831, p. 3, Col. 1

54
Gamble, p. 481

55
Gamble, p. 481

56
Ben Fortson, Georgia Official Statistical Register, State of Georgia, 1973-1974

57
Daily Georgia, June 6, 1827, p. 3 Col. 6

58
Daily Georgian, June 2, 1829, p. 2, Col. 1

59
Gamble, p. 140
Daily Georgian, June 2, 1829, p. 2, Col 1

Daily Georgian, October 6, 1831, p. 2, Col 4

Daily Georgian, October 23, 1832, p. 2, Col 1

Daily Georgian, December 23, 1833, p. 2, Col 2

Daily Georgian, December 15, 18, 1835 - Record of Rollcall

Congressional Globe - 1835

Amanda Johnson, Georgia As A Colony and State, 1733-1937 (Walter W. Brown Publishing Co, Atlanta, GA.) p. 251

Johnson, p. 251
This conclusion was made by gathering information from the daily newspapers of the day as well as from research from the Superior Court Grantee and Grantor books.

Republican and Savannah Evening Ledger, January 2, 1812, p. 3, Col. 3

Ibid

Ibid

United States Census, 1850, Georgia State Historical Collection - Microfilm

Property Inventory, G.W. Owens, circa 1835, Colonial Dames, MSS

Property Inventory, figures are suspect, a comparison with his inventory and deed records show a discrepancy in some of the prices he paid for the property.
This data was compiled from the various issues of the Republican newspaper: January 7, 1818 p. 2; January 5, 1820, p. 2; January 4, 1821, p. 3; January 8, 1823, p. 2; August 23, 1827, p. 2

Judgement Book, Superior Court - Chatham County, Georgia Historical Collection, Savannah, GA. item # 7053

Will, G.W. Owens

Republican, June 11, 1812, p. 3

Republican, June 10, 1819, p. 3

Georgian, February 25, 1826, p. 2
86
Georgian, March 14, 1832, p. 2 - There was no information found explaining what the Jockey Club was.

87
Georgian, January 28, 1833, p. 2

88
Georgian, June 18, 1831, p. 2

89
Georgian, June 28, 1833, p. 2

90
Georgian, May 7, 1833, p. 2

91
Georgian, March 10, 1835, p. 2

92
See note 67
Christ Church Registry - Registry #2, Georgia Historic Collection, microfilm

Death Records - Laurel Grove Cemetery

Will, G.W. Owens

Will, G.W. Owens

Ibid

Ibid

Gamble, p. 140
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Laurel Grove Cemetery Record Book, Laurel Grove Cemetery, Savannah, GA. 1852-1938

Probate Court, Chatham County Will: George W. Owens, Savannah, GA

Probate Court, Chatham County, Index to Marriages - 1806-1851

Superior Court, Judgement Book - Index to Civil Minutes, Georgia Historical Collection, Savannah, GA, 1782-1868

Superior Court, Chatham County, Grantee Books, Savannah, GA. Volumes 2D, 2F, 2I, 2N, 2O, 2R, 3P, 2T, 2V

Superior Court Chatham County Grantor Books, Savannah, GA., Volumes 2E, 2G, 2N, 2T

34
United States Census Reports, Bureau of Census, Washington, D.C. - 1820, 1830, 1840, 1850

MSS

Owens, George W. Item #66, 79, 88, 71, 74, 66, MS. Colonial Dames of America, Savannah, GA.

Owens, George W. Item # 602, 649, 965, 1326, MS. Owens-Thomas Family Papers, Savannah, GA. 1837-1954

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Savannah Republican - January 4, 1814, September 29, 1812, January 2, 1812, November 25, 1812, January 7, 1818, January 5, 1820, January 4, 1821, January 8, 1823, August 23, 1827, June 11, 1812, June 10, 1819