BIOGRAPHY OF OLIVER STURGES

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ABSTRACT

Oliver Sturges was born in Fairfield, Connecticut, in 1777 the son of the Honorable Johnathan Sturges, L.L.D., a member of the Congress under the Confederation. Oliver and his wife Eliza Neal arrived in Savannah, via Augusta, in late 1802. Oliver quickly established himself in the merchant business and also, rather quickly, began to serve in City government. His work with the Free Hospital and Poor House and his involvement with the Presbyterian Church suggest a solid Christian, humanitarian life. His involvement as Director of the State Bank of Georgia, Planters Bank, and United States Branch Bank of Savannah, suggest a business sense necessary in the life of a thriving merchant. Ultimately, Oliver's mark will be made by his involvement in the first steamship crossing of the Atlantic Ocean in 1819. Unfortunately for Oliver, the depression of 1819-1822 weighted heavily on this hard working man. While other Savannah New Englander's recovered from this lull, Oliver only suffered, and suffered, and died in 1824.
Oliver Sturges was born in 1777 Fairfield, Connecticut, the ninth child of Johnathan and Deborah Sturges. His father was a judge, and "an efficient member of Congress under the confederation which vindicated the rights and obtained the independence of the United States." Little was uncovered of his early years (childhood) but possibly a generalized assumption may be made here, his father's career suggests a well-educated man and his nine children were possibly quite infected with the competitive spirit. This spirit may have prompted Oliver's move south to join a growing group of New Englander's who saw the southeast as the land of milk and honey.

Oliver came to Savannah, via Augusta, in late 1802. However an event worth noting in any man's life occurred on June 12, 1802 - his marriage to Eliza Neil. At the time living in Augusta, somewhat of a "sister city" to Savannah, the Sturges family soon moves to Savannah. By November 2, 1802 Oliver was brought into the firm of Harris-Burroughs now known after the death of Harris as "Burroughs and Sturges." This is the beginning of Oliver's life in the merchant business and the business relationship with William Burroughs lasts until Williams death. Now married, and already set in the merchant business (and rather quickly, also) one more reward also came to Oliver rather quickly, the birth of his first daughter, Elizabeth Sarah Sturges a mere ten months after his marriage to Eliza.

Things were looking well for Olivers, in fact by March 14, 1804 the firm previously known as Burroughs and Sturges made again the pages of the
Columbian Museum and Savannah Advertiser, this time the firm's name was reversed, now called Sturges and Burroughs. It is historically accurate to assume that the first name in a firm's name is the more prominent, however this newspaper citation to Sturges and Burrough's was not to announce the name change but rather it was "A list of defaulters for the year 1803."\(^6\)

Oliver, like his father, also became active in government. On June 18, 1806 mention is made of Oliver being appointed, by council, as manager, to superintend the election for alderman for Heathcote Ward.\(^7\) On July 9\(^{th}\) Oliver was elected as alderman to the Heathcote Ward. Oliver served on the seventeenth administration under mayor John Noel until his resignation in January 1807.\(^8\) His resignation may have resulted from his election by the president and the board of Directors of the Bank of the United States, to serve as Director for the Office of Discount and Deposit at Savannah for a term of one year.\(^9\) This was to be the first of his long-running involvement with the banking business.

This 30 year old man had done rather well, rather quickly in Savannah, perhaps his alliance with other New Englanders who were also prominent in Savannah helped him considerably. Proof of his continued ties to his "yankee homeland" may be offered through his involvement in The New England Society of Georgia." On May 29, 1807, it was reported in the Columbian Museum and Savannah Advertiser that Oliver was elected as 2\(^{nd}\) vice-president of this
group later on March 10, 1810 Oliver was selected as president.

With his one-year stint with the U.S. Bank about to end Oliver again becomes involved in city affairs. On the sixth of January, 1808, Oliver was elected as treasurer to the Savannah Chamber of Commerce. Again on February 2nd 1808 Oliver was elected to serve the U.S. Bank in Savannah. On May 10, 1808 Oliver compends his duties with the elected post of member of the Board of Health. Oliver may seem to be almost too public minded, however an interesting fact from Thomas Gambles History of Savannah Government shows his acceptance of the Board of Health position may have been less humanitarian minded and more in line with his "merchant consciousness." "An ordinance creating a Board of Health was passed August 27, 1804." Any person elected by Council and refusing to take upon himself the duties of said office was made liable to a fine of $100." However, one should really not undermine Oliver's Christian Charity, by November of the same year this ordinance was rescinded and Oliver still remained at his post. In December, 1808, The Savannah Poor House and Hospital is officially incorporated. Oliver along with a hundred or so community leaders each pledged $10 a year for their part in the incorporation. Even Oliver had his limits; on the 26th of August 1808, he was proposed by "a friend of the community" as a proper and good candidate for alderman position. Four days later Oliver respectfully declines candidacy for the alderman position.

