

MAGNOLIA MESSENGER



The Friends of Magnolia Cemetery

"Remove not the ancient Landmark"

Summer 2012

Moses Waring: Mobile's Salt King

Last year an auction in New Orleans included a hexagonal black marble topped table with the provenance "Waring family American Gothic Carved Rosewood Center Table, ca. 1845." The final auction price? \$47,800.

It was purchased by the Detroit Institute of Arts which subsequently named it their favorite acquisition of 2011. Terming it "an icon of the Gothic Revival in the United States." Their curatorial staff describe it as "one of only two examples of this table to have a reliable provenance back to the mid-nineteenth century. The table was originally purchased for the Mobile, Alabama home of Moses Waring."

But who was Moses Waring and where was his home?

This table and many other fine pieces of furniture once occupied the residence of Moses Waring which stood on the south west corner of Government and Claiborne streets for almost a century. Today the parking lot of the Mobile Carnival Museum fills that corner, but to the immediate south stands the former service wing to the Waring home and beyond that its very recognizable garconniere, also known as the "Waring Texas House."

A post card image from the early 20th century reveals that Waring's home was a two story brick structure with a recessed doorway facing Government Street. While precariously near Claiborne Street, a lot to the west provided a shaded garden.

The house dated to 1846 when it had been built for Judge Edmund Dargan (1805-1879), who served as chief justice of the Alabama Supreme Court from 1849 to 1852. In 1851 Dargan sold his home to Moses Waring and subsequent city directories indicate Dargan had moved to the north east corner of Dauphin and Ann Street, where Central Presbyterian Church stands today. Dargan is buried at Magnolia Cemetery in Square 19.



"The Waring Family American Gothic Center Table, ca. 1846-1851," now in the collection of the Detroit Institute of Arts. Also put up for auction were the portraits of the table's original owners.

Waring, like so many Mobile merchants of the time, was a New Englander by birth. He was a native of Ridgefield, Conn. which today is a popular suburb of Manhattan. When Waring was born it was a rural farm community.

Waring's father, William, moved to Cincinnati in 1811 and died the following year from wounds received in his service during the War of 1812. Moses Waring ultimately found his way to Mobile where an aunt and uncle resided.

According to his obituary, Moses Waring was "a painter by trade and came to Mobile with nothing but his brush." The article continued that once he had accumulated some capital "he gradually got into the ship chandlery business."

The earliest Mobile city directories of the 1830's show Waring in the hardware business with John Bartlett in the firm of Bartlett and Waring. The 1837 directory lists them as being "Commission Merchants" with an office in the "new buildings, Front Street." This street ran along the riverfront, east of Commerce and Water streets. His residence was listed as being on North Conception Street between Congress and State streets.

By 1844 Waring was listed at 91 Commerce Street with his occupation that of “Steamboat Agent.” In 1850 his occupation was given as “Commission Merchant” and his residence listed simply as “country.”

The Warings Move to Government Street

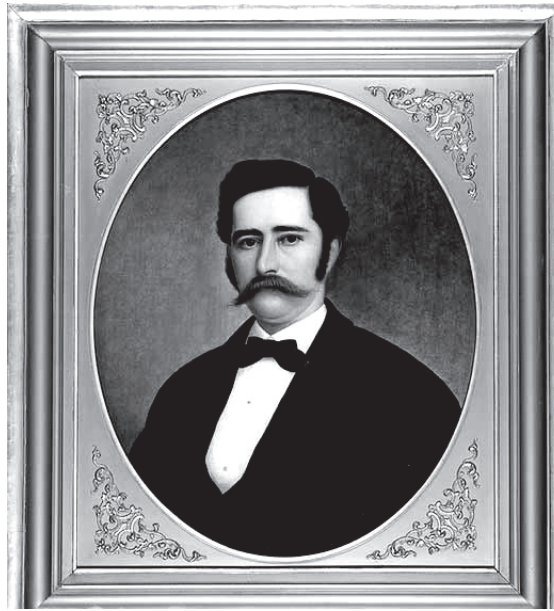
Moses Waring had married Sarah Ellen Smoot, a native of Washington, D. C. and the couple had six children, the eldest of whom was born in 1837. Perhaps by 1851 the house “in the country” had been outgrown or Waring had tired of the commute. In that year they purchased Mr. Dargan’s five year old house on Government Street, and then bought the adjoining lot. The house was a typical side-hall design with two spacious rooms on the east side separated by pocket doors.

