Man Who Would Be King Washington Had the General Accepted Crown

WILLIAM LANIER WASHINGTON, General's Hereditary Representative in Cincinnati Society.

THORNTON AUGUSTINE WASHINGTON.

BUSHROD WASHINGTON, Union Veteran.

BY JOHN ELFRETH WATKINS.

WHO would be King Washington to-day had the immortal George accepted the proffered crown? In other words, who is the present head of the Washington family in America as represented by the numerous grandnephews—with various greats—of the country's father?

The Virginia Society of the Cincinnati, after considerable research, has granted this honor to Mr. William Lanier Washington, a New York broker, who is the first President's great-great-great-grandnephew. Of course, the society has not investigated any possible claims which this gentleman might make upon the American throne, had his immortal uncle accepted the proposition of his friend, Colonel Nicola. But in the Society of the Cincinnati the right of membership descends from eldest male heir to eldest male heir by the English law of primogeniture. This same law determines the succession of the British crown as well as that of nearly every other monarchy of Europe, save that in certain emergencies where male heirs are lacking the succession may go to a woman, as in Victoria's case. But male heirs are favored when existing. Therefore, the fact that William Lanier Washington has been unanimously selected as George Washington's "hereditary representative" in the Cincinnati society serves, in the estimation of a faction of the Washington family, to establish the certainty that the New York broker would now be our King had the general, like Napoleon, accepted the royal powers placed with his grasp.

Search for Head of Family.

At the time of the celebration of the centenary of the first President's inauguration in New York, there arose a spirited controversy as to who was then the head of the Washington family in America. A number of persons, more or less related to the first President, were brought forward and featured in the papers, and although the discussion aroused a certain amount of ridicule, it stimulated the Society of Cincinnati to ascertain for itself who was the man most eligible to represent the patriot commander-in-chief in the organization.

As the result of several years' investigation by the society's genealogist, the late James Barroll Washington, secretary of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad Company, was offered membership as General Washington's hereditary representative. This gentleman, thus selected as the general's heir, by virtue of the law of primogeniture—as the man who in England would have inherited any titles and estates belonging to George Washington—was born in Baltimore in 1839, became a major in the Confederate army and while on duty in Alabama married Jane Brittney Lanier Cabell, of that State. He, with his sisters and half-brother, inherited "Wakefield," the house in which General Washington was born, and where his ancestors had dwelt. They also owned the burying ground, in which the general's American ancestors are interred, and this, for a consideration of one dollar, has been leased for ninety-nine years to the Colonel Dames of Virginia, who have suitably protested and marked it.

COLONEL SAMUEL WASHINGTON, the General's eldest full brother.

In 1873 James Barroll Washington's duties called him to Pittsburgh, and it was by virtue of his residence there that he was invited to join the Pennsylvania Society of the Cincinnati. But inasmuch as the Virginia society, which had become dormant, was then being revived, he felt that his allegiance was to the latter State. However, during the many delays in accomplishing the revival of the Virginia society he lost interest and died.

Designated "Hereditary Representative."

Since then the Virginia society has taken up the thread, and after a careful investigation has installed his son as the hereditary representative of the country's father. And this son is the William Lanier Washington aforementioned.

The gentleman who would be King William of America—many now think—had his great-great-great-granduncle been weak enough to accept a throne, was born nearly forty-seven years ago at Montgomery, Ala., where his father was serving as aid-de-camp to General Joseph E. Johnston. After his parents moved to Pittsburgh, he was educated at University of Pennsylvania. After serving as general passenger agent of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, he became president of corporations engaged in the manufacture of steel and oilcloth, as well as of a land company, and he was also vice-president of a corporation manufacturing fireproofing material.

For the past dozen years he has lived in New York, where, as stated, he is a stock broker. Six years ago he married Miss May B. Brennan, of Louisville.

He is a clubman, and, with his wife, has an entree in the most exclusive social circles of the metropolis. His hobby is the breeding of blooded Irish setters. Despite his Southern lineage, he is a Republican in politics, although he prefixes "independent" to that party designation.

Law of Primogeniture.

Now, as to his right to the distinction of being the "hereditary representative" of the first American:

General Washington was the first president-general of the Society of the Cincinnati, organized by his brother officers in the Continental Army just before it disbanded in 1783. As intimated, membership in the organization was to be handed down through direct male descendants, in order of birth, and through females only in default of males. This hereditary scheme was based directly upon models determining descent of European royalty and nobility.

