

NATHANIEL RUSSELL'S
EARLY LIFE

NOTES SUPPLIED BY:-

THE RHODE ISLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Nathaniel Russell was born at Bristol, November 16, 1738, the son of Joseph and Sarah Russell. His father was an important man in the colony, serving as Justice of the Inferior Court of Common Pleas for Bristol County, 1746-51; Justice of the Supreme Court, 1751-59, 1761-63, 1774-76; and Chief Justice, 1765-67, 1768-69. He was also a member of the General Assembly of the Colony.

I have been unable to uncover information concerning Nathaniel Russell's early career in Rhode Island, but he must have moved away at a fairly early age. A number of his letters to Rhode Island merchants, all written from Charleston, have been published in Commerce of Rhode Island, 1726-1800 (Boston, Massachusetts Historical Society, 1914, 1915), which constitutes volumes 9 and 10 of Massachusetts Historical Collections, 7th Series. The earliest of these letters is dated 1770.

Russell seems to have maintained his Bristol connections after moving to Charleston and one of his grandchildren, Nathaniel Russell Middleton married Annie Elizabeth DeWolf, whose father Henry DeWolf had worked for Russell at Charleston as a young man. The DeWolfs are among the most prominent of Bristol families. Russell's Middleton descendants owned a fine old mansion in Bristol until 1938. I imagine that you are acquainted with Life in Carolina and New England... (Bristol, 1929) by Alicia Hopton Middleton, which deals with the DeWolf and Middleton families and contains some mention of Nathaniel Russell.

NOTES FROM
THE HISTORY OF THE NEW ENGLAND SOCIETY
OF
CHARLESTON, SOUTH CAROLINA

THE NEW ENGLAND SOCIETY. - At a meeting of a number of citizens who had previously associated themselves for the purpose of forming a charitable and benevolent society with this title, held at the Carolina Coffee House on Wednesday evening last, January 6, 1819, the following-named gentlemen were elected officers for the ensuing year:

NATHANIEL RUSSELL, President
JOSEPH WINTHROP, Vice-President
F. SHAW CROCKER, Secty. and Treas.

NATHANIEL RUSSELL

Nathaniel Russell, the first president of the New England Society of Charleston, was born at Bristol, Rhode Island, November 16, 1738. His ancestors had been leaders of thought and action in New England for more than one hundred and fifty years. His father, Joseph Russell, was for a time chief justice of Rhode Island.

It was the Reverend John Russell, a forbear of Nathaniel Russell, who in 1675 concealed in his home at Hadley, Massachusetts, Edward Whalley, one of Cromwell's major generals, and William Goffe, an English parliamentary commander, who had been conspicuous in the Revolution of England and who had been instrumental in bringing a guilty king, Charles I, to the block.

These two heroes of democracy were of course persona non grata to all who believed in the divine right of kings, consequently after the restoration of Charles II they were pursued and persecuted by the minions of royalty. They naturally fled to America for protection and safety, which they found in the castle of "the parson of Hadley," who at the peril of his life gave them a place

of refuge.

One hundred years ago some of the great merchants of the world lived in Charleston, South Carolina. They came from England, France, and New England. Thomas, in his Reminiscences and Sketches of His Life and Times, gives the names of about forty of the leading merchants of Charleston in 1795. The name of Nathaniel Russell appears at the head of the list. There was only one native of South Carolina in the group mentioned, and he was a junior partner of one of the large firms; his name was Stoney.

Mr. Thomas continued his observation by stating that "the door of the St. Cecilia Society was shut to the plebeian and the man of business, with two exceptions: Adam Tunno, king of the Scotch, and William Crafts, vice-king of the Yankees under their legitimate head, Nathaniel Russell, than whom there was no better man."

Nathaniel Russell came to Charleston from New England a beardless youth, and by reason of rare ability, indomitable will power, and sterling integrity, became a merchant prince.

Not many years after his arrival in Charleston he married Miss Sarah Hopton. Two daughters were born from this union - Sarah, who married the Right Reverend Theodore Dehon, D.D., bishop of South Carolina, and Alicia, who married Arthur Middleton.