The Warings enlarged the house, adding a thirty foot long dining room to the west and a service wing to the south. Oddly the number of bedrooms remained the same: three. A stable was built around 1856 containing stalls, and rooms for carriages and feed. The lot was large enough to contain a chicken house and a pen for a cow.

The 1860 Federal Census found the 51 year old “merchant” residing in the house with his wife and six children aged between 9 and 23. The city directory also notes that his profession had changed to “salt merchant.” He apparently would remain in this field until his retirement nineteen years later.

A Fortune in Salt

Until the advent of refrigeration late in the century, salt was one of the world’s most important commodities. Some historians equate the value of salt in the 19th century with the current value of oil. And just like oil, countries with salt deposits sought to limit exports and keep prices high.



*Moses Waring
(1808-1884)*

into wheel barrows and hauled to awaiting schooners for shipment.

During the Civil War with ice importation at a halt, salt was particularly important for food preservation. The northern troops made a special effort to target salt supplies in the South. General Sherman once said “without salt the enemy cannot make bacon and salt beef. Salt is eminently contraband because of its use in curing meats.”

One of the biggest exporters of salt in that century was the island of Bermuda which harvested it from the Turks and Caicos islands. Those islands had salinas – shallow depressions which filled with saltwater. When the water evaporated fields of salt remained. The salt was shoveled

Just where Mr. Waring obtained his salt is not known. What is known is that by 1867 his business was known as Moses Waring and Son and consisted of Moses and his sons Bartlett (26) and Marion (24). Waring’s Salt Warehouse was listed at “South Commerce Street, west of Theatre.” All were living at what was now numbered as 91 Government Street.



*Sarah Ellen Smoot Waring
(1811-1870)*

Thomas L. Harrison and the Waring Texas House

The Waring’s daughter, Mary, married Thomas Locke Harrison in 1867. Harrison was an 1860 graduate of Annapolis who in 1861 had tried unsuccessfully to request foreign duty to avoid making a choice between the Union and the Confederacy. A Virginian by birth, he chose the South and was executive officer of the C.S.S. Morgan on which he led a minor mutiny preventing it from being scuttled by its captain

In 1868 Mr. Waring bought the ca. 1840 structure to the south of his home which held a side-galleried building atop a raised basement. It had been built by a “Mr. J. Nugent”

and was last used as a school-house when Waring purchased it. He converted it into a garconniere or bachelors' quarters for his sons. This date would coincide with their entry into their father's lucrative business as well as the arrival of the Harrison newlyweds into the main house.

The structure has been termed a "texas" as these buildings were usually far removed from the main house, and at the time, the state of Texas was about as far away from civilization as could be imagined.

1868 was also the year that Moses Waring began a two year run as president of the First National Bank of Mobile. Waring had been one of the original subscribers to the bank's stock in 1865 and was its second president.

A Crowd at the Waring House

The Federal Census of 1870 reveals that there were fifteen adults living at 91 Government Street. In addition to the 61 year old "salt merchant" and his wife were sons Marion and Joseph, two unmarried daughters, Cora and Belle, and their sister Mary and her husband Thomas Harrison, a commission merchant, and their one year old son, Moses Waring Harrison.

The eldest son, "Bart" does not appear in the household on the census but is listed there by city directories until 1872 when his address was given as "boards Laclede House." This former hotel still stands on Government Street today.

Moses Waring's wife, Ellen died later in 1870 and was buried in the family plot at Magnolia Cemetery. She was 59 years old.



The Waring Home stood at the south west corner of Government and Claiborne streets for nearly a century. Waring added the one story wing to the west to house a large dining room with a canopied balcony overlooking a side garden. Despite having six children, the house only contained three bedrooms. Descendants remained here long after their neighbors had escaped an avalanche of commercial intrusion. (Historic American Buildings Survey)



The Waring Texas House

In 1868 Moses Waring bought this building at the back of his lot to serve as a garconniere for his three sons. The boys' sister had recently married and the newlyweds were living with the Warings. The unique building has been carefully maintained by Mobile's oldest Mystic organization since 1966.

Marion, who was known as "Man" and Joseph, (Joe) undoubtedly were occupying the Texas while the two story service wing housed seven domestics ranging in age from 20 to 49. Their positions were not listed but certainly would have ranged from a nursemaid to a stableman. The eldest of those servants, Julia Blacborn, would ultimately be buried in the family plot at Magnolia Cemetery in 1910 at the age of 90 beneath a handsome headstone.