As is well known, George Washington's father was twice married—first to Jane Butler and afterward to Mary Ball, the general's mother. So when the question of determining the first President's hereditary representation in the Cincinnati Society lately came up (since that once dormant organization was revived) the problem arose as to whether the descent should come through the general's eldest half-brother or his eldest brother, with male descendants. Of half-brothers there were, first, Butler, who died in infancy; second, Lawrence, whose children all died young and unmarried, and third, Augustine II., who had a son, and of "own" brothers the general had three, the eldest of whom, Colonel Samuel, had a male heir.

Through Brother or Half-Brother?

So the question was whether, by right of the law of primogeniture, the descent should come through the half-brother, Augustine II., or the full brother, Samuel. The society favored the half brother, Augustine II. So the line was brought down through the latter's only son, Colonel William Augustine, who married his first cousin, Jane Washington. They had two sons, Bushrod, the eldest, and George Corbin. The older of these brothers went to Illinois, where, it has been stated in the published literature on the subject, he was lost sight of. An article in one of the monthly magazines four years ago states that he thus disappeared from view, "although efforts were made to find him" by his family.

The younger brother, George Corbin Washington, was mentioned in the American Almanac of 1899 as "the oldest and nearest surviving relative of his grandnephew, General Washington." He was born in Westmoreland county, Va., the year of President Washington's first inauguration, graduated from Harvard, entered the law, moved to Maryland, served ten years in Congress from that State, was president of the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal, also commissioner of Indian affairs, and was prominently mentioned for the vice-presidency. He died in Georgetown in 1854. Through him the Cincinnati Society has brought down the descent through his eldest son, Lewis William Washington, through the latter's son, James Barroll Washington, the aforementioned, and finally to the latter's son, the aforementioned William Lanier Washington, great-great-great-grandson of George Washington's eldest half-brother leaving male issue.

The Lost Brother Found.

During the past few years the heirs of George Washington have been pressing through Congress a claim for certain public lands granted to the general, but alleged to have been "jumped" by a one-time United States Senator. And it so happens that Lawrence Washington, of the Library of Congress, in tracing up the heirs party to this claim, has ferreted out the wanderings and heirs of the lost Bushrod Washington, eldest son of William Augustine—the elder brother, who was lost to view in Illinois. This Bushrod, it appears, married his first cousin, Henrietta Spottswood (daughter of General Alexander Spottswood). They had children, the eldest son being Spottswood Augustine, who went to Michigan, and there, following the early profession of his collateral ancestor of immortal fame, became a surveyor in the public Land Office. He fought in the Union army, studied law, settled later at Kankakee, Ill., and married a Miss Fletcher, whose father had moved to that state from Westmoreland, the native county of the Washingtons in Virginia.

His children are Bushrod, the eldest son, a Union veteran, of Monmouth, and James, a plasterer and house painter, of Kankakee, Ill.; William Augustine, lawyer and judge, also of Kankakee, and a married daughter, who removed to Chicago.

Possible King Brave Soldier.

By strict application of the law of primogeniture, it would therefore appear that Washington's crown, if descending through the half-brother, would now be worn by this aged Union veteran, Bushrod Washington, who was born in Kankakee, Ill., in 1841. He is described by kinsfolk in the east as a man of education and studious tastes. In the Union army he fought with his father and his brother, William Augustine, his courage being such as to arouse the admiration of his commander, General Logan, who offered him a commission, which he declined. In 1866 he married Martha Jane McKee, and by this union there is one child, Mrs. Stella Evelyn Witmer, of Chicago.

But despite this discovery of the lost Bushrod's oldest son's oldest son, partisans of William Lanier Washington maintain that the latter should be retained in his established position as head of the family by virtue of a double descent from the general. And this double descent is traced as follows: First, through the line of George Washington's eldest half-brother (with male descendants as stated), and, second, through the first President's full-brother, Colonel John Augustine Washington, whose eldest child, Jane, is the New York broker's great-great-grandmother. Above it was mentioned that the broker's great-great-grandfather married his "cousin Jane," and this was the union referred to. Jane, however, was not the daughter of George Washington's eldest "own" brother.

Descent Through Full-Brother.

He was Colonel Samuel, mention of whose name turns us now to the other side of the original controversy—whether, if Washington had been crowned king, his throne would have descended through his half-brother, Augustine II., or this eldest full-brother, Colonel Samuel. Authorities fail to agree as to whether, by a rigid interpretation of the law of succession, descent through a half-brother would be recognized. Had this hypothetical crown been worn by George Washington's father, it would have passed to the son by the first marriage, unquestionably. But, supposing it to have originated with George Washington, the question whether it would have descended to his half-brother or full-brother is a vexed one. But let us concede that the line of descent was through the eldest full-brother, Samuel, and see who, in this event, would be the present American king.

Samuel himself could never have inherited the crown, because he died in 1781, eighteen years before the death of George. And Samuel's eldest son, Thornton, also died before the general, although only by a few months. However, the line through these two was unbroken, inasmuch as Thornton was survived by John Thornton Augustine, who was a lad of sixteen when the first President gave up the ghost that chill day at Mount Vernon.

