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TREVANION BARLOW DALLAS:
HIS HUNTSVILLE CONNECTIONS

by Mike Kaylor

"...In short, he was a highly educated, honorable, unfailingly courteous gentleman -- a man of the world the like of whom are seldom met."¹

Those words eulogized Trevanion Barlow Dallas on the pages of the evening newspaper in Nashville, Tennessee, on June 20, 1902. The story was not front-page news; it appeared on page 7. It was the city's final tribute, though, to a man who had promoted its industrial causes for more than 30 years. The words marked the end of a life that began as a last farewell to a Naval commodore and spanned 58 years through two wars, two marriages and many business endeavors. As his finances dwindled during the final days, Dallas remained unshaken. He continued to coordinate industrial activities with utmost efficiency. The greatest memorial to this man standing today is a 300,000 square foot structure on the northeast side of Huntsville, Alabama, that originally housed the Dallas Manufacturing Company. Its present tenant is Genesco, a Nashville-based shoe company that employs 75 men and women on the site, warehousing and distributing shoes for such brands as Wrangler, Laredo, J.C. Penney and Sears & Roebuck.²

Dallas was the grandson of Alexander James Dallas, a Philadelphia lawyer who served as United States Secretary of the Treasury under President James Madison in

1814. Trevanion's father was Alexander James Dallas, a naval hero who fired the first shot in the War of 1812 with England.³ During the administration of James K. Polk, Trevanion's uncle, George Mifflin Dallas, was Vice President of the United States. As presiding officer of the Senate, he pressed for the hasty admission of Texas to the Union, and for his efforts,⁴ Texans named Dallas County after him. Other noble relatives of Trevanion Barlow Dallas included his aunt, Princess Murat, wife of Prince Achille Murat, who was the son of France's King of Naples and Caroline Bonapart.

THE DALLAS FAMILY

Trevanion Barlow Dallas was born on September 11, 1843. His father, Commodore Alexander James Dallas, had requested a three- to four-year assignment as leader of the Pacific Squadron in the U.S. Navy during the spring before Trevanion was born. The commodore left for Peru without ever seeing his child. The following summer, on June 3, 1844, Commodore Alexander James Dallas died in Callao, Peru, of⁵ what was called "paralysis." He was 53.⁵ The senior Dallas had been a sailor since the age of 14. He had joined as a midshipman in 1850 and advanced through the ranks to the highest level allowed at that time. He was described as "arrogant, independent and solitary -- a graceful dancer and an excellent conversationalist who spoke several languages." He had a fiery temper and was often callous toward his family.⁶

In 1811, he fired on the English man-of-war "Little Belt," the first hostile

blast of the not-yet-declared War of 1812. The next year, he was cleared of any wrongdoing by a court of ⁷enquiry and commissioned a full lieutenant. During the late 1820s, he was sent to Pensacola to establish a naval station there, which he commanded off and on during the remainder of his career. Commodore Dallas was married in 1821 to Henrietta Meade, daughter of Richard Worsam Meade and sister of the famed Union General George Gordon Meade. The couple had two children, Richard Worsam Dallas, who died in 1827 at the age of 3, and Alexander James Dallas, who fought in the 23rd infantry during the Civil War and died childless in the 1890s. The first Mrs. Dallas died in Florida in 1831. ⁸ Commodore Dallas was married a second time, in 1836, to Mary Byrd Willis, daughter of Col. Byrd C. Willis of Fredricksburg, Virginia. The second Mrs. Dallas bore three children, Bayard Charles Dallas, in 1837, Mary Willis Dallas, born about 1840, and Trevanion Dallas, in 1843.

Trevanion was named for his uncle, the youngest and probably favorite brother of his father. He had been a lawyer and later an associate judge of the district court in Pittsburgh before dying of scarlet fever in 1841. Dallas' father Alexander was the oldest son of Alexander James Dallas, a lawyer of Philadelphia. The elder Dallas' second son was George Mifflin Dallas, who became vice president of the United States under James K. Polk in 1844. He also served as a minister to Russia and was sent to England at the start of the Civil War to lobby against Britain's ¹⁰recognition of the Confederacy, in 1861.