In 1811 Mr. Russell completed his mansion on Meeting Street, which was one of the most palatial residences at that time in the South. It was the first house built in Charleston in which marble keystones were used. Not many years ago, Dr. Thomas Nelson Page, the famous author and diplomat, in passing the Nathaniel Russell house, said to his friend, "There are my windows." When Dr. Page built his handsome residence in Washington, D. C., he sent an architect to Charleston to copy the beautiful windows Mr. Russell had designed for his Charleston home more than one hundred years before.

After the death of Mr. Russell, Governor Alston lived in this elegant home. It is now the residence of Mr. Francis J. Pelzer.

The New England Society of Charleston owes its existence to Nathaniel Russell. He was the moving spirit in its origin and organization, and quite naturally its first president. Next to his own family he loved this Society. He bequeathed to the Society its first legacy, the sum of five hundred dollars, which at the time was a large amount, and which became the nucleus of an endowment of more than twenty thousand dollars. "He builded better than he knew."

He died April 11, 1820, full of years and full of good works. A splendid tomb marks his resting-place in the cemetery of the Circular Congregational Church, on Meeting Street.

The day after his death the following appreciation appeared in the Courier:

Died, yesterday, in his residence in Meeting Street, the venerable Nathaniel Russell, an upright, honorable man, a philanthropist, and a fervent and exemplary Christian. He was a native of New England, an honor to the land which gave him birth, and a blessing to this city which has long enjoyed the light of his virtues, the warmth of his benevolence, and the chastening purity of his character and influence.

This morning will consign his remains to the grave - and he who for nearly a century has been doing good on earth will be seen here no more. We cannot express what we feel on this afflicting bereavement.

The Right Reverend Nathaniel Bowen, D.D., writing in his register in 1820, paid the following tribute:

"The death of my venerable friend, Mr. Nathaniel Russell, was a deeply affecting event. From my earliest youth he had sustained toward me the relation of a kind, paternal counselor and friend. He had been the friend of my father when he came in search of a professional establishment in this country.

"He was the friend and protector of my mother in the destitution and sorrow of her widowhood, and he never failed to

evince towards me the kindest and most benevolent affection. How could I entertain a faint sentiment of gratitude of love towards him? He was not of the church of which I am; but he was a Christian of no ordinary excellence; and there was always that in him that gave him an unquestionable claim to be respected.

"He was a virtuous, wise man, and I truly believe he diligently sought to be accepted of God through Jesus Christ.

"Thine own and thy father's friend forget not. Mr. Russell's death, though at eighty-two years of age, was a public loss of considerable importance."

William Crafts, Jr., speaking at the annual celebration of the New England Society, just a few months after the death of Mr. Russell, said:

"It is the record of active and persevering virtues, such as filled up and adorned and endeared the life of your late worthy president and benefactor. I miss from among you his venerable form. He rests from his benevolent labors. The useful only have a right to live, and sweet is repose after honorable toil."

NATHANIEL RUSSELL, DIED APRIL 11, 1820.

HIS WILL

(16 Rs.) South Carolina. In the name of God Amen. I Nathaniel (No. 16) Russell of the City of Charleston and State aforesaid Merchant, being of sound mind and memory to hereby make ordain and declare my last Will and Testament of and concerning all my worldly estate which it had pleased God to bless me with, revoking and annulling hereby all and all manner of Wills codicills, Testaments and Testamentary papers by me at any time heretofore made written or executed. Imprimus. It is my Will that my just debts and funeral expenses be fully paid as soon as convenient after my decease out of the income of my Estate. Item. I give and bequeath unto my beloved Sister Anna Russell of Bristol in the State of Rhode Island and to her Executors, administrators and assigns forever all the funded Stock of the United States standing in my name in the Loan Office of the State of Rhode Island consisting of Fourteen hundred and Twenty seven dollars of six per Cents. Twelve hundred and eleven dollars of three per Cents and Seven hundred and thirteen dollars of deprd. six per Cents: Also all the funded Stock of the United States standing in my name in the Loan Office of the United States in Boston in the State of Massachusetts consisting of Eight hundred and seventy five dollars of six per Cents, Eight hundred and sixteen dollars of three per Cents and Four hundred and thirty seven of deferred six per Cents. Also a Treasury note of the Treasurer of the said State of Massachusetts for about ninety pounds lawful money of that State be it more or less and I direct my Executors to make the requisite transfers of the said Stock, I also give to my said Sister Anna Russell the Sum of One hundred and fifty dollars per annum during her natural life to be paid to

