

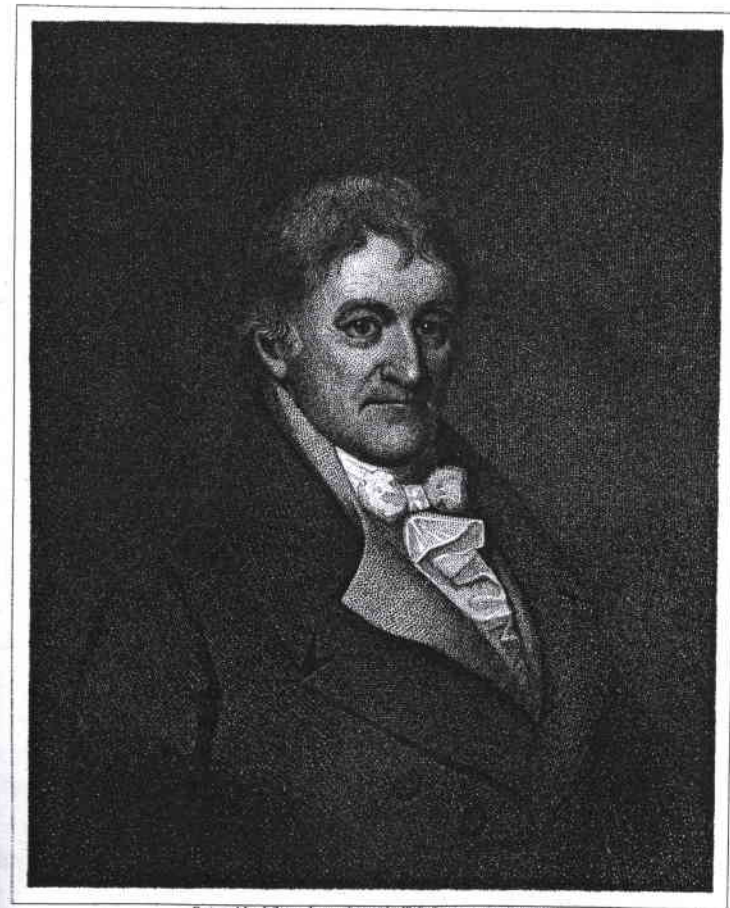
## Joseph Habersham.

**J**OSEPH HABERSHAM, the second son of James Habersham and Mary Bolton, was born in Savannah, Ga., July 28, 1751. His mother having died when he was quite young, he was sent, at the early age of eight-and-a-half years to Princeton, N. J., to be educated, where he remained six and a half years. About the age of fifteen he returned to Savannah, a disappointment to his practical old father so far as his education was concerned, for in a letter to William Knox, Esq., dated May 7, 1768, the father says, in referring to John, his younger son, "I truly lament that I ever sent my other two sons to the northward. Joe went there at eight-and-a-half years of age, and under the idea of stuffing his head with useless criticisms of phrases and words in Latin and Greek, he was neither taught to write legibly nor with propriety in the Language."

Not being very strong physically, his father determined to send him to England for the benefit of his health, as well as of his education. Accordingly, in May, 1768, his father placed him aboard ship, tenderly consigning him to William Knox, Georgia's Provincial Agent in England, and placing in his hands an advisory letter of deep paternal solicitude, which the son was to read on the first day of every month for one year after his arrival in London.

He remained in England three years engaged in the mercantile business, and returned to Savannah November 17, 1771, much improved in health and in his practical knowledge of business affairs. By the aid of his father, he entered into a commercial business, first with his brother James, and afterward, on January 1, 1773, with Mr. Clay.

In the dramatic events that formed the political prelude to



Engraved by J. Greco from a Painting by W. G. Conner after Douglass.

JOSEPH HABERSHAM.

*Joe Habersham*

the Revolution, Joseph Habersham aligned himself with the patriot cause, and throughout that eventful struggle for liberty, he bore a conspicuous and honorable part. When the tidings of the battle of Lexington reached Savannah, Joseph Habersham, in company with Dr. Noble W. Jones, Edward Telfair, William Gibbons, Joseph Clay, John Milledge, and a few others,—most of them members of the Council of Safety—broke open the powder magazine in Savannah on the night of May 11th, and took therefrom about six hundred pounds of powder, which was afterwards used with good effect in the American cause.