Alexander James Dallas, father of Commodore Dallas and George Mifflin Dallas, was born in Jamaica in 1759 and died in Trenton, New Jersey in 1817. He served three terms as Secretary of State of Pennsylvania, and in the early 1800s, President Thomas Jefferson appointed him U.S. attorney for the Eastern Department of Pennsylvania. In 1814, he became Secretary to the Treasury under President James Madison and saved the nation from bankruptcy by reorganizing the federal bank. He then became Secretary of War from March 1815 to November 1816, charged with reducing the military to a peacetime force.¹¹

The Dallas family has been traced to William Dallas I of Budgate in 1458. Trevanion Barlow Dallas is said to be a great-great-great grandson of Sir Nicholas Travanion of Cornwall, England, and a great-great grandson of Dr. Barlow, a clergyman of the Church¹² of England and an astronomer of his time.

Through his background, Dallas had the advantages of a good education and wide range of experiences. His travels, however, took him away from those comforts, into challenges in both the social and business world. When war broke out in America during 1861, Dallas split from the fold of his aristocratic kin and headed to Florida to join the Confederacy. After the war ended, he traveled in Europe and joined yet another conflict. He finally settled in Nashville, where he put his abilities as an organizer to work in industry.

THE YOUNG TREVANION

Little information is available about the childhood of Trevanion Barlow Dallas. Accounts of his death say he was born in Washington, D.C. After his father's death, Dallas and his mother remained in Florida, where they were listed in the 1850 and 1860 U.S. Census as residents of Pensacola. He apparently was greatly influenced through the years by his mother's family, the Willises, who lived in the areas around Richmond and Fredricksburg, Virginia. He is said to have graduated from the University of Virginia in Charlottesville.¹³ When the Civil War broke out, Dallas was forced to choose sides. His father's relatives and his half-brother in Pennsylvania were all staunch supporters of the Union, and he was offered a commission in the United States Army. His sentiments lay, however, with his mother's family in Virginia, and at the first call to arms, he left the university, returned to Florida and joined the forces of Gen. H. H. Chase as a private.¹⁴ Dallas fought with the Confederate forces at Forts McRee and Barrancas in Florida, as well as the bloody attacks at Fort Pickens on Santa Rosa Island in November of 1861. He also fought in the Battle of Shiloh in April 1862, and after that followed the Army of Tennessee through the remainder of the war.

Even in war, Dallas put the business sense he had inherited from his grandfather to good use. He became a lieutenant in the ordnance division under Gen. T. C. Hindman. His reports to Lt. Col. H. Oladsowki, chief of ordnance for the Army of Tennessee, show how he conducted his inventories of

ammunition in a businesslike manner. "The expenditure of ammunition can only be arrived at by approximation, as the brigade supplied themselves once from the ordnance wagons of the enemy." The 20-year-old lieutenant added that "before closing this report, I would like to call your attention to the fact ..." that several cases of .69 caliber shells seemed to have been mislabeled.¹⁵ The report was written following an attack at Missionary Ridge, October 24, 1863. Eighteen months later, on April 30, 1865, Dallas made his last inventory of the Civil War as part of S. D. Lee's corps. At that time, he surrendered more than 1,000 weapons and nearly 40,000 rounds of ammunition to the Union forces.¹⁶

Following the surrender, Dallas served six months as a naval engineer in the yard at Pensacola that his father had established.¹⁷ He then went to Paris to visit his aunt, Princess Murat. While there, he enjoyed a rich social life among the aristocracy. But in 1867, when Austria and Prussia went to war, Dallas joined the staff of a Prussian general as an aide-de-camp and followed the combat troops.¹⁸ When a brief period of peace returned to Prussia, Dallas headed back to America, where he found employment in the banking business in New York City. After a brief stay there and in Virginia, Dallas moved to Nashville in 1869 and went to work for Hugh Douglas & Company, a dry-goods firm. The same year, he married the daughter of Hugh Douglas, Ella A. Douglas.¹⁹ They had one child, Hugh Douglas Dallas, before the first Mrs. Dallas died on March 10, 1873, in Pensacola, Florida.²⁰ Dallas continued to work for Hugh Douglas & Company through 1879, even after he married Ida Bonner, daughter of

Dr. Moses H. Bonner of ²¹Fayetteville, Tennessee, on January 6, 1876.

