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Dooley

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THE LIFE OF MAJOR JAMES HENRY DOOLEY

Robert B. Harris

The Life of Major James Henry Dooley

In the small town of Limerick, Ireland, in the years prior to 1834 lived Mr. John Dooley and his wife Mrs. Sarah Dooley, the parents of the subject of this sketch. It was in this year that they decided to leave their native land in search of greater things and an opportunity to become established in a new land where chances for a successful career were not enhanced by prejudices. Accordingly they boarded a ship bound for America and subsequently landed in the United States in the latter part of the year 1834. Mr. and Mrs. Dooley settled in Alexandria, Virginia, but later they decided to move to Richmond. Mr. Dooley established himself as a merchant and became deeply interested in the welfare of his newly adopted community. The elder Dooley became a recognized leader and was greatly liked by his associates. Characteristics evidenced were loyal support to charity, intensive public spirit, courage, and above all a sincere devotion to both his native country and the country of his adoption.

It was on January 18, 1841, that James Henry Dooley was born. During James' childhood he enjoyed good health and was always fond of reading. When he was eight years of age he entered school, his first perceptor being Dr. Socrates Maupin, who afterwards served for many years as professor and chairman of the faculty at the University of Virginia. His mother was from

the time of his birth an invalid, but still he had the best of home influences necessary to direct a young boy along the right paths.

After completing his regular pre-college academic training in Richmond, he decided to pursue his studies further at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C. He matriculated as a candidate for a Bachelor of Arts degree at the age of fifteen. In the year 1861, James Dooley graduated from Georgetown University with the degrees of Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Laws. While attending the university he continuously led his classmates in scholarship and graduated with the highest honors in his class. Among the many rare objects of art and historical value which he collected during his later years none was valued more highly than the medal he won as being the best Greek scholar in his class. While a student, his particular interest was in the field of law. In later years James Dooley was honored by the coveted degree of Doctor of Laws from his alma mater.

As soon as the War Between the States broke out in 1861, John Dooley immediately enlisted in the service of his state, and he was subsequently appointed Captain of Company B of the First Virginia Regiment of General Kemper's Brigade, "Montgomery Guards," on April 21, 1861. In November, 1861,

(1)

Richmond News Leader, November 17, 1922.

(2)

Records of Company B, Lee Camp Records, State Library Archives.

because of his bravery, courage, leadership, and ability he was awarded by promotion to the rank of Major. The First Virginia Infantry was made up mostly of men prominent in the various businesses within Richmond. It was this regiment which helped to make the Army of Northern Virginia a band of heroes destined to become the pride of the South and admired by the military leaders of the world.

James H. Dooley enlisted for service under his father on April 1, 1862, and became a member of Company C of the First Virginia Regiment. At this time Captain William English of Richmond was in command of Company C. It is significant to note that his first month's salary amounted to forty-four dollars. The company, along with other companies of the regiment, was ordered to march to Williamsburg on May 1, 1862. ⁽³⁾ On May 5, 1862, the Battle of Williamsburg took place, and it was in this battle that Private Dooley was shot through the wrist and taken prisoner by the Federal troops. He was later taken to Hampton Roads where he was confined as a prisoner of war on the Rip Raps, a prison situated on an artificial rocky island off the shores of Ocean View, Virginia. An excellent description of the Battle of Williamsburg has been given in the following statements of an eyewitness. ⁽⁴⁾

A gentleman who witnessed the fight near Williamsburg on Monday, informs us that our force engaged what amounted

(3) (4)

Ibid.