One task, again during 1808, I'm sure filled Oliver with a deep sense of pride. From a newspaper report of June 24th, 1808, was Oliver being selected
to a committee of seven men to make preparations for the celebration of our independence, the day which gave American our freedom. 19 Oliver's father, it may be remembered, was a member of the Congress under the Confederation which obtained the independence of the United States. Throughout his public services and position with the U.S. Bank Oliver remained at the merchant firm of Sturges and Burroughs. Evidence for this comes from the number of Law Suits Oliver has in the area courts, a case in Bryant County against Simone Maxwell which collects $604.31 for Oliver, 20 Oliver Sturges v Thomas Law nets $395.09, 21 and a judgement against John McIntosh for $154.00 22. Typical of the merchant-planters financial relationships of this period was the practice of planters having merchants advance goods to be repaid by the planter at the harvest time. Typical also was the fact that collections of debts ended up in the court system. 23

The year 1809 found little documentation on Oliver's comings and goings. Fortunately thought, an event of major importance occurs in Oliver's life which not only granted Oliver a sense of satisfaction but for the sake of Chronological continuity made the present biographer smile reflectively. This is the birth of his daughter Lucretia Burr Sturges. 24

The merchants Sturges shows himself as an actual Factorage and Commission agent in late 1810. Though the official record sets the date of his companies Factorage and Commission status in 1812, the newspaper account of November 1st, 1810 show Oliver acting in a duel role. One article lists Oliver as the one to apply for passage or shipment of goods to N.Y. this article also lists
Some goods which Oliver had received on consignment and was offering for sale. These goods were such things as cotton bagging, sugar, copperrails, white rope, and imported wines. This variety of goods may shed some light on Oliver's Merchant function: bit ibkt dud ge receive goods for the workings of everyday life (cotton gagging, sugar, and white rope) but apparently he also acted as middle-man between the wealthy of Savannah and the markets Oliver had access to (note: imported wine). One the same day an article lists for sale a 253 ton ship, the ship, the Maddalena. Those interested were directed to apply on particulars to the ship's captain (captain Williams) or to Oliver Sturgess. This is indeed Big Business! Practical man that he is however, Oliver kept an eye on matters of small business: in June of 1810 furniture auction at the house occupied by Oliver Sturgess (near the market) was announced in the Columbian Museum and Savannah Advertiser. Again Oliver played many sides, it was noted in article that the furniture offered for auction was both "Common and Elegant."27

Besides his election in 1810 as president of the "New Englanders in Georgia", in the Chatham County Deeds Books another New York connection is located. Thomas Carpenter of New York appoints his "trusty and loving friend Oliver Sturges" as his lawful attorney. This was done particular to collect a $1200 judgement against James and William Magee of Savannah. Oliver, also in 1810, found himself working on behalf of the plaintiff in a suit brought by the United States Bank against Samuel Howard for $4000. Again in 1811 he was subpoenaed by the 6th District Circuit Court in the case of the U.S.
Bank vs. Benjamin Wall and others. This suit yielded the plaintiffs $1012.89.  

In 1811 the co-partnership of Sturges, Burrough's, and Butler, having been recently dissolved by mutual consent, printed in the local newspaper a request that all persons owing or owed of company should present themselves for settlement to Oliver Sturgess.  

Apparently all didn't heed the calling; Oliver ends up back in court to collect a sum of $400 from Thomas Jones and Arthur Simms.  

Also during this period Oliver the "yankee merchant", the "good Christian", and the "trusty and loving friend" is found out to be engaged in buying and selling of human commodities - slaves. Though my small discovery of one slave (Hyacinth was his name), being bought on March 24th 1810 for $350 and resold on the same day for $400, may not place Oliver as a major slave trader, one wonders if more time had been allowed for this biography just what if anything, may have been uncovered. He was in the shipping business indeed.