Through his early years in Nashville, Dallas owned various pieces of property, but usually lived in a boarding house. He settled his first wife in a home near the intersection of Capital Avenue and Park Street, but after she died he lived there only a few years before moving into the Nicholson House. Nashville city directories of the period show that he and his second wife changed residences several times during the next 12 years, before finally buying a lot in 1892 at the intersection of West End Avenue and Vanderbilt Street.²² There they built a fine brownstone house.²² Dallas and his second wife had two sons and three daughters. The oldest daughter, Anne Willis Dallas, married Guilford Dudley of Nashville. The second daughter, Trevania, married Hugh Blair-Smith of Nashville. The oldest son, Alexander James, became a public accountant in Nashville, and the second son, George Mifflin Dallas, was a lawyer in Nashville. The third daughter, Elizabeth, married Kenneth Ward-Smith²³ of Nashville, a brother to Hugh Blair-Smith.

In 1880, Dallas had left Hugh Douglas & Co., and the following year was listed as treasurer of the Tennessee and ²⁴Los Cerillos Gold and Silver Mining Company. By 1882, he had started the Nashville Cotton Mill, with a man named William²⁵ Hinchliffe as the plant's superintendent.²⁵ Hinchliffe would later oversee day-to-day operations of a similar mill Dallas organized in Huntsville, Alabama.

During the latter years of the 19th century, the T. B. Dallas family frequently entertained at their brownstone house at 1800 West End Avenue. Trevania, the second daughter, was a debutante during 1900, and her younger sister became one five years later.²⁶ Theirs were the lives of true socialites. Meanwhile, the finances of their father appeared to falter. In 1892, even as he was undertaking a massive venture in the Huntsville cotton mill, Dallas secured a trust deed and borrowed \$5,000 against their house on Capital Avenue. In 1896, he secured a second loan for \$8,000 on a trust deed to the West End home. Both loans were unpaid when he died in 1902.

THE DALLAS MANUFACTURING COMPANY

During the late 1880s, the leaders of Huntsville began an all-out effort to bring industry into the small cotton-farming community. The earliest major move was by the North Alabama Improvement Company, which was formed on March 17, 1886, to promote the area. Among its members were such businessmen as Charles H. Halsey, Milton Humes, John L.²⁷ Rison and Michael J. O'Shaughnessey. They began a concerted effort to interest Eastern capitalists in investing in Huntsville, and one of their greatest successes came in 1890.

Trevanion Barlow Dallas was vice president and general manager of the Nashville Cotton Mills in the Tennessee capital, which he had organized and established in 1881 with the help of Nashville lawyer Godfrey M. Fogg. One member of the North Alabama Improvement Company,

O'Shaughnessey, had been in the cottonseed oil business in Nashville at the turn of 1880 and probably was²⁸ familiar with Dallas' earlier ventures. In addition, the Weekly Mercury praised Charles H. Halsey "for his untiring zeal and indefatigable labor" in bringing the Dallas Manufacturing Company to Huntsville.²⁹ As a result of their activities, when the call went out from the North Alabama Improvement Company, Dallas was listening. The first public meeting in Huntsville pertaining to the new mill was in November 1890 and was chaired by Captain Milton Humes. He called for stock subscriptions from the citizens present, and those who responded included some of the most prominent names in the city³⁰ -- Rison, Jones, White, Lowenthal and Rand. That same week, the directors of the Dallas Manufacturing Company met for the first time, and among them were W. R. Rison, J. R. Stevens, M. J. O'Shaughnessey and Oscar Goldsmith. Commissioners listed for the corporation were Godfrey M. Fogg, Augustus H. Robinson and Dallas, all of Nashville; William W. Flannagan of New York; and Humes of Huntsville.³¹