This possible heir apparent took for his first wife Elizabeth Conrad Bedinger, of West Virginia, daughter of a Revolutionary officer. Their eldest son, Laurence Berry Washington, born in 1811, was a lawyer, a lieutenant in a Virginia regiment in the Mexican War, and in 1849 joined the rush for gold in California, drifted to Missouri and died suddenly on a Mississippi steamboat in 1856. He was a bachelor, so the descent would have gone through his eldest surviving brother, Daniel Bedinger Washington, born in 1814, who married his cousin, Mrs. J. J. Wharton, in 1874, moved to Missouri in 1886, fought in the Confederate army, and spent his last days on his farm near Index, Cass county, Mo. The line stops with his only son, Thornton Augustine Washington.

Wields Brush Instead of Sceptre.

So 'tis claimed by some, this Thornton Augustine Washington would today be wielding a sceptre instead of a paint brush had a crown descended from the immortal George through the latter's full brother, Samuel. Pharmacy was once the chosen profession of this possible monarch, but he found the brush more lucrative than the pestle, and became a house painter. He lives near Index, Mo., with his two maiden sisters.

Had Washington gained sufficient power to retain a crown would he not have arrogated to himself sufficient power to choose his own successor, inasmuch as the dynasty would have originated in him? And in this event, would he have left his crown to the lad, John Thornton Augustine, grandson of his dead brother Samuel, or would he have placed it upon the brow of a more mature kinsman, in whom he had confidence? The latter question is answered as follows by a prominent member of the Washington family, to whom the writer is indebted: "One thing is reasonably certain, had Washington accepted the crown and had named his successor from among his numerous nephews, he would have named Colonel William Augustine Washington (son of his half-brother, Augustine II.), who was his favorite nephew, whom he named first after his widow, among the executors of his will, to whom he gave the first choice of his swords, and who also was his legatee."

It is through this favorite nephew that William Lanier Washington, the broker, and Bushrod Washington, the Union veteran, trace their descent.

About the only certainty which can be attached to this discussion is that the American people long ere now would have overturned the throne, even had Washington mounted it. In that event one of the three living gentlemen mentioned as possible kings would very probably be much in the limelight of the present generation as the American "pretender," for, without doubt, we would still have a considerable royalist party among us.

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ASHEVILLE

[Special to The Times-Dispatch.]

Asheville, N. C., February 17.—One of the most delightful affairs of the season was the luncheon tendered by Mrs. Thomas Settle Tuesday afternoon at her home on Pearson's Drive to a number of her young friends. Her guests were Miss Martha Wooldridge, Miss Mary Moore, Miss Gwendolyn Rutherford, Mrs. Alice Wright, Miss Frances Bailey, Mrs. W. A. Wright, of Wilmington; Augustus Wright, Robert Strange, Allen Emerson, Ellsworth Lyman, Allen Morrison, Frank Jordan and Thomas Jones.

Mrs. Tenche Coxe entertained at the "Klondyke" Monday afternoon, and the reception was an unusually enjoyable affair. The home was testily decorated for the occasion, delicious refreshments were served, and the guests of Mrs. Coxe spent a pleasant afternoon at her home.

Miss Lila Stokeley entertained a number of her friends Tuesday afternoon at her home on Orange Street. Various games were engaged in, at the conclusion of which a salad supper was served.

At her home on Montford Avenue, Monday afternoon, Miss Katherine Arbogast entertained about a dozen and a half of her young friends, the party having been arranged in celebration of the birthday of the hostess. The party was a delightful one, and those who were the guests of Miss Arbogast spent a most enjoyable afternoon with her.

One of the most brilliant weddings of the season was that of Miss Emma Bernard and Ernest Harwin Kammer, which was solemnized on Saturday evening at the First Presbyterian Church. The ceremony was performed by Dr. R. F. Campbell, of this city, and after the wedding members of the bridal party were the guests of honor at the home of the bride's parents.

A very pretty home wedding took place Wednesday evening, when William Augustus Wright, of Wilmington, claimed an attractive Asheville girl, Miss Martha Wooldridge. The ceremony was witnessed by only a few friends of the young couple. Mrs. Wright is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Thomas J. Wooldridge, of this city, and has hosts of friends in Asheville. Mr. Wright during the time that he has spent in this city has made a large number of friends here. He was formerly a student at the Bingham School, and it was while he was a student at that institution and a member of the football team of the school that he met Miss Wooldridge, who was at that a loyal supporter of Bingham. The young couple left immediately after the ceremony for Northern and Eastern points, where several days will be spent, after which Mr. and Mrs. Wright will be at home at Wilmington.

