

What about those tiny clothes, short beds and low ceilings? Can we still assume that differences in height account for the variations we notice. Probably not. Low ceilings were sometimes adaptations to climate (low ceilings rooms were easier to heat in areas with cold winters) or to economics (many people could not afford a large-scale, high-ceilinged house.) Clothing was often cut down to fit younger family members until it was worn out or too small to fit anyone else.

Worn-out garments were eventually thrown away, but the too-small-to-resize garments might be saved to end up in a museum collection one day. And while some antique beds are sized differently from ours, they are often not as short as they appear. Eighteenth-century bed lengths and widths were not standardized, as they are today, so a wide bed can look unusually short to us, especially if it is dwarfed by tall bedposts and heavy bed hangings.

So it seems the difference in people's height from the eighteenth to the twentieth century is not as great as most people mean when they say "People were shorter back then."

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## A LEGACY OF THE LOWNDES

James E. Gilbert, Ph.D.  
Docent, Aiken-Rhett House

We know much about William Aiken, Jr. And his family. The following is a brief introduction to the immediate members of Harriet Lowndes Aiken and her family, the Lowndes of South Carolina. The primary resource for this paper is George B. Chase's Lowndes of South Carolina: An Historical and Genealogical Memoir (Boston: A. Williams and Company, 1876). Hopefully, additional material concerning Harriet's branch of the Lowndes family will become extant in the near future.

1812 was a significant year in the life of the young United States as it was the initial years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century world. Napoleon invaded Russia and the United States went to war with Great Britain over the impressment of U.S. seamen. James Madison was re-elected President over DeWitt Clinton. Louisiana was admitted to the union as the eighteenth

state. Gas illuminated London as well as Charleston (in 1843). The New England Journal of Medicine began publication. There were revolutions in Venezuela, Chile, Mexico, and Central America. Robert Browning and Charles Dickens were born. Goya painted and Beethoven composed his seventh and eighth symphonies.

These famous people were oblivious to an event that was taking place in the "big house" on Oakland Plantation on Combahee River (or perhaps at Lowndes Grove, Charleston) in the South Carolina lowcountry. February 28, 1812 was the date. Sometime on that day, Sarah Bond I'on Lowndes gave birth, for the ninth time, to a child from her union with Thomas Lowndes.

That child was Harriet Lowndes who grew to womanhood at Oakland and Lowndes Grove. She married William Aiken, Jr. on February 3, 1831. Little is known, from published accounts, of her youth. Documents and personal papers do exist in the Aiken collection, located at the Charleston Museum that could perhaps shed light on the early years of Harriet Aiken. Those papers are a mine of information, the depths of which remain to be plumbed for the history contained therein.

As most interpreters of the Aiken-Rhett House know, there is precious little known concerning intimate personal details of the life of William Aiken, Jr. Less is known of his wife Harriet who died on March 24, 1892. As a modest proposal, would it not be reasonable to initiate the investigation of this distaff side of the Aiken family, with an introduction to Harriet's father, mother, and ten brothers and sisters?

Thomas and Sarah had eleven children; eight boys and three girls. Harriet was number nine. Following is a list of the Lowndes children and their birth dates:

Rawlins	May 28, 1799 [died October ?, 1800]
Mary I'on	August 1, 1800
Rawlins	September 1, 1801
Thomas	June 26, 1803 [died February 7, 1829]
Jacob I'on	September 19, 1804 [died July 8, 1833]
William Price	September 21, 1806
Charles Tidyman	June 28, 1808
Edward Tilghman	January 15, 1810 [died June ?, 1837]
Harriet	<b>February 28, 1812</b>
Caroline Huger	September 25, 1813 [died September 8, 1817]
Richard Henry	March 4, 1815

Note that some entries do not have dates of death. Most probably, the individuals without such dates were still living at the time the Chase reference [from which this information was gleaned] was published in 1876.

From the information available, it may be concluded that all children were born in Charleston except Thomas who was born in New Haven, Connecticut (1803) and Jacob I'on who was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (1804). Harriet lost a younger sister at four years of age (Caroline) while her older sister Mary I'on, older by twelve years, married Frederic Kinloch in 1816. Of her eight brothers, three died unmarried (Rawlins, Jacob I'on, and Edward) while five married.

Harriet's brother, Rawlins, graduated from USMA West Point in 1820 at the age of nineteen. By the age of 29 he was a Major and resigned from the Army. Rawlins married Gertrude Laura Livingstone of Staatsburg, New York in 1826 (did Harriet travel to Staatsburg when she was fourteen for the wedding?). He established two homes; one in Charleston and one on the banks of the Hudson River. In 1861 he left South Carolina moving to New York never to return. Rawlins and Gertrude had five daughters one of whom they named **Harriet**.

Harriet's brother William Price although born in Charleston, was educated in New Haven (Yale?) and Columbia, South Carolina (Columbia College), but graduated from neither. Somehow William made it to Staatsburg, New York and met the Livingstones. In 1833, he married Gertrude's sister Susan Mary Elizabeth.

Apparently Richard Henry, Harriet's younger brother by three years, was an officer in the U.S. Navy serving as an aide of the Commanding Officers of the USS Constellation and the USS Ohio. He resigned from the Navy in 1842 and married Susan Middleton Parker of Charleston. Richard and Susan had four children, naming one of their two sons **William Aiken**.