To raise the \$500,000 capital needed to construct the mill, the company issued 5,000 shares of stock at \$100 per share. In the initial stock subscriptions, the North Alabama Improvement Company held 250 shares, Dallas and Fogg owned 200 shares, while M. J. O'Shaughnessey, J. F. O'Shaughnessey, A. H. Robinson and W. W. Flannagan owned 100 shares apiece. The remainder belonged to several other Northern capitalists and dozens of loyal Huntsvillians. When Dallas offered the last remaining shares of stock in March 1891,

the Weekly Mercury proclaimed that "the successful completion of the Dallas mills will inaugurate a new and prosperous era in the life of our city."³²

The Nashville Cotton Mill consisted of two different mills, which combined had 18,000 spindles and 500 looms. It was one of the largest in the South. When Dallas Manufacturing began operation in 1892, it had 25,000 spindles and 750 looms.³³

As the Dallas mill was nearing completion, a group of Northern industrialists arrived in Huntsville to form the Northwestern Land Association, which took up the cause of promoting Huntsville from the North Alabama Improvement Company. Among the leaders of this group were William S. Wells, president; Tracy W. Pratt, vice president; W. I. Wellman, secretary; and J. A. Ward, treasurer. These names appear prominently even today on street signs in the old mill village. Their activities also later brought another large textile mill, the Merrimack Mill, to Huntsville. Early activities of the Northwestern Land Association are detailed in an account of the death of Wells in early 1900.³⁴

Meanwhile, another group of businessmen organized the Huntsville Land Company in 1892 to build houses necessary for the Dallas mill workers. The Weekly Mercury called it a "syndicate of Philadelphia" and identified the major stockholders as Oscar Goldsmith of Huntsville and "his partner in the mercantile business, M. M. Newman of Philadelphia." The newspaper said stock in the company was \$100,000 and had been paid in full upon

incorporation. Goldsmith was elected president; W. R. Rison, treasurer; and Newman, S. Blumenthal of Philadelphia and David D. Shelby³⁵ of Huntsville were executive board members.

Dallas had, in fact, ushered in a new era in Huntsville. This mammoth mill was followed by not one, but two additional textile factories during the next decade. By 1899, Dallas Manufacturing Company had outgrown its 750 feet-by-106 feet, five-story building. The company's board of directors voted an additional stock issue to double the company's capital to \$1.2 million. By that time, the largest stockholders included S. M. Millikin and Albert W. Green, both of New York, with 708 1/2 and 700 shares, respectively. Dallas still owned 150 shares in the company and was³⁶ secretary of the board and general manager. However, by this time, Dallas' family in Nashville was outliving its means, and the respected businessman was \$13,000 in debt. Records show that the Northwestern Mutual Life Insurance Company held two liens against his present and former homes, which remained³⁷ unpaid until after the businessman's death. Both loans remained outstanding until several years later, and one was finally paid off by the³⁸ new owner of the Dallas' brownstone home.

IN SUMMARY

During his last years, Trevanion Barlow Dallas remained active in the affairs of the Dallas Manufacturing Company and the Phoenix Mills in Nashville, with which Nashville Cotton Mills had merged. Just before his

death in 1902, he sold to William R. and Archie L. Rison the summer home in Viduta where his family had vacationed on Monte Sano during the later years of the 1890s. The home had previously been in the Rison family for many years, when it was the summer residence of John R. Rison and his wife Tennie.³⁹