The year 1812 another major milestone occurs for Oliver, the purchase of his home. Previously Oliver had been living in a house on St. James Square owned by Tuftus H. Schibar. On March 5, 1812 from the Chatham County Deed Books, the vestrymen of Christ Church grant to Sturges and Burrough's for $5000 a lot "180 ft. length and 60 feet breadth, known in the plan of the said city by the letter T founded on the last by Reynolds Square, on the south by Duke Street, on the north by St. Julian Street, and on the West by Drayton St."  

The house Oliver built on this lot has been re-modeled and stands this day as 27 Abercorn St. (see appendix) Also on the 26th of February a deed is recorded for $6000 purchased of lot in Reynold Ward #? (unreadable on deed), its
situation is located as west of Lincoln Street and east of the Old Coffee House Wharf. 37

On the 3rd of March from the Republican and Savannah Evening Ledger it is announced that the copartnership of Oliver Sturges and Benjamin Burroughs were ready to solicityBusiness in the Factorage and Commission Business. 38 Perhaps this helped spur the idea for the formation of another business venture of enterprising Oliver. From the Republican and Savannah Evening Ledger it is reported that Oliver and other partners had received Georgia House and Senate approval to form "The Insurance Company of Savannah", the purpose being "to insure property and effects against sea risques, fine, and other casualties." 39 Oliver also, in 1812, began an association with the independent Presbyterian Church, in this year he was selected to serve as a church trustee. 40

The following four years Oliver continues his work with the Presbyterian Church, and also an association with the Planter's Banks continues with his election to serve on the Board of Director's for 1813. 41 However the bulk of his attention seems more focused toward his Factorage and Commission business. From the W. C. Hartridge Manuscript Collection a collection of shipping goods consigned to and consigned by Oliver show a prosperous time for the firm of Sturges and Burrough's. Ships such as the, Andes, Anna Maria, Margaret, Sloop Yankee, White Oak, Oglethorpe, and others continue the well traveled route from Jacksonville, to Savannah, to New York, to Europe, and back again. 42 Perhaps the financial successes of these years prompted the gift bestowed by Oliver and
his wife to his partner Benjamin Burroughs. Recorded in the Chatham County Deed Books, Benjamin "buys" from Oliver and his wife for $10 "% of the lot known as the letter T being the southern half of said lot." Ten dollars for the lot that Oliver had paid $5000 for!

On the 27th of January 1817, Oliver is appointed by the General Board of Directors from Philadelphia to serve as a director of the United States Branch Bank to be established in Savannah. Apparently Oliver had been serving in 1816-1817, on the Board of Directors of the State Bank of Georgia, as evidenced by announcement in the Columbian Museum and Savannah Daily Gazette that said Bank of Georgia was meeting to elect new director following Olivers resignation. Another position to be filled by Oliver is as one of twelve directors selected to serve as a director of the "Marine and Fire Insurance Company of Savannah." Also by 1817 Oliver is now serving as Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Independent Presbyterian Church.

1819 finds Oliver meeting citizen approval from many quarters. He is first elected as trustee in the New Presbyterian Church, and later appears as chairman of the trustees. He was chosen by the state Legislature to serve as Director of the State Bank of Georgia and was selected by the citizens to help prepare for the arrival of President James Monroe. More importantly this is the year that involved Oliver in a venture of historical importance, the first steamship crossing of the Atlantic Ocean. Though not listed in the initial
list of incorporators. Sturges and Burroughs did purchase 1/3 of the stock from the original incorporators and were usually listed as major contributors to this technological innovation. The contract for the building of the ship called for a vessel of a 300 ton burden. "When completed she was a full rigged clipper ship, fitted with engine's and sidewheels." The S. S. Savannah sailed for Liverpool on May 20, 1819, destination Liverpool. Pitch pine was used for fuel and after 22 days she arrived in Liverpool. The ships' return voyage took 25 days.

As often is the case on technological innovation the first model is often economically unsuccessful. This was also the case with the voyage of the S. S. Savannah. However, though the pine-tar proved expensive for operation Oliver and his son Johnathan saw possibilities for this large vessel. They bought the ship, removed her steam engine and made a sailing ship of her.