There is a well approved tradition that a part of this powder was sent to Cambridge and used in the battle of Bunker Hill.

In July, 1775, Captain Maitland's ship direct from London, and loaded with gunpowder and military supplies, appeared at the mouth of the Savannah River. This ship, Joseph Habersham and Captain Bowen, with a picked body of men, determined to capture. Conveyed in a Georgia armed schooner, the first commissioned for naval warfare in the Revolution, these daring men succeeded in their hazardous undertaking, and at the earnest solicitation of Congress, five thousand pounds of the captured powder was sent to Philadelphia to be distributed to the Continental armies.

Mr. Habersham was a leading member of the Provincial Congress, which assembled in Savannah July 4, 1775, and on January 7, 1776, he was appointed Major of a battalion raised for the protection of Georgia under the command of Colonel Lachlan McIntosh and Lieutenant-Colonel Samuel Elbert.

At a special meeting of the Council of Safety, on January 18, 1776, it was decided to place under arrest the Governor, Sir James Wright, and his Council, and Major Joseph Habersham, then a member of the Council of Safety, volunteered to accomplish this bold plan. With a party selected by himself, he pro-

ceeded to the residence of the chief executive, the site on which now stands the Telfair Academy of Arts and Sciences, and passing the sentinel at the door, he boldly laid his hand upon the shoulder of the Governor, and said, "Sir James, you are my prisoner." The members of the Council who were in consultation with the Governor at the time, fled precipitately from the building. The Governor was confined to his house for some time, cut off from communication with his officials, but wearied and mortified at his harassing situation, he effected his escape on February 11th, through the rear of the house, and made his way to a warship at the mouth of the Savannah River.

The physical and moral courage required to perform this daring act indicates the heroic quality of Joseph Habersham's character, and in those eventful times, its accomplishment was as important as it was startling and dramatic.

Throughout the Revolution, Colonel Habersham bore a conspicuous part, and he was always ready to respond to the calls of duty when courage and patriotism were demanded. He was present at the memorable siege of Savannah, and aided in directing the military operations upon this eventful occasion.

After the close of the war he was elected a member of the General Assembly of the State of Georgia, and was twice honored by that body as Speaker of the House.

He was a delegate to the Continental Congress from 1785 to 1786, and in 1788 he was a member of the Convention which ratified the Federal Constitution.

In 1790-'91 he was a member of the city council of Savannah, and in 1792-'93 he served as its Mayor. When President Washington visited Savannah in 1791, Joseph Habersham delivered an address of welcome to that distinguished guest.

In 1795 he was appointed by Washington as Postmaster-General of the United States, a position which he filled with credit till Mr. Jefferson was elected President. By Mr. Jef-

erson he was tendered the office of Treasurer of the United States while yet Postmaster-General. Regarding this as a delicate hint from the President that his resignation would be acceptable, he promptly surrendered his portfolio and returned to his home in Savannah. This incident is one of the earliest illustrations of the application of the doctrine, "To the victor belong the spoils." Colonel Habersham had accepted the position tendered him by Washington from the highest motives of patriotic duty, and he filled the office without cringing or political favoritism. He finally refused to remove, from the subordinate position in his department, postmasters who were of opposite political views to those of the administration, but regarded only efficiency and good behavior as factors for continuance in office.

Having retired to private life, Colonel Habersham entered upon a commercial business in his native city, and in 1802 he became President of the Branch Bank of the United States in Savannah. This position he held till his death, which occurred November 17, 1815.

In May, 1776, he married Miss Isabella Rae, daughter of John Rae, who was living at Brampton plantation, near Savannah. Of this union ten children were born.

Colonel Habersham was a man of strong and positive character, with the most exalted conceptions of honor and patriotism. Though of a quick and ardent temper, he was ever ready to make amends for any wrong, and to the needs of the poor and unfortunate his heart and his purse were always open. Tolerant of the views of others, he expressed his own with freedom, and guided by the great principle of right, he was ever found loyal to the best interests of his people. His services to his state and to his country, and the inspiration of his exalted life, will place him for all time among the foremost of Georgia's early patriots.

OTIS ASHMORE.