Waring , Brainard & Co.

William J. Brainard, a Civil War veteran and later county sheriff, joined as a partner in the salt business in 1873 and the firm was renamed "Waring, Brainard and Co." Brothers Marion (30) and Joseph (25) were running the business with Mr. Brainard. The Waring's oldest son, Bartlett, had died in 1872 at the age of 34, apparently unmarried.

By the late 1870's the salt firm had been taken over solely by William Brainard. The 1879 city directory lists no occupation for Moses or his sons Joseph and Marion, but all were at 91 Government Street. A map of Mobile from 1879 indicates that Moses Waring owned substantial tracts of valuable real estate including warehouses and numerous commercial buildings on Water and Commerce streets which would have provided a steady rental income.

Cora Waring married and moved to Baltimore. Her sister, Belle, like her three brothers, never married.

A Funeral Attended by Our Best People

The second of the Waring's three sons, Man, died in Sep-

tember of 1882. His obituary noted that he was 40 years old and had succumbed to a “disease which had troubled him for years,” but that “he had bore his sufferings bravely



By the mid-twenties a tire store and a Ford dealership had replaced the elegant Government Street homes of Mr. Waring's contemporaries. Still, his descendants stayed put – for a while. This is a view looking north across Government Street with the Waring house just out of sight to the immediate left.
- McCall Library/USA Archives

and patiently. His amiable disposition and pleasant manners made him a universal favorite and few young men have enjoyed more popularity.”

The obituary stated that the 4:00 PM funeral, held at Christ Church, “was largely attended by our best people.” Burial had followed in Magnolia Cemetery.

Mobile Loses a Most Influential Citizen

Two years after Man's untimely death his father died. According to his obituary, the 76 year old had been in failing health and “the old citizen passed away without a struggle.” The article discussed his climb to success and that he had sold his wharves to the city of Mobile for \$300,000 but always had “a warm spot in his heart for the young man struggling under difficulties in the battle of life.”

His death rated an obituary in the Baltimore Sun titled “Death of a Wealthy Alabamian” and described Waring as “one of Mobile's wealthiest and most influential citizens.”

Moses Waring's funeral was held at Christ Church, which according to the Mobile Register, was “crowded with mourners and friends. In the galleries above were many colored people who had known and admired Mr. Waring in life and came to pay their last token of respect.” The hearse left for Magnolia Cemetery “followed by a large concourse of people.”

The Waring house in 1884 was now down to unmarried siblings, Joe and Belle, Mary and Tom Harrison and their two children, Moses Waring Harrison and his sister, Ellen (later Mrs. Francis J. Inge). Eight years later, in 1892, Joe Waring and Tom Harrison were also carried from Christ Church to the Waring lot at Magnolia Cemetery.

Fit for a King

In 1900 at the age of 31 Moses Waring Harrison reigned over Mobile's carnival as King Felix, III. By that time he was working for the Barney-Cavanagh Hardware Company on North Commerce Street. Nearly 70 years earlier his illustrious grandfather had been in the same line of work. It would certainly be a bittersweet year for Waring. He lost his mother in July of that year. She was only 55.



Moses Waring Harrison (1869-1939)

Namesake of his illustrious grandfather, pictured here as King Felix III in 1900. Harrison finally gave up the family home on Government Street for a quieter Dauphin Way address. He would not enjoy it long. (Photo courtesy Mobile Carnival Museum)

Waring married Miss Cecil Hammond and the couple lived

on Government Street with Aunt Belle Waring. They had two daughters, Mary Waring and Alice.

In 1914 Waring Harrison became a charter member of the Rotary Club of Mobile, joining under the classification of Wholesale Hardware. Three years later the Barney-Cavanaugh Hardware store closed and his profession was listed as "Special Agent, U.S. Bureau of Exports," in 1918. Then in 1920, he was listed as secretary of an export firm, the Southern Trading Co.

Progress Comes Knocking

During the 1920's Government Street was changing. In 1920, the brick mansion west of Government Street Presbyterian Church was demolished for a car dealership. The house immediately across the street from the Waring home came down for a tire dealership. The widow next door sold her home to Roche Mortuary in 1923. Automobiles were quickly outnumbering horse drawn carriages, and stables like those behind the Waring home became archaic.