The year 1820 was a dark year in the history of Savannah. Early in January a fire destroyed four million dollars of property, and the yellow fever plaque again came to Savannah. Also the Depression of 1819-1822 hit hard not only nationwide, and city wide, but also Oliver Sturges, the merchant, met his financial demise. "In the south the Bank of the United States finally took a loss of two million dollars of bad debts." In 1818 imports were valued at $2,976,257 (in Savannah) and in 1821 at only $865,146. This was what would hurt Oliver the most. To add "insult ot injury" the sailing ship S. S. Savannah owned by Oliver and his son was lost to fire off the coast.
of Long Island (area now known as Fire Island.) The ship and all its contents were destroyed by fire in November, 1822. 60

Oliver was proposed as Alderman candidate in August of 1822 61 and subsequently elected. 62 However financial trouble still plagued Oliver. Chatham County Deed Books shows an indenture for $5,000 between Oliver and John Cumming, the collateral was Oliver's house and property on Reynolds Square.63

Apparently broken by disaster upon disaster Oliver resigned from the 34th administration on August 19th, 1824 64 and the last of his crucial events occurred on November 27th, 1824. The cause of death given as dropsy. 65

William Hunter was the administration of the estate of Oliver Sturges and in his application for letters of administration Hunter supposed the worth of the estate to be $2,000. This proved to be an optimistic evaluation. City tax of $28.43 3/4 was owed for the year 67 and his gain from the sale of the Sturges estate was only 811.29. 68

The banks which had honored Oliver with directors positions now began suing Oliver's estate. The Planter's Bank sued the estate to $3000. 69 and later for $358. 70 The state Bank of Georgia also sue the estate for $2200. 71 Finally on April 5, 1825 John Cumming foreclosed on the property of Oliver's home for the debt of $5000 that was left unpaid. 72
1. Early Georgia Portraits 1715-1870- comp. The Historical Activities Committee (Univ of GA. Press) pg 296

2. Kate E. Perry, The Old Burial Ground of Fairfield, CONN: (American Publishing Company, 1882) pg. 105

3. Warren, Marriages and Deaths in Georgia 1763-1820, pg. 111
   see also: Augusta Chronical 6/12/02

4. Columbian Museum and Savannah Advertiser 11/2/02 pg. 315

5. General Index to Keepers Record Books, Laurel Grove Cemetery V.II
   S. V. Elizabeth S. Hunter (her death date was given as 10/7/72 and her age at death was given as 69 yrs. 14 days)

6. Columbian Museum and Savannah Advertiser, 3/14/04 pg 2C1

7. Columbian Museum and Savannah Advertiser, 6/18/06 pg 3C2

8. A History of the City Government of Savannah, GA., from 1790 to 1901
   comp. Thomas Gamble, Jr., from official Records and under the direction the the City Council, pg. 63

