

COMMUNITY

5 generations of achievers in McCaw family

There are only a few families in America who can boast of members of outstanding achievement for as many as five consecutive generations. The McCaw family is an exception to the rule.

Louise Pettus



NEARBY HISTORY

The first McCaw in America was John McCaw, a native of County Antrim, Ireland. His family had a large estate and the means to educate him in the best schools of Europe. John, seeking ad-

venture, decided that life in northern Ireland would be too tame. He emigrated to the Pennsylvania frontier in 1733.

John's son, John McCaw Jr., fought with British General Braddock in the French and Indian Wars. When the Indians went on a rampage in western Pennsylvania he moved his family to Virginia. Further Indian raids on the frontier led him to come south to this area.

He became the first clerk of court of York County, an office he held for many years. Educated by his father, John McCaw Jr. is said to have been a great Greek and Latin scholar and was much admired by the people of Yorkville.

John Jr.'s son, Robert McCaw, had a remarkable business career.

Robert G. McCaw attended the University of Virginia. Six weeks before graduation his father died. He was an only child and came home to handle his father's estate. He never returned to college.

He died fairly young, leaving an estate of more than a half-million dollars. Robert married Nancy Bratton, daughter of Col. William Bratton of Revolutionary War fame.

Of Robert's son, Robert Gadsden McCaw, it has been written: "A figure moulded in the rarest type of manly beauty, 6 feet in height and of perfect symmetry and grace, was crowned by a head that at once was a model for a sculptor and a delight to the phrenologist." (Phrenology, a pseudo-science, purported that it was possible to read a person's character by measuring the head and reading its contours.)

The description continued: "A forehead massive, broad and high, indicative of the highest intellectual strength and moral development, shading eyes of brilliant steel-gray, that kindled with the

kindly light of a great philanthropic soul. . . ."

Robert G. McCaw attended the University of Virginia. After his father died, he came home to handle the estate.

McCaw was noted for his ability as a planter and was considered a good master to his slaves. Admired for his sterling character, McCaw easily won a seat in the legislature and was twice elected senator. In 1864, during the Civil War, he was elected lieutenant governor.

McCaw was also a benefactor of the poor. Most of his philanthropy was kept hidden, at least until the great famine of the 1840s came along. Three years with practically no rainfall in upper South Carolina left the people desperate for food for themselves and their animals. McCaw had more than 8,000 bushels of corn in his granaries. He opened his corn cribs to the people

and only made modest charges for the corn. If people had no money he still gave them corn.

In 1847 he married a cousin, Belle Bratton, a daughter of Dr. William Bratton of Fairfield County. There were five children.

William Bratton McCaw, the second son, was born in Yorkville Aug. 22, 1857. He attended local schools, including Kings Mountain Military School, and afterward attended the University of the South at Sewanee, Tenn. He graduated in 1876.

Next, he studied law for three years, an unusually long course for those times but undoubtedly it made him one of the best trained lawyers in South Carolina. He handled many of the important civil cases, especially railroad cases, of his age.

In 1888 William McCaw was elected to the S.C. House but declined to stand for re-election following one term. He returned to full-time practice of law.

McCaw was married on Nov. 24, 1885, to Emma LeSassier, a New Orleans native of French descent. They had two daughters and a son. William McCaw died Sept. 20, 1908, at the age of 49 and is buried in Rose Hill Cemetery in York.

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