Chamberlayne, E. H., "Records of Richmond and Henrico County, Va., Troops Confederate States Army.

to six or eight thousand men. The battle lasted nine hours. The First Virginia Regiment captured a battery of eight guns, and two colors, from the enemy. There has been some dispute in regard to which regiment performed this gallant act, but we learn that the matter has been decided in favor of the First by the General commanding the brigade to which it is attached. The number of casualties in killed and wounded in General A. P. Hill's brigade have been ascertained as follows: First regiment, 46; Seventh regiment, 90; Eleventh regiment, 131; Seventeenth regiment, 71; total, 338. Some erroneous statements have been published in connection with this battle, which we are now enabled to correct. General Early was not mortally wounded; his injuries are severe but it is believed that he will soon recover and be able to take the field again. Colonel Williams, of the First Virginia, received a very severe wound, and is now in the hands of the enemy. Major Palmer, of the same regiment, who was reported killed, received only a slight wound in the arm, and remained on the field until the close of the engagement. Neither Colonel Kemper nor Colonel Corse, both of whom were reported wounded, received any injury, though they exposed themselves in a daring manner throughout the day. The rumor that General Anderson was killed probably arose from the death of his brother, who fell in battle. The General was not injured. We

hear that the loss on our side, in killed, wounded and missing, is estimated at five hundred. The loss of the enemy can only be conjectured, though it is unquestionably much heavier than ours.

We captured several hundred prisoners, and could have taken more, the woods being full of scattered Federals; but we could not trouble ourselves with them. During the night the men took shelter in the vacant houses in the town and dried themselves.

In August/1862, James Dooley was exchanged for a Federal soldier. The Confederate Government instituted a rather rigid examination for appointments in the Ordinance Department, and this young soldier won a commission as lieutenant of ordinance, and was assigned to duty with General J. L. Kemper, and served with skill, gallantry, and efficiency. For such excellent service towards the close of the war he received a promotion to the rank of Major of Ordinance.

Upon the beginning of the reconstruction period Major Dooley went actively to work, beginning the practice of law in November, 1865. In his college days he had shown an intense liking to the profession and was exceedingly well prepared for it.. His next few years proved to be most successful. Mr. Dooley served in the Legislature of the State of Virginia for six years (1871-1877),

and was considered a very valuable member, serving on some of the most important committees, and leading in some of the most important legislation.

On September 11, 1869, Mr. Dooley was married to Miss Sallie May, of a prominent old Virginia family. They had no children. In 1880, Major Dooley selected a site in Byrd Park upon which to build. The place where the huge mansion was erected and its many surrounding gardens proved to be a great attraction to all friends and acquaintances of Mr. and Mrs. Dooley. The care given the trees and shrubs on this place has made it a wonderful arboretum in which the natural beauty of the site has been amplified and increased by careful attention, skill, and art. The name, "Maymont", was selected for the estate since Mrs. Dooley's name was Sallie May before marriage.

In 1881, he was appointed director of the Richmond and Danville Railroad, and, also the same year director of the Richmond and West Point Terminal Railway and Warehouse Company. These two railroads later were important connecting links between Baltimore, New York, Boston, and Richmond via the Chesapeake Bay. They later became parts of the Southern Railway System. From January 1, 1886, until December 31, 1886, he was vice-president of the Richmond and Danville Railway. He was for seventeen years President of the Richmond and St. Paul Land and Improvement Company, and for about the same period president of the Richmond and West Point Land, Navigation and Improvement Company.

In 1888, he was selected as the president of the North Birmingham Street Railway Company and of the North Birmingham Land Company. In 1889 he was one of the organizers and directors of the great Seaboard Air Line Railway Company. In real estate Major Dooley had always been a constructive force. The development of the West End of Richmond was commenced by Major Dooley and Mr. Joseph Bryan, who formed the West End Home Building Fund Company, of which Major Dooley was president. He was also president of the Henrico Building Fund Company.

