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A SKETCH OF THE LIFE OF THE LATE  
BENJAMIN DANIEL BRANTLEY

FOR WHOM THE PROPOSED COUNTY  
IS NAMED





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A SKETCH OF THE LIFE OF THE LATE BENJAMIN DANIEL BRANTLEY  
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Of the new counties created, so far as they could be created by legislative enactment, by the Legislature recently adjourned, several have interesting stories connected with their organization and even more interesting stories in the lives of men for whom they have been named.

In South Georgia, particularly, the new county of Brantley is of interest, and the Morning News is glad to have the opportunity of presenting a sketch of the distinguished Georgian who will live in the name of one of these new counties and on the future maps of his native state.

Benjamin Daniel Brantley died at his home in Blackshear, Pierce county, on March 13, 1891, and now nearly thirty years later the Georgia Legislature has proposed to create a new county and, in honor of his memory, to name it Brantley.

The new county will be carved out of Pierce, Wayne and Charlton counties, the area of each of which is large, and the size of no one of which will be injuriously affected by the territory it loses. Each of these counties consented to the making of the new county, and they agreed upon Hoboken, now in Pierce county, to be its county seat.

The creation of Brantley county is the culmination of long continued efforts on the part of the people affected to have a new county in their immediate section. It will add greatly to the comfort and convenience of

these people, and will undoubtedly result in a growth and development of the territory involved more than justifying its creation. The reasons urged for its creation were so strong and persuasive that the bill therefor, on its passage through the Legislature, met the opposition of but one vote in the Senate and of but nine votes in the House.

Those who will become the first citizens of Brantley county selected its name. Their reasons for the selection, and the significance they attach to the name selected, are too well known among them to call for any statement, but there are many who must vote upon the ratification of the new county who are not informed in these regards, and who should be told something of the manner of the man whose name is thus to be preserved to future generations, and so this brief sketch is written.

Benjamin Daniel Brantley was essentially a self-made man. Born of poor but respectable parentage, he found himself handicapped in many ways in the struggle of life. Bereft of a father when but a few weeks old, and denied the advantages of schools and colleges, of influential friends, of family prestige and of money, he had but his own strong, determined self upon which to rely. His equipment, meager as it seemed when he began life, proved all sufficient to overcome his many handicaps, and when he died at the age of 59, in the fulness of a strong and virile manhood, he had unshackled himself from poverty, had lifted himself above the environment of his beginning, had made himself a leader of men at a time when only real men could lead, and had won for himself not only the respect and esteem, but the love and affection of the masses of the people throughout a large section of Georgia. The story of the humble beginning and of the gradual growth of this section of the state to riches and power

is in part the story of his life; for, led thereto in his young manhood by his pioneer instinct, his courage, his leadership and his wise counsel contributed much to its growth and development; and as it grew, he grew with it.

When one now looks back on his life it is not hard to see from whence came the success that crowned his efforts. It came