Thomas graduated from Harvard when twenty-one in 1824. Born in New Haven, he died in Charleston at the age of thirty after marrying Ellen Deas of that city. About Charles Tidyman, there is little known other than he married Sabina Elliot of Charleston in 1829. Sabina and Charles T. had five children.

Sarah Bond I'on Lowndes' [1778 (?) - October 7, 1840] mother and father (Harriet's maternal grandparents) were Mary Ashby of Christ Church Parish and James Bond I'on of St. James Parish and Springfield Plantation. Sarah married Thomas Lowndes on March

15, 1798 when she was twenty and sat for Gilbert Stuart in Philadelphia (or Washington, DC) in 1803. Sarah Lowndes was said to have "united great charm of manner to a handsome and distinguished presence, and whose portrait by Gilbert Stuart has been ranked among the most successful of all his pictures of women, as it was the favorite of the artist himself" (Chase).

Gilbert Stuart was in Philadelphia and Washington, DC during the years 1796-1805. The Lowndes were in Washington, DC 1800-1805 and Philadelphia in 1804, at least, when Jacob I'on was born. The Stuart portraits were donated to the Carolina Art Association (135 Meeting Street) and presently reside in the Gibbes Museum of Art in Charleston. They were bequeathed to the museum by Carroll and Marion Langdon in 1950.

Thomas Lowndes (January 22, 1766-July 8, 1843) was born of a union of Rawlins Lowndes and Mary Cartwright who were married in 1751. He was educated according to Chase, "in the city of Charleston", and on the family estate "on the Ashley River" (Lowndes Grove?). Thomas was ten years old at the time of the Revolutionary War.

Mr. Lowndes was a lawyer and served in the South Carolina House of Representatives for four terms (1792-1800). He was elected to Congress in 1800 as a member of the Federal Party. Thomas served the seventh (1801-1803) and eighth (1803-1805) Congresses. He was defeated when running for the ninth Congress in 1805.

After running for Congress in 1805, he retired from public life and his legal practice and devoted the remainder of his life to his business interests, family, and Oakland Plantation. He alternated his residence between Oakland and Charleston (Lowndes Grove?). Oakland Plantation was on the Combahee River south of present day Jacksonboro, SC on what is now US Highway 17 South. As noted, the Lowndes family traveled north on a number of occasions both prior to and after the War of 1812. Thomas sat for Gilbert Stuart in 1803.

Chase says of Thomas Lowndes, "he entertained both in town and country with cordial hospitality characteristic of the manners of the period; and his conspicuous social station. His house was the resort, as his father's had been before him, of distinguished citizens of the State".

Although little is known of the early life of Harriet Lowndes, enough is known to permit exposing one's self on the cliffs of conjecture. The Lowndes were a family in tune with the social, cultural, economic, and political tenor of the times both regionally and nationally. They were cognizant of state and federal issues because they experienced

those issues on a first hand basis. It must be remembered their travels took them through what was at that time eighty percent of the United States. Their friends and associates were in position of leadership in Charleston, Philadelphia, New York, and Boston; the four largest cities of the United States in 1790.

Harriet, born at the outbreak of the War of 1812, came upon the scene a bit late to experience the full brunt of the families heady experiences in the seats of power and influence. She missed those early years of travel during Congressional recesses. Even though Thomas had retired from politics and the law to Oakland and settled into business in the lowcountry, Harriet most likely participated in the excitement of meeting and listening to honored guests of prominence who visited Oakland and Lowndes Grove. She undoubtedly listened with rapt attention to the stories told by her brothers who had traveled as far west as the Missouri Territory (Rawlins with the Army) and vast oceans (Richard Henry with the Navy). The probability is high that she traveled at least to New York to visit the Livingstones and to participate in weddings (Rawlins and William Price) and to visit her aunts, uncles, and cousins in Staatsburg. As the youngest sister (Mary I'on was twelve years her senior and Caroline died at age four) of seven lining brothers she would have gained valuable experience in managing a plantation "big house", participating in formal dinners and social gatherings, being a member of a structured society with defined roles, and functioning as a recipient and transmitter of the "traditions of the South".

Certainly, Harriet Lowndes was well prepared to assume her role as "first lady of South Carolina", a representative of southern feminine gentility in Washington, a contributing member of Charleston plantation society, hostess to General P.G.T. Beauregard of the CSA and President Jefferson Davis of the Confederate States of America, lifelong companion of Governor William Aiken, Jr., and mistress of the residence at 48 Elizabeth Street, Charleston, South Carolina. She was endowed by training and experience to carry well the legacy of the Lowndes into the worlds of the Aikens and the Rhetts.



Thomas Lowndes  
By Gilbert Stuart (c. 1803)



Sarah Bond I'on  
By Gilbert Stuart (c. 1803)

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## WE NEED YOUR HELP!!!!

WE'D LIKE TO SEE VISITATION NUMBERS AT THE  
AIKEN-RHETT HOUSE AND THE POWDER MAGAZINE  
INCREASE, SO PLEASE MAKE SURE TO ENCOURAGE  
GUESTS TO VISIT THE FOUNDATION'S OTHER SITES  
WHEN THEY VISIT.