



*Painted by John Sartain, Phila.*

MAJOR JOHN HABERSHAM.

CONTINENTAL ARMY

## John Habersham.

**T**HIS distinguished Georgian was the third and youngest son of the Hon. James Habersham and Mary Bolton. He was born December 23, 1754, at Beverly, one of the country residences of his father, nine miles southwest of Savannah, Georgia. When quite young his mother died, and ever afterwards his kind hearted father was tenderly devoted to him.

He was baptized by the Rev. Bartholomew Zouberbuhler, the rector of Christ Church, of which his father was a leading member. His early education was obtained in Savannah, and serving from a mere youth as the secretary of his father, he became practically acquainted with his extensive public and private business. When only thirteen years old his father regarded him as "one of the best clerks in the Province." For some time he was with the commercial house of Mr. Clay, and here he acquired those habits of industry and close attention to business which later contributed so much to his success. He afterwards went to Princeton College, from which he was graduated with distinction.

When the issues of the Revolution were forced upon the Colonies, John Habersham, who had scarcely attained to manhood, together with his two brothers, promptly took sides with the patriots, though his aged father, who was the President of the Royal Council, and for a time Acting Governor of the Province, remained loyal to the last to the Crown of England.

On January 7, 1776, he joined the Continental service as **First** Lieutenant of the first company of the battalion raised for the defense of Georgia. With three hundred of this bat-

talion, of which his brother, Joseph Habersham, was Major, he assisted Col. Lachlan McIntosh, from hastily constructed works on Yamacraw Bluff, in repelling the British troops led by Maitland and Grant in their attempt to take to sea the vessels in the harbor laden with rice. He soon afterwards was made Brigade Major of the Georgia troops under General Lachlan McIntosh, ranking officer, and Colonel Samuel Elbert, second in command.

He accompanied the unsuccessful expedition planned for the subjugation of Florida, and when dissensions arose in the American camp concerning the conduct of the campaign, Major Habersham was appointed upon a council of war, which reported against the further prosecution of this ill-advised and badly-managed expedition.

The British in Florida planned, in turn, an attack upon the settlements in Georgia, having for their special object the capture of the town of Sunbury, and the investment of Savannah.

Led by Colonels Fuser and Prevost, the British troops advanced to St. John's Parish, burned the Midway Meeting House, and laid waste the county with fire and sword. At this juncture Colonel Elbert commissioned Major Habersham to hold an interview with Colonel Prevost for the purpose of protecting the invaded territory from needless pillage and conflagration. The English commander, however, declined to grant the request, insisting that, inasmuch as the people were in rebellion to the authority of the Crown, they would have to suffer the consequences, however disastrous they might be.

In one of the skirmishes near Midway Meeting House the brave General Screven was severely wounded, and captured by the enemy. Desiring to render medical aid to his fallen companion in arms, Colonel Elbert sent Major Habersham, under a flag, to Colonel Prevost, and in response Dr. Braidie and Dr. Alexander were permitted to attend him, but their examination

showed the wound to be mortal, and the gallant Screven died upon the field.

At the capture of Savannah by the British under Colonel Campbell, on December 29, 1778, Major Habersham was entrusted with a part of the artillery on the American left, just east of the city. Finding it impossible to withstand the deadly assault of the enemy and threatened by a flank movement on the right, he directed his cannoneers to save themselves, but himself refused to quit his guns till completely overwhelmed by the foe. At this critical moment, it is said, Major Habersham, perceiving personal capture inevitable, broke his seal upon one of the cannon to prevent it from falling into the hands of his captors. In the unfortunate rout which ensued many of the Americans were killed or captured. Among those taken prisoners was Major Habersham.

His imprisonment, however, does not seem to have been of long duration, for at the unfortunate battle of Brier Creek Major Habersham again appears with McIntosh and Elbert, stubbornly holding the left of the line of battle after the right and centre had broken and fled, till nearly every soldier in their command was either killed or wounded. Here it appears he was exchanged in time to take part in the memorable siege of Savannah, in October, 1779.

In January, 1782, General Greene, who then had command of the Southern Department, detached General Anthony Wayne, the hero of Stony Point, "to reinstate, as far as might be possible, the authority of the Union within the limits of Georgia."

This officer, desiring to win over to the American cause the parties of Creek and Cherokee Indians who frequently visited Savannah since its capture by the British, and who by presents were inspired to annoy the outlying settlements, appointed Major Habersham to intercept and conciliate them. In this

he was partly successful, but through the imprudence of some of his associates the mission was, in a large measure, defeated.

When Savannah was evacuated by the British, in 1782, the civilians who had remained loyal to the Crown and who could not readily depart with the military and officials, were anxious to ascertain what their status would be under the American occupation, and to secure pledges of immunity from molestation either in person or property. To Major John Habersham, on the part of the patriots, these negotiations were entrusted, and by him they were conducted with wisdom and fairness.

Lieutenant-Colonel James Jackson with his legion, and Major Habersham with his recruits, were detailed by General Greene to take charge of the town till the Civil Government could be restored. So far as Georgia was concerned, the Revolution was now at an end.

In 1784 Major Habersham was elected President of the Executive Council, and in that capacity he opened the Land Court in Augusta.

In 1785-'86 he was a member of the Continental Congress, and in October, 1786, he was the chairman of a commission appointed by the State of Georgia to make a treaty with the Indians at Shoulder-Bone Creek, in Hancock County. At this meeting fifty-nine chiefs and warriors of the Creek nation were present, and on November 3, a treaty was signed providing for the peaceful conduct of the Indians, and agreeing upon the boundary lines, about which there had been some dispute.

In 1787, he was appointed as one of the commissioners from Georgia to settle a dispute between this State and South Carolina concerning the boundaries between them. The commission met at Beaufort in April, and adjusted in an amicable manner the pending differences between the two states, and the agreement was ratified by Congress and by the General Assembly of Georgia.

After the Revolution, Major Habersham resided in Savannah, much respected for his patriotic services and his business ability. On January 27, 1785, he was appointed a member of the first Board of Trustees to establish a State University,—a compliment to his intelligence and wisdom.

In 1789, he was appointed Collector of the port of Savannah, an office which he continued to hold till his death, which occurred November 19, 1799, at the early age of forty-five years.

On March 27, 1786, he married Ann Sarah Camber, and seven children were born to them.

In all the public and private relations of life Major Habersham exhibited a most commendable character. He was honest, public-spirited, and a true friend to those in distress. He forms one of a noble group of patriots in the early history of Georgia whose memories will live so long as heroism and high purpose find a lodgment in the human heart.

OTIS ASHMORE.