

The Last Laird of Sapelo

What is a Laird?

How did the title come about? The Spalding family has been associated with the Ashantilly Estate in Scotland for generations. The most notable member of the Spalding family to hold the title of Laird of Ashantilly was William Spalding, who acquired the estate in the late 18th-Century. He was a wealthy merchant who made his fortune in Jamaica and invested in property in Scotland. He built the Ashantilly House in Scotland in the early 1800s, and his descendants continued to live on the estate for many years.

So, what exactly is a Laird?

Historically, "Laird" is a term associated with a Scottish landowner or landlord. The term denoted a man who owned a large estate or a significant portion of land in Scotland.

The responsibilities of a Laird varied, depending on the time period and specific circumstances. But, a Laird usually wielded significant power and authority over their estate and the people who lived on it. Responsibilities of a Laird in Scotland included:

- Managing the estate, overseeing the day-to-day operations, managing the agricultural and livestock production, maintaining the buildings and infrastructure, and caring for all who lived and worked on the land, providing housing, food, and other necessities.
- The Laird held the authority to enforce the law on their estate; resolving disputes between all those under his care, punishing criminal behavior, and maintaining order and security.
- Many Lairds served in local government positions, such as justices of the peace or as members of the county councils, making decisions that affected the community.
- In times of war, the Laird served in the military, either by leading troops or by providing financial support for the war effort.

However, a Laird is not a title of nobility, as in the Lords of England. The term derives from a corporeal hereditament, or inheritable property explicitly tied to the physical land. It is a designation that cannot be bought or sold without selling the land. A Laird's family possessing a registered coat of arms is recognized as a member of Scotland's minor nobility, and may be likewise recognized as a chieftain or chief, or descendant of one,

Primary Character Profiles & Facts

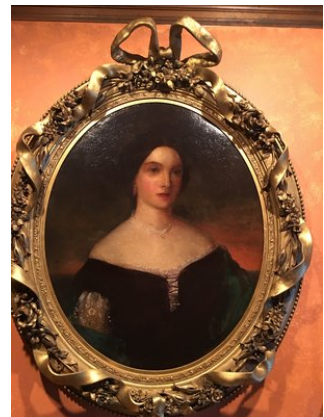
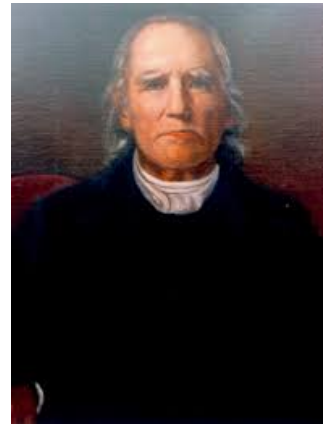
The Spalding Family

James Spalding (1735-1794) married **Margery McIntosh**, 1772. James arrived from County Perth, Scotland in 1760. He built a prosperous mercantile enterprise up and down the coastal region with partner, Donald Mackay on St. Simons Island. He and his father, **Thomas Spalding**, held the title of *Barony of Ashantilly*, although the family's grand estate had been left mortgaged and abandoned after the failed Scottish uprising of 1745. **Margery McIntosh's** ancestors had been the Highland leaders who founded Darien in 1736. James built his home amid the ruins of Frederica, and became a prosperous planter as he expanded his land holdings and added slaves to work on his estate. Margery's father was William McIntosh of Fair Hope plantation in St. Andrews Parish. During the Revolutionary War, James remained loyal to the English crown only to lose his property and wealth, but recovered to become the wealthiest man in Glynn County. He died in 1794, and owned 94 slaves and 5,550 acres upon his death.

The **Ashantilly estate** in Scotland was granted to Sir Peter Spalding by Robert the Bruce in recognition of exploits at Berwick Castle, 1318.

Thomas Spalding (1774-1851) was the only child of James and Margery and was born at Frederica. He inherited most of his father's holdings. After the Revolutionary War he got his formal education in New England. In 1795 after he got admitted to the bar in Savannah and married **Sarah Leake**, daughter of **Richard Leake**, Esq. of McIntosh County, who owned Belleville Plantation. **Sarah Leake** was "*widely known for her beauty, grace, and solid worth.*"

Richard Leake, an Irish-Englishman from Cork, Ireland, like James Spalding had been a loyalist during the Revolutionary War and when he returned to Georgia after the war acquired Jekyll Island with the aid of his father-in-law's estate. In 1791 he sold Jekyll Island to Dumoussay Delavause from the Sapelo Island Company. In 1792 he leased the Belleville Plantation before buying it in 1795 where he grew Sea Island cotton, rice and oranges, as well as raising various livestock. During this time he developed close ties with the French owners of Sapelo Island. He married **Jane Martin**, daughter of a Planter who owned Jekyll Island by virtue of a 1768 grant before leaving the country as a loyalist during the war. He died in 1802 in Savannah leaving his estate to his only child, **Sarah Leake**.