Miss Maude Waddell invited a large number of the members of the younger set to a Bingham School dance, which was held in the clubhouse on Bingham Heights on Saturday afternoon. The floor was in excellent condition, the music was good, and those who attended the hop had a very pleasant time.

Mrs. J. D. Penland entertained a number of friends Saturday afternoon at auction bridge. The afternoon was a pleasant one for those women who were the guests of Mrs. Penland on this occasion.

In honor of Mrs. E. O. Beaman, of Knoxville, Tenn., who is a very popular Asheville visitor, Mrs. J. M. English entertained Friday afternoon at a bridge whist party, which was largely attended and which was a very successful affair.

Mrs. Gaston Meares entertained at bridge Saturday afternoon at her home on Atkins Street. The house was handsomely decorated for the occasion, delicious refreshments were served, and the afternoon was thoroughly enjoyed by Mrs. Meares's guests.

GORDONSVILLE

[Special to The Times-Dispatch.]

Gordonsville, Va., February 17.—Mrs. M. D. Cowherd, of "Monteith," Mrs. M. D. Cowherd, Jr., John Carr, Jr., and R. G. Cowherd, of Orange, spent Sunday at "Jordan," the home of Mr. and Mrs. George S. McElroy.

Mr. and Mrs. Ellis Sampson entertained at cards on Tuesday evening. Whist was played. Mrs. G. B. Sampson won the woman's prize; Thomas Sampson winning the men's. The guests were Mrs. Fleming Brisco, Mr. and Mrs. W. C. Baker, Mr. and Mrs. James C. Graves, Mrs. E. B. Sampson, Thomas Sampson, Miss Sampson and Mr. Boulware.

Dr. Derby was a recent guest at the home of his father-in-law, Mr. Partlow.

Sam W. McElroy, of "Maple Spring," spent a part of this week in Richmond.

Miss Ida Boston was a week-end guest of her aunt, Miss Sallie M. Boston.

Mrs. W. M. Yager, of Somerset, has for her guest, this week, Mrs. H. G. Withers.

John C. Hendricks has returned home after a delightful visit of several days at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Harrison, of Louisa county.

Mr. and Mrs. Wilbur Osborne and J. F. W. Ruffin were Charlottesville visitors on Friday.

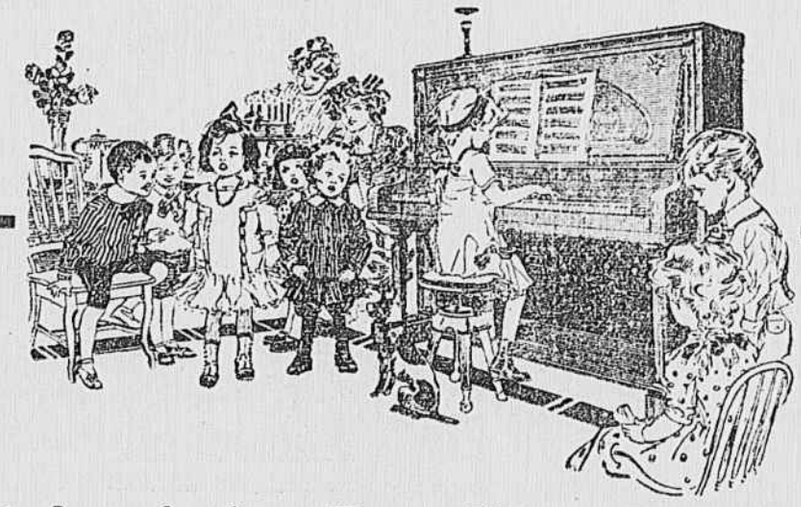
[illegible] F. McElroy returned home on Wednesday from Washington, where he has spent the last ten days visiting friends.

Miss Lottie Estes, of Thistlewood, has returned home after spending a month in Washington.

Miss Adie Cowherd is visiting her cousins, Mr. and Mrs. Lewis, in Richmond.

Miss Eugenie Wamberaie spent the last week at her home, near Orange, and in Charlottesville.

G. T. Cowherd was an Orange visitor on Thursday.



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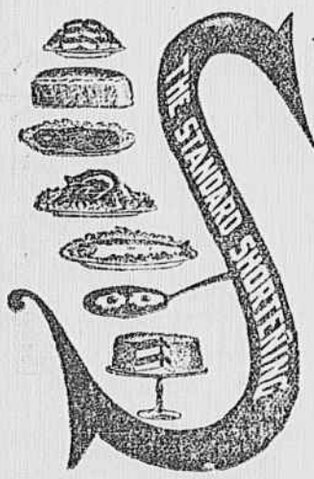

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