her as soon as convenient in Bristol in every month of January after my decease out of any monies that may be in the hands of my Executors at the time the said Annuity becomes due and after her death the said Annuity to remain, a part of my Estate subject to the provisions and dispositions of this my Will. I also give devise and bequeath unto my Said Sister Anna Russell all my share or whatever portion I am entitled to have or take out of the Estate real or personal of my deceased brother Jonathan Russell late of Bristol, Rhode Island, to be held and enjoyed by my said Sister during the term of her natural life and at her death to fall into my Estate and pass under this my Will as above. Item. I give and bequeath unto the Bible Society Five hundred dollars to be added to their general funds and to be applied to the purposes of that institution by the President and Managers thereof in Charleston and their Successors in office. Item. I give and bequeath unto the late Established New England Society to be added to their general funds and applied to the purposes of that Institution in Charleston by the President, Vice-President and Committee, thereof and by their Successors in Office Five hundred dollars; and it is my desire that these two legacies be paid by my Executors within six months after my decease. Item. I give, devise and confirm unto my dearly beloved wife and to her heirs and assigns all the Estate real and personal that was settled upon her at our marriage as will appear by marriage settlement, excepting nevertheless that part thereof that hath been sold with her consent and approbation and for which she hath signed Conveyance. I also give and bequeath unto my dearly beloved wife and her Heirs and assigns a two story Wooden House bought of John Wyatt, also a two story Brick House and all the Wooden Buildings to the Westward thereof on Ellery and Meeting Streets commonly called Parkers Lott which

Brick House and Wooden Buildings I purchased of Joseph Parsons some time subsequent to our marriage which two houses and Wooden Buildings were not included in our marriage settlements, all which property so devised to my wife is to be taken in lieu of the property sold by her consent as aforesaid the titles to which she is to confirm if necessary. Item. I give and bequeath unto my dearly beloved wife my
Mansion House in which I now reside in Meeting Street, Charleston and the whole Lot and all buildings and improvements on the said premises as they may stand at my death together with all the Household and Kitchen Furniture, Plate, Books, Implements and Articles belonging to the said house and premises or therewith usually occupied and used; and in like manner I give and devise to my said wife my Lot and House at Rumney as fenced in with board fence containing about Eight acres more or less, with the Furniture and Implements usually belonging to the Said Premises. To have and to hold all and singular the said Mansion House and Lot and Premises in Charleston and the Furniture and the Plate and other Furniture therewith connected as aforesaid and the said Lot and House at Rumney with every article therewith connected unto my said wife for and during her natural life, freely to be used and enjoyed and at her death to go and be subject to the ulterior disposition of this my Will. I also give and bequeath unto my said Wife and her Executors, Administrators and assigns all the negroes that I may own at the time of my death together with my Chariot Coach and horses. Item. I dispose of the other rents profits and income of my Estate not falling under any of the specific dispositions of my will in the following manner during the life time of my Wife, that is to say: It is my desire that all and singular the rents of my Houses, Land and Real Estate (saving whatever I have given to my

Wife for life) and all interest money on my Bonds, notes and specialties and all dividends on my Bank Shares in Insurance Companies and interest on Stock of every kind (save what I have otherwise disposed of in this my Will) together with every kind and description of Income from my Estate to be received by my Executors to be united and become one consolidated fund the net proceeds whereof shall be paid in equal parts and proportions to my wife and my two daughters each taking one equal third part for the support of themselves and families to be paid over to each as the funds come in or are received by my Executors, share and share alike; that is to say, during the life of my wife, and therefore this arrangement depends on the assent and concurrence of my Wife. But should my Wife elect and conclude otherwise and should choose to take and receive to herself solely the whole income of all her own Settled Estate then and in that case it is my will and I do order and direct that all and singular the rents, interest dividends and income of my own Estate above alluded to be exclusively appropriated during the life of my wife to and for my two daughters for the support of themselves and families one moiety thereof to each to be paid by my Executors and divided between them my daughters every three months as such rents and income shall come in and be received; and in case of either of my daughters should die in the lifetime of my Wife the provision herein made is to go to the husband and children of such daughter for the purpose aforesaid. Item. On the death of my Wife it is my will that all and singular of my Estate be divided between my two daughters, both Real and Personal of what nature and kind soever and wheresoever, situated each a moiety or equal share of my Real and Personal Estate in severally for and during the term of her natural life without impeachment of Waste, to be freely had used, occupied and enjoyed