In 1802, **Thomas Spalding** purchased the south end of Sapelo Island after he sold his St. Simons Island holdings and Sarah had inherited her father's estate, Belleville Plantation. At the same time Thomas took an active role in politics and was a member of the Georgia Constitutional Convention and elected to the Georgia Senate in 1798. He briefly was elected to Congress before losing reelection in 1805-06. He returned to the Georgia Senate, 1808-10; 1812-14. "*Never a man for personal glory*" he never pursued national office again as matters of Georgia were far greater to him.

1807-1810, Thomas Spalding built **South End House**, the family's plantation mansion. During this time he revitalized and improved the use of tabby construction on the island that became adopted all up and down the coastal region. In addition to Sea Island cotton and sugar cane, he experimented with indigo, silk, olives, rice, and oranges, as well as cultivation methods.

By 1804 he owned or co-owned 3/4 of Sapelo. He sold his family's Orange Grove estate on St Simons Island to finance his Sapelo holdings. By 1851, Spalding family owned all of Sapelo except for *Raccoon Bluff* (Montalet family). He also acquired Sutherland's Bluff, Black Island near Darien, and Cambers Island in the Altamaha delta. By 1825 he had 7910 acres of cultivated lands' second largest slave owner in McIntosh County to Pierce Butler estate, Spalding is credited with bringing slaves, sea island cotton, rice, and sugar cane to Sapelo, along with considerable organization and energy, and placed great emphasis on "*permanence of his empire.*"

Thomas Spalding gave his slaves a great deal of leeway and freedom, allowing free time to develop personal interests and agrarian pursuits. He disliked slavery, and his plantation earned the nickname, "Nigger Heaven," as Sapelo black had their own communities on the island. By 1822 he had 421 slaves, short of the Butler plantation with 678 slaves. He never sought to purchase additional slaves after that time and felt "the slaves might progress through serfdom to a measure of liberty and independence. They should be attached to the land and never sold from it." On Sapelo many of the slaves were Muslims and practiced their faith without reprisal. **Bu Allah**, a black Mohammedan and the patriarch of the Sapelo slaves, served as overseer on Sapelo and became Thomas Spalding's trusted second in command.

Sarah Leake Spalding died in 1843 at **Ashantilly** which was owned by their oldest son, Charles Spalding. In 1851, after fighting to keep the South from their inevitable Secession, **Thomas Spalding** died.

Children of Thomas & Sarah Spalding

Only five outlived their parents

James Spalding, (1797-1820) served in the U. S. Navy during War of 1812 and then served as a state representative from McIntosh. He died in 1820 from influenza at Milledgeville.

Hester Margery Spalding, (1799-1824) married **William Cooke**.

Margaret Spalding died at 3-weeks of age in 1800.

Margery Spalding died in 1806, age of 2.

Thomas Spalding died in 1819, age of 6.

Emily Screven Spalding died in 1824, age of 6.

Mary Ann Elizabeth Spalding died in 1818, age of 14.

Three others died at birth.

Jane Martin Leake Spalding (1796-1861) married **Colonel Daniel H. Brailsford**

(1797-1833) in 1821. **Daniel Brailsford** was murdered by his dismissed overseer, John Forbes, 1833. They resided at Sutherland's Bluff plantation.

Sarah Spalding Brailsford-Morris (1824-1856)

William Brailsford (1826-1887)

Elizabeth Spalding (1806-1876) married **Alexander William "A.W." Wyly** (1801-1872) in 1830. They resided at **the Forest** plantation along Sapelo River above Darien and the Ridge. They had nine children:

Thomas Spalding Wyly (1831-1922) (Captain, CSA) Married **Johanna Marion Doherty** (1832-1881) They had six children.

Alexander Campbell Wyly, (1833-1911)

Hester Cook Wyly (1834-1848)

Charles Spalding Wyly (1836-1925)

John Armstrong Wyly (1838-1854)

William Cook Wyly (1842-1923)

Sally Leake Wyly (1844-1920)

James Wyly (1846-1854)

James Hamilton Couper Wyly (1850-1884)



Captain Thomas Spalding Wyly

Charles Harris Spalding (1808-1887) was born on Sapelo Island. He attended Edinburgh University in Scotland as a medical student, 1829-30, but failed to graduate. He married **Eliza Houston** (1810-1836) in 1834, the daughter of James and Mary Ann Houstoun of Marengo Plantation, McIntosh County. Eliza died two years later. Charles remarried in 1839 to **Evelyn West Kell** (1820-1898), daughter of **John and Margery Spalding (Baillie) Kell**. Charles went on to represent McIntosh County in the Georgia Senate in 1841-43 and 1855-56. During Civil War he commanded the 1st Battalion of Cavalry of coast defense forces. **Charles** had no children.