Early in the year 1900 Major Dooley decided to build a summer home in the Blue Ridge mountains of Virginia where he could get away from the many worries and problems of his business. A site was selected atop one of the mountains at Rockfish Gap near Waynesboro, Virginia. Here "Swannanoa", one of the most beautiful estates in the United States, was built. The house cost about two million dollars and was constructed of pure Italian marble selected by Major Dooley on one of his trips to Italy. It took several years of difficult and laborious work in transporting the marble to its final resting place and perhaps no place in Virginia and few in this country can equal "Swannanoa" in beauty, outlook and splendor of setting. Major and Mrs. Dooley placed their rare and costly collection of paintings and ancient art within the spacious walls of "Swannanoa." One must note that some years after the death of Major Dooley the estate was sold to a large group of prominent ^{men} of Richmond and other

cities as part of an enormous country club project. They failed to meet the regular payments agreed upon and finally the project had to be abandoned. "Swannanoa" was then placed on the real estate market by the receivers and it was purchased for approximately three hundred thousand dollars by members of Mr. Dooley's family.

During the years 1900, 1901, and 1902, Mr. Dooley was chairman of the executive council of the Seaboard Air Line Railway Company. From 1898 to 1904 he was vice-president of the Richmond Trust and Safe Deposit Company, and for a number of years was a director of the Merchants National Bank of Richmond. Up until the time of his death he maintained his office in the Merchants National Bank Building. This bank consolidated and became the First and Merchants National Bank of this city, one of the largest and strongest of our banks today. In 1898, his law practice was brought to an end in order that he might look after his many and varied financial interests. Major Dooley's connection with the several railway companies heretofore mentioned led him to be one of the promoters and builders of the Georgia-Pacific Railway. This association brought the gentlemen connected with him into close contact with Birmingham, and from this contact the great Sloss-Sheffield Steel and Iron Company developed. For several years Major Dooley was a director and a member of the executive committee of the Sloss-Sheffield Company, and this

(5)

The Richmond News Leader, November 17, 1922.

company in 1922 was one of the great iron producers of the country, and second only to the Tennessee Iron and Coal Company, the
(6)
greatest iron producers in the south.

Major Dooley was deeply interested in the civil welfare of his community and did much to aid those in need of assistance. He was the person who founded and equipped the Dooley Hospital for Crippled Children on East Marshall Street, and he likewise had an interest in a similar hospital in Roanoke, Virginia. He was a director of business affairs of the Sisters of Charity. He also took a profound interest in educational and religious matters being associated with the Catholic Church. He was a member of the board of directors of the Co-Operative Educational Association of this city. At one time he served as president of the Richmond Art Club. He was a member of the Manhattan Club of New York, the Westmoreland Club, the Commonwealth Club, and the Deep Run Hunt Club, all of Richmond. He was always identified with the Democratic party, but was a "Gold Democrat" in the McKinley-Bryan campaign. Mr. Dooley offered the following suggestions to young Americans anxious to attain true success in life:

Let them avoid loafers, and associate with earnest people who have high ideals and aspirations. Let them do each day, with all their might, the work which comes to hand. Let them not be content to do only as much

(6)

Ibid.

work as they are obliged to do, but so much more as to attract the attention of those above them, and compel their approbation. Let them tell the truth, and be honest under all circumstances.

Let them avoid speculation, and live within their means. If they follow these percepts they will be successful and honored men. (7)

This advice came from an honored and successful business man of Richmond.

Major Dooley and Mrs. Dooley returned from "Swannanoa" on November 2, 1922, after a pleasant stay throughout the summer months, and opened "Maymont" for the winter. Major Dooley seemed to be in very good health after his vacation and went to his office in the Merchants National Bank regularly every day. On Wednesday, November 8th, he became ill, and his condition grew so serious that he had to be removed to Grace Hospital. In 1920 he had been stricken with partial paralysis but had apparently recovered completely, and again took active interest in his business affairs. It seemed almost incredible that within less than a week, after telling friends that he never felt better, he should be stricken with paralysis with little hope for recovery. He died at 11:30 o'clock on November 16, 1922, in his eighty-third year, truly one of Richmond's greatest citizens.-----Capitalist, Soldier, Philanthropist, Corporation lawyer, Pioneer in Real Estate, and above all a true

(7) Tyler, Lyon G., Men of Mark in Virginia, Vol. 1, Page 167.

gentleman of the Old South.

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