and should either of my daughters die leaving alive her present or future husband then from and after the death of such daughter I give and devise her moiety or portion to such her surviving husband in Trust for the use of Himself and the proper support, education and maintenance of all the Children of such my daughter to be held, used and applied by such surviving husband during the term of his natural life and upon and amediately after the death of my said daughters and their husbands then it is my Will that moiety of my Estate Real and Personal herein and hereby given to my said daughters for life (and limited to further use during the life of their respective husbands as aforesaid in the event of their surviving my daughters as aforesaid) shall go and I do hereby devise and bequeath the same to the children of my respective daughters the moiety of each daughter to be fairly divided amongst such of her children as she shall leave living at the time of her death, share and share alike and to their respective Executor Heirs, Administrators and assigns forever; Provided always that should any child of either of my daughters have died in the lifetime of the mother leaving child or such child or children is, or, are to take himself or herself or equally amongst them if more than one that portion which the parent would have taken had he or she not have died in the lifetime of my daughter. But should it so happen that either or my daughters at the time of her death should leave no lawful issue or descendants of her body to take her share of my Estate agreeably to the above devises and bequests, or should it so happen at the determination of her husband's life estate as above given in the event of his surviving his wife, no issue or descendant of such daughter should be alive to take the moiety of such my daughter according to the intent of this my Will, and I do

11.

devise the Share and portion if living to be held by her in all respects as her own proper portion is given in this my Will, to be held and subject to the like limitations; or if such the other Sister be not then living then such share or portion to go to and amongst her Children in the same manner as her own moiety is to go under this my Will. In the disposition above made of my Real and Personal Estate, it is not my intention to prevent the selling of disposing any part or parts of my property where it may be most for the advantage of my children or their families, so that the proper proceeds of what may be sold be invested in other property Real or Personal and subjected to the same uses and limitations as the property that may be sold and I therefore empower my Executors by and with the consent and advice of my daughters to be signified in writing under their hands to sell any part of my Real or Personal Estate and make proper titles to purchasers provided always that the proceeds of any sales be duly invested in the purchase of other property that may be more productive and be limited to and for the same uses intents and purposes under this my Will as the property so sold was or would be subject to and liable unto. Item. As to the mode of dividing my Real and Personal Estate after the death of my Wife. I direct the same shall be done in the following manner. Three discreet and well informed men having no connection with any of the parties interested under my Will, Shall be nominated in writing by my Executors or a majority of them who shall first appraise the whole Estate then divide the same fairly according to the best of their judgement into two equal parts or lots which being done I give the election or choice to my eldest daughter Alicia Middleton and other lot is to remain to my other daughter Sarah Dehon, But as I am well persuaded that the price which my Mansion House cost

in London to the said John Hopton during his natural life of five per cent. Interest clear upon capital sum of nine thousand five hundred pounds British Sterling, being the amount of all debts which I hold and which by the agreement with the said John Hopton is to remain equally to my daughters after his death, I, therefore, request my Executrixes and my Executors to be very particular and punctual in remitting or causing to be paid to the said John Hopton in London in conformity to our agreement a clear interest of five per cent, yearly during his natural life on the before mentioned sum in the month of January of each year, for the purpose of providing this annual interest I have usually kept a fund in the said John Hopton's hands and I recommend my Executrixes and Executors to do the same if convenient. And whereas since the death of my Son in law the late Right Reverend Bishop Theodore Dehon, I received a letter from my brother in law John Hopton, Esq. in Islington near London in Great Britain requesting me to make a codicil to my Will which was then made, signed and witnessed on the ninth day of July in the year of our Lord, one thousand eight hundred and sixteen as then my last Will and Testament but since revoked and made void by this my last Will and Testament. But I do hereby acknowledge a codicil made to my last Will, (which Will is now void) which codicil is dated on the fifth day of June in the year of our Lord, one thousand eight hundred and eighteen, and which I attach to and make a part of this Will, and I enjoin it upon as Executrixes and Executors to act upon it accordingly in the same manner as if the whole was contained in this Sheet of Paper. Item. The promises herein made for my beloved wife are to be taken and accepted for and in lieu of Dower on my Estate and do hereby nominate, constitute and appoint, nominate and constitute my beloved Wife and my daughter Sarah Dehon

to Executrixes and Arthur Middleton John Parker and Josiah S. Lovell, Esquires, to be Executors of this my last Will and Testament. In witness whereof, I the said Nathaniel Russell have hereunto set my hand and seal this twenty sixth day of May, in Charleston, in the year of our Lord, one thousand eight hundred and nineteen.