9. Columbian Museum and Savannah Advertiser, 1/25/07 pg 3C2


12. Columbian Museum and Savannah Advertiser, 2/2/08 pg 3 C4

13. Columbian Museum and Savannah Advertiser, 2/26/08 pg 3C1

14. Columbian Museum and Savannah Advertiser, 5/10/08 pg. 2C1

15 His. of the City Government. pg 82

16. Columbian Museum and Savannah Advertiser. 12/27/08 pg 2C1

17. Columbian Museum and Savannah Advertiser, 8/26/08 pg 3C1

18. Columbian Museum and Savannah Advertiser, 8/30/08 pg 3C1

19. Columbian Museum and Savannah Advertiser, 6/24/08 pg.3C1

20 Wayne, Stites, Anderson Papers Folder Bos 17 414 Georhin Historical Society
21. Wayne, Stites, Anderson Papers Box 17 Folder 414 G.H.S
22. Wayne, Stites, Anderson Papers Folder 270 G.H.S.
23. From Oral Interview of Walter Campbell, Savannah Historian and Acting Director of Dept. of Oral History U.N.C. at Chapel Hill
24. W. C. Hartridge Manuscript Collection Box 54 File: 349 (G.H.S.)
25. Columbian Museum and Savannah Advertiser, 11/1/70 p 3C5
26. Columbian Museum and Savannah Advertiser, 11/11/10 p 1C1
27. Columbian Museum and Savannah Advertiser, 6/21/10 p 3C5
28. Chatham County Deed Books Book 2 C fold 169 (Chatham County Superior Court)
29. Wayne, Stites, Anderson Papers Box 11 Folder 213 (G.H.S.)
30. Wayne, Stites, Anderson Papers Subpoena From District of 6th Circuit Court Found in W. S. A. Papers Box 17: F 439 (G.H.S.)
31. Columbian Museum and Savannah Advertiser, 2/28/11 p 3C3
32. Wayne, Stites, Anderson Papers Folder 233 (G.H.S.)
33. Chatham County Deed Books Book 2C (Folder 454: Grantor listed as B. Berthlot and wife (Chatham County Superior Court)
34. Chatham County Deed Books Book 2 C (Fold 454, Oliver As Grantor and Joseph R. Lacaze as Grantee (Chatham County Superior Court)
35. Columbian Museum and Savannah Advertiser 7/16/06 P2C3 (Note: spelling of last name may be incorrect. Poor photo copy of newspaper)
36. Chatham County Deed Books Book 2D Folio 369
37. Chatham County Deed Books Book 2D Folio 324
38. Republican and Savannah Evening Ledger 3/3/12 p 3C3
39. Republican and Savannah Evening Ledger 12/24/12 p 3C3
40. Republican and Savannah Evening Ledger 1/7/12 p3C1
41. Republican and Savannah Evening Ledger 1/5/13 p 2C1
42. W. C. Hartridge Manuscript Collection Box 54 File 349
43. Chatham County Deed Books Book 2G Folio 96
44. Columbian Museum and Savannah Daily Gazette 2/6/p2C1 see also p2C1
45. Columbian Museum and Savannah Daily Gazette 2/17/17 p 3C2
46. Columbian Museum and Savannah Daily Gazette 2/24/17 p 2C1
47. Columbian Museum and Savannah Daily Gazette 3/12/17 p 3C3
48. Columbian Museum and Savannah Daily Gazette 1/16/19 p 2C2
49. Columbian Museum and Savannah Daily Gazette 5/16/19 p?C?
50. Columbian Museum and Savannah Daily Gazette 11/15/19 p?C?
51. Columbian Museum and Savannah Daily Gazette 3/17/19 p 2C4
52. G. H. Preble, Steam Navigation History p 109
53. O. F. Vedder & F. Weldon History of Savannah Georgia From the Close of 18th Century (D Mason & Co. Publish SYraluse NY 1890 p 469)
54. IBID. p 469
55. IBID p 469
56. S. S. Savannah: The Elegant Steamship p 47
57. Vedder & Weldon p 470
59. Vedder & Weldon p 470
60. Savannah comp. Savannah Unit Federal Writers Project in Georgia, W.P.A.
61. Savannah Museum 8/18/22 p 3C1
62. History of the City Government p 20
63. Chatham County Deed Books Book 2L Folid 494 (recorded 2/6/23)
64. History of City Government p 20
65. Chatham County Death Records SV Sturges (Eisenhower Dr. Health Dept) ess also small obit in Daily Georgian p2C4 11/30/24
66. **Index of Wills, Estates, Administrations** File S170 Doc. 1023 (Chat Probate Crt)

67. **IBID** File S170 Doc. 1066 (Chat. Probate Court)

68. **Estate Accounts** Roll S-2 (Chat. Probate Court)

69. **Chatham County Superior Court Judgement Books** File 5117

70. **Judgement Books** File #5135

71. **Judgement Books** File #5118

72. **Deed Books** Book 2N Folid 216
American Historical Review "The Depression of 1819-1822" Samuel Reznick. 39:32

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OLIVER STURDY HOUSE
27 ABERCORN ST.
In memory of the
Hon. JONATHAN STURGESS, LL.D.
who was born Aug. 23, 1740,
and died Oct. 4, 1819.
aged 79 years.

He sustained with high reputation from an early period a number of the most important offices in the gift of his native State and was an efficient member of Congress under the Confederation which vindicated the rights and obtained the independence of the United States. Wise and prudent as a Statesman, upright as a Judge, a faithful friend, an affectionate parent and above all an exemplary Christian. His friends have an assured hope that in his sudden death he passed into glory and received the welcome of his Divine Master.

OLIVER'S FATHER'S TOMBSTONE,
OLD BURIAL GROUND. FAIRFIELD, CONN.