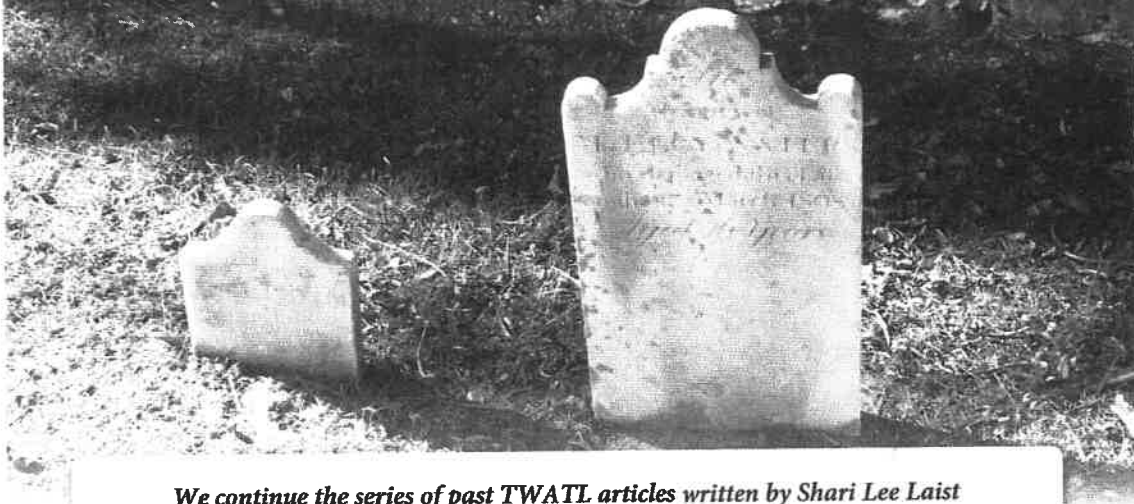


THE GRAVES

On The 15th Hole Of Oakridge

By Shari Lee Laist



We continue the series of past TWATL articles written by Shari Lee Laist in the early 2000's.

There are two nineteenth century graves in a tabby enclosure near the 15th hole of the Oakridge golf course on Skidaway Island; one for Thomas B. Waters aged 14 months, and one for Mrs. Elcy Waters, aged 26. We moved to Skidaway Island a short time ago and I wondered about the background of these two lonely graves. Lulled by the leisurely atmosphere and the warm November (after Connecticut winters) temperatures, I awaited some Taylor Caldwell epiphany or Isabel Allende spirits to enlighten me. As an archivist, I am no stranger to old records, but I fell victim to a spell of southern dreaminess that kept me from diving into the files at the Georgia Historical Society.

Perusing past issues of the TWATL, an article about street names by Jim Morris also piqued my curiosity. Is there a connection between Waters

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Avenue and these Skidaway graves? The date of Thomas' death finally spurred me to action. Sadly, the toddler died on Christmas Day, 1804. As we approach another Christmas, let's recall a time when livestock roamed the Skidaway Island and cultivated fields, not golf courses, abounded.

The Columbian Museum and *Savannah Advertiser* of Dec. 26, 1804 only devotes a couple of lines to Thomas Waters' death. "DIED, in this city on the 25th instant, Thomas B. Waters aged fourteen months, Son [of] Mr. John Waters." The other grave, that of Elcy Waters, was probably that of Thomas' mother. Elcy died on Saint Patrick's Day in 1808 at 26 years of age. John Waters, who came to America from Scotland as a "youth" would have been 39 at the time of her death. I could not find a marriage record, but marriage licenses

were not required in Georgia until 1805. Scottish immigrants were prevalent in Savannah since at least 1742 when the Scottish Highlanders took their place in local history after the battle of "Bloody Marsh" near present day Darien.

Elcy's death notice on March 25, 1808, was more extensive.

DIED, in this city after a few hours extreme illness on the 17th instant, Mrs.[sic] Elsy Waters, comfort of Mr. John Waters aged 26 years. While the purest morals united with every domestic virtue and crowned by a sincere esteem for religion, are considered as recommendations of character, Mrs. Waters will be embalmed in the affectionate remembrance of her acquaintances; and to her numerous relations, especially to her husband and children, her decease constitutes a loss which may justly be termed irreparable. But it is the Lord who is as wise and as gracious, as he is sovereign, free and unsearchable in his ways— it is the Lord, who has taken this admirable lady in the midst of her days from the most endearing relations of life to the world of spirits. Let the pleasing hope, her life, her death, and the gospel of Christ, inspire as to her happy immortality, dry up our tears and induce an imitation of her virtues.

The graves are in a location developed after 1757 as the "New Village," where plots as small as 50 acres were sold. After these deaths, if John was prosperous enough, he may have abandoned Skidaway as a home and moved to town. Sickness was common on the island and in marsh areas and he may have feared for the health of his remaining children. This move to town would

have been consistent with the behavior of the larger landowners who usually did not live on their island plantations. I found one reference to confirm this supposition. In 1831, John Waters advertised in the *Daily Georgian* for an overseer for his plantation.

On Nov. 30, 1815, John Waters married a widow, Mrs. Sarah Tiot with property of her own. A well known minister of the Independent Presbyterian Church in Savannah and a relative of Mrs. Tiot (sometimes appears as Tilt), Rev. Henry Kollock, performed the ceremony. We also learn that John Waters joined the Saint Andrews Society in Savannah, a Scottish fraternal organization in 1825.

John continued to prosper, purchasing a number of Savannah properties and was fortunate in at least one of the Savannah land lotteries. In April 1827 John Waters, won a "tything lot": "Lot 100 no. 20 sec 1, Liberty Ward." [near Liberty Square]. "Tything" means ten, corresponding to the number of lots on each block. Most tything lots measured 60 x 90 feet. We find this lot later advertised for rent as a part of Sarah Tiot Waters' [John's second wife] estate in 1837.

On September 17, 1835, John died at age 66 of Bilious Fever, which seems to have been a kind of flu involving gastric distress. His obituary lists him as a "planter" and reads in part, "*Mr. John Waters has resided in this city for upwards of forty years, a much respected citizen. By his honest industry he had placed himself in easy circumstances and has left a competency to his children.*" John's will directs that his executors "sell my plantations." It does not enumerate where they were but perhaps he still held property on Skidaway. He

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also directed that the "negroes [from the plantations] be sold in families." I could not find out where John was originally buried but I did find this notation: "Waters, John and others removed from Old Cemetery to lot 1110 in Laurel Grove" in 1859.

Did he visit the graves of his wife and son? If he continued to own property on Skidaway, it is likely he visited the island. His estate included \$8000, 100 shares of Planters bank stock, railroad stock as well as a number of Savannah lots, homes and plantations. His estate went to his three daughters, Mrs. Jane A. Bruen, and Mrs. Harriet Bryan from Elcy, and Eliz(s)a Waters. Elisa may have been born to him and Sarah. He never had another son after Thomas died, although Sarah did have a son, Charles Tiot and she lists one Thomas Young "in trust" in her will.



Did John Waters' name live on? The name Waters Avenue first appears in the city directory for 1897. Perhaps it is named for a relative of the Waters family on Skidaway. Now we have a partial picture of the family related to the lonely graves. Give pause as you pass by and remember Thomas, Elcy, and father and husband, John.♦