Colonel Charles Spalding, 1884

Katherine Anna Spalding (1810-1881) married **Michael J. Kenan** (1806-1875) of Milledgeville. They built a home called *Duplin* off the Duplin River on Sapelo Island in 1854. They had ten children.

Sarah Aurelia Kenan-Hall (1833-1910)

Spalding Kenan (1836-1908)

Thomas Holmes Kenan (1838-1845)

Eliza Houstoun Kenan (1840-1845)

Owen Holmes Kenan (1845-1845)

Emily Randolph Kenan (1846-1847)

Catherine Clifford Kenan-Williamson (1847-1934)

Jane Brailsford Kenan (1850-1853)

Arabella Horne Kenan (1851-1852)

Owen Thomas Kenan (1853-1928)

Spalding Kenan (1836-1908) became a surgeon and served during the Civil War for the 45th Georgia Regulars. He moved to Sapelo in 1872 to the tract his grandfather, Thomas Spalding, deeded to his mother. He moved to and practiced medicine in Darien beginning around 1880 and became mayor of Darien.

Randolph Spalding (1822-1862) married **Mary Dorothea Bass** (1823-1898) from Seale, Alabama in 1843. In addition to becoming a successful planter on the mainland and later on Sapelo after his father passed, he served as the State Representative from McIntosh County for several terms. At the outbreak of the Civil War he served as Colonel of the 29th Georgia Infantry Regiment then on the staff of **General William H. C. Walker** in Savannah where he died of pneumonia, March 17, 1862.

Sarah "Sallie" Elizabeth Spalding-McKinley (1844-1916) married **Archibald Carlisle (A.C.) McKinley** (1842-1917). They had one child who died at birth (November 28, 1867)

Thomas Spalding II (1847-1885) married **Sarah Barrow McKinley** in 1871.

Thomas Bourke Spalding (1851-1884) married Ella Patience Barrow in 1874.

Mary's older brother, **Allen Bass** (1815-1884) married Almira Gillespie (1820-1860) in 1849. Son, **Charles** (1853-1919), daughter, Laura (1850-1853). Allen arrived on Sapelo following his wife's death and served as overseer. Note: Spalding Kenan married their niece, **Evelyn E. Livingston** (1836-1894) in 1860.



Thomas Spalding II



Thomas Bourke Spalding



Lt. A. C. McKinley



Colonel Randolph Spalding



Sallie Spalding, A. C. McKinley with Charles Bass up front, 1915.

NOTE: **The Spalding City of the Dead** is the family cemetery plot in the St. Andrews Cemetery near the family's beloved Ashantilly, 1-1/2 miles north of Darien. There they laid family members "to the long sleep beneath the giant old live oak trees draped with funeral moss."

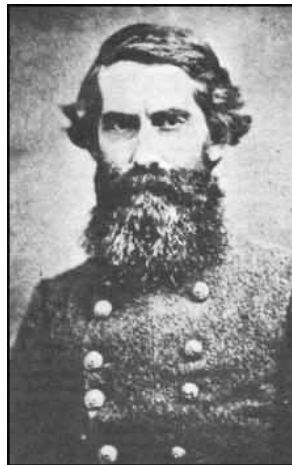


Above: side by side memorial headstones of Randolph and Mary Spalding with Randolph's actual grave marker in Laurel Cemetery, Savannah. Drawing by Sallie Spalding of South End's Big House. Sapelo Lighthouse and Keeper's House as it looked not long after the war ended. Randolph Spalding's mainland house today near The Ridge above Darien.

Other Key Historical Characters



This 1860 portrait of Charles Stevens (1816-1865) and his daughter, Mary Henrietta (1855-1937) is the only known photograph of Stevens in existence. Photograph courtesy of a descendant, George Stevens.



Top left to right: **Captain Charles Stevens** and his daughter, circa 1860. **Captain William Holding Echols**, CSA Corps of Engineers from Huntsville, Alabama. **Major Levi Knight** (1803-1870), Berrien Militia from Ray's Mill, Georgia. **General Alexander Robert Lawton** (1818-1896) Commanding General Georgia Militia. **General W. H. T. Walker** (1816-1864) Commander of Savannah Defense.

Not shown: **Alexander B. Hazard** (1824-unknown), lighthouse keeper on Sapelo Island **James H. Graybill** (1836-1880) cotton merchant in Savannah, brother **Captain Lewis L. Graybill** (1841-unknown). James married Mary A. Fish in 1858. **Henry**, infant son.