Despite the changes around them, the Harrisons, and Aunt Belle stayed put. It was down to just the Harrisons when Belle Waring made her final trip out to Magnolia Cemetery in 1927 at the age of 76.

The stock market crash in 1929 apparently sounded the death knell for Waring Harrison's export firm. The 61 year old's profession was "Probation Officer" according to the city directory of 1930.

A House Worth Studying

In November of 1936 a photographer with the Historic American Building Survey, a federally funded project, visited the Waring house. Detailed blueprints were rendered and crisp photographic images survive showing a once proud house clearly down on its luck.

The parlor and library still contain their mid-nineteenth century furniture and the Gothic Revival table which Detroit now treasures is visible among the ancient floral carpet and peeling wallpaper.



Waring Lot, Magnolia Cemetery

This handsome cross marks the grave of Moses and Sarah Ellen Waring, near Confederate Rest.

A view into the stair hall reveals a stovepipe meandering upward from a heating apparatus. The stables still hold a fine carriage, although it is nearly obscured by debris. Photos of the interior of the "texas" show a room crammed with unused furniture, a desk open revealing stacks of papers.

An Empty House

Just as Judge Dargan before them, the Harrisons left Government Street for a house on Dauphin Street, near Ann Street by 1938. Waring Harrison died a year later at the age of 70. A newspaper editorial noted his passing came "at a time when Mobile was making its preparations for the celebration of Mardi Gras, an event which Mr. Harrison loved and for which he worked during his lifetime. His passing will leave a vacancy among the carnival celebrants that cannot be filled."

Another vacancy soon came to the corner of Government and Claiborne when the wreckers came to number 351. The main house was smashed to bits, and with its western garden paved it provided ample space for a used car lot. Soon Mobile and the rest of the nation would enter World War II and the memories of the Warings and their once proud home quickly faded.

The Warings' texas became home to the city's oldest Mystic organization in 1966. The servants' wing currently holds the offices of the Mobile Carnival Association. The Mobile Carnival Museum operates in the house next door and the corner parking lot is used for parties during Mobile's Mardi Gras season. Surely Mr. Harrison would approve.

A piece of Mobile history is now being treasured in Michigan. The table was not the only Waring heirloom to be disposed of at that New Orleans auction house. Also sold were oil portraits of patriarch Moses Waring and his wife Ellen in their handsome gilt frames. Their current whereabouts are unknown.

Tom McGehee

President's Message

I am excited to begin my second tour as President of the Friends of Magnolia Cemetery! We have come a long way since I attended my first meeting back in 1989! The Memorial Fence project around the perimeter of the Cemetery is almost complete, much needed restoration and stabilization of monuments and markers has taken place, grounds and landscaping has been much improved. This has all been accomplished with a dedicated Board, staff, volunteers and members working with the City to maintain Mobile's only active municipal cemetery! But as with anything 175 years old, much remains to be done.

Your membership helps us in our continuing restoration and maintenance of historic Magnolia Cemetery. Please stay current and encourage your friends and acquaintances to join as we work together towards our next 175 years!

Douglas Burtu Kearley, AIA, NCARB, President.

Please

Don't forget your Friends!

Renew Your Membership Today

THANKS!

(We regret that as a non-profit agency we cannot afford to send newsletters if your membership has expired.)

Q & A by

H. F. "Tige" Marston
Cemetery Specialist, City of Mobile

Q: When may I come in to your office to research through your records regarding my ancestors?

A: Although many think my office is a genealogical library, Magnolia is an active cemetery and my primary goal must remain the arranging of internments and the meeting with family members. We are not equipped for walk in researchers. Also, because of the fragile condition and age of many of the cemetery documents we do not allow direct access to them by the public.

Researchers are asked to put their requests in writing and to send them to me at 1202 Virginia Street, Mobile, AL 36604. I do my best to respond within two to three weeks.

In time Janet Savage and I will complete the Herculean task of having all of Magnolia Cemetery's records on line. Until that time we must ask for your requests to be in writing and for your patience.

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Friends of Magnolia Cemetery • P. O. Box 6383 • Mobile, Alabama 36660
(251) 432-8672

- Please find enclosed my tax-deductible membership contribution of \$35.
- I would like to make an additional contribution of \$_____ to The Friends of Magnolia Cemetery.
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- Renewal I am a new member.

Name _____

Address _____

City/State _____ Zip _____

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<i>In Memory of...</i>	<i>Given By...</i>
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P.O. Box 6383
Mobile, Alabama 36660
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