Nathaniel Russell (L.S.)

Signed, sealed, published and declared by the said Nathaniel Russell as for his last Will and Testament, in the presence of us, who in his presence at his request and in the presence of each other have hereunto subscribed our names as witnesses.

Thomas Paine.

Joseph Winthrop.

J. F. Plumeau.

South Carolina. In the name of God Amen. Whereas, I Nathaniel Russell of the City of Charleston, Merchant, did on the ninth day of July which was in the year of our Lord, one thousand eight hundred and sixteen, duly execute my last Will and Testament in writing, bearing date of that day; and whereas since the execution of the said Will circumstances have occurred by which I am induced to make a codicil to the said Will, I do now hereby make a codicil, confirming in all respects my last Will and Testament excepting so far forth as the same may in any wise be altered by this my codicil, which I desire shall be added to my said Will and be taken as part thereof; That is to say, as touching and concerning the capital sum of nine thousand five hundred pounds British Sterling money mentioned in my Will which my good friend and brother in law, John Hopton of London hath settled upon my two daughters as a donation to them at his death for which I, or my Estate, is or am to pay him the annual interest

of five per cent until his death (for which payment I have made provision in my said Will which is to be carried into effect as therein directed) the said John Hopton in his letter to me dated Islington, February 24th, 1818. Having signified his desire that the sum that will fall to my daughter, Sarah, now the widow of the Reverend Bishop Dehon on the decease of him the said John Hopton should after her death go to her present children to be divided equally by such of them as may survive their mother; now to secure the desire of the said John Hopton the Donor, it is my Will, and I hereby direct that the moiety of the said Capital Sum of nine thousand five hundred pounds that will fall to the said Sarah Dehon upon the death of the said John Hopton (which Capital Sum is in my hands and shall be so held, used and enjoyed by her, my said daughter Sarah Dehon during her lifetime, as that her said moiety of the said Capital Sum shall at her death, survive to and vest in her present children or of them as shall be living at the time of the death of my said daughter, to be equally divided share and share alike, or otherwise, and in the event of her said moiety of the said Capital Sum being diverted, or not disposed of at her death agreeably to the desire of the said John Hopton as above expressed, then and in that event I order and direct that out of my said daughter Sarah Dehon's portion of my Estate given her in my Will, there be taken out and set apart and secured a Sum equal to her moiety of the Capital Sum aforesaid; which Sum so to be taken out of her share of my Estate she is to enjoy during her natural life: but at her death it is to be specially delivered over to and divided amongst her present children or such of them as may be left living at the time of her death, equally to be divided share and share alike. Item.

I do hereby revoke the appointment of Josiah Sturgis as an Executor of my Will: and do constitute and appoint my Son in law Arthur Middleton to be one of the Executors of my last Will and Testament. In witness whereof I have hereunto set my hand and seal this fifth day of June, in the year of our Lord, one thousand eight hundred and eighteen and in the forty second year of the Independence of the United States of America.

Nathaniel Russell (L.S.)

Signed, Sealed, Published and Declared by the said Testator as and for a codicil to his last Will and Testament in the presence of us, who in his presence at his request and also in the presence of each other have hereunto subscribed our names as witnesses.

James Miller, Senior. Joseph Winthrop. J.F. Plumeau.

Proved before James D. Mitchell, Esq. O. C. T. D. April 17th, 1820. April 20th, 1820, qualified Arthur Middleton Executor----- May 26th, 1820, qualified Sarah Russell and Sarah Dehon, Executrixes. John Parker and Josiah S. Lovall have renounced. See renumeration filed with original Will. -----

Examined.

42 Co:Sh:

Recorded in Will Book F-1818-1826.

J. D. M.

Recorded on Page 157.