Trevanion Barlow Dallas was a tireless organizer among Northern and Southern capitalists. His work gained him the respect of industrialists all across the nation. An 1892 article reprinted in the Huntsville Mercury from the Boston Financial and Commercial News praised him, saying "the mention of the name of Mr. T. B. Dallas in the cotton market and throughout the country carries with it a prestige and confidence enjoyed in great degree by none in the South...."⁴⁰ His own connections in the East had been a great benefit to the Southern towns of Nashville and Huntsville. Among the larger stock owners in Dallas Manufacturing at the turn of the century was a James D. Willis of New York, possibly one of Dallas' maternal relatives. The last days of Trevanion B. Dallas brought a sad end to a glamorous life. His first-born child by his first wife, a son named Hugh Douglas Dallas, died in 1900, and friends said⁴¹ the elder Dallas was broken by the sorrow. He fell ill in late 1901 and never recovered. Dallas' son Alexander represented his father at meetings of the Dallas directors in December of 1901, and before the mid-year summer meeting in 1902, Dallas was dead.⁴² After having been one of the biggest stockholders when the mill opened in 1892, his family was forced to sell his entire

holdings shortly after his death. Dallas' obituary appeared 10 hard years after the Dallas mill began operations, but it reflected the same respect for the man that he had commanded before: "While he was not a man to thrust himself before the public gaze, he was one who was quick to identify himself with every worthy cause and undertaking."⁴³

THE END

Footnotes

¹ "Peaceful Death of Mr. T. B. Dallas," The Nashville Banner, June 20, 1902, p. 7.

² Unpublished interview with Mr. Floyd Drake, General Manager of Genesco in Huntsville, Alabama, April 23, 1984.

³ Waller, William, editor, Nashville in the 1990s, Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1970, p. 248.

⁴ Belohlavek, John M., George Mifflin Dallas: Jacksonian Patrician, University Park and London: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1977, p. 201n.

⁵ Ibid., p. 67.

⁶ Ibid., p. 67.

⁷ Hamer, Phillip M., Tennessee--A History: 1673-1932, Volume 4, New York: The American Historical Society, Inc., 1933, p. 747.

⁸ Belohlavek, p.66.

- ⁹ Dallas, James, The History of the Family of Dallas, Edinburgh: T. and A. Constable Ltd., 1921, p. 507.
- ¹⁰ Belohlavek, p. 180.
- ¹¹ Hamer, p. 746.
- ¹² Ibid., pp. 745-747.
- ¹³ Ibid., p. 747.
- ¹⁴ Waller, p. 248.
- ¹⁵ War of Rebellion: Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies, Washington: Government Printing Office, 1895, Series I, Volume 30, Part 2, p. 332.
- ¹⁶ Ibid., Volume 47, Part 3, p. 856.
- ¹⁷ The Nashville Banner, June 20, 1902, p. 7.
- ¹⁸ Hamer, p. 747.
- ¹⁹ Dallas, p. 507.
- ²⁰ Acklen, Jeannette Tillotson, Tennessee Tombstone Inscriptions and Manuscripts, Nashville: 1967, Volume 1, p. 54.
- ²¹ Hamer, p. 747.
- ²² Waller, William, editor, Nashville From 1900 to 1910, Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1972, p. 182.
- ²³ Hamer, p. 747.

24 Rogers, George, compiler, Nashville City Directory, Volume XVII, 1881, p. 187.

25 Rogers, George, compiler, Nashville City Directory, Volume XVIII, 1882, p. 281.

26 Waller, 1972, p. 313.

27 Madison County Corporative Record, Volume 1, p. 17.

28 Tennessee Census, 1880.

29 "The Dallas Mill," The Weekly Mercury, November 12, 1890, p. 8.

30 Ibid., p. 5.

31 Dallas Manufacturing Minutes Book, No. 1, p. 1 and p. 8.

32 The Weekly Mercury, February 18, 1891, p. 8.

33 The Weekly Argus, September 29, 1892, p. 2.

34 The Weekly Mercury, March 7, 1901, p. 3.

35 The Weekly Mercury, June 22, 1892, p. 2.

36 Madison County Corporative Record, Volume 1, p. 455.

37 Trust Deed Book, Davidson County, Tennessee, 1900-1906.

38 Ibid.

- 39 Madison County Deed Book, Volume 90,
p. 169.
- 40 The Weekly Argus, September 29, 1892,
p. 2.
- 41 The Nashville Banner, June 20, 1902,
p. 7.
- 42 Dallas Mill Minutes Book No. 1, p.
230.
- 43 The Nashville Banner, June 20, 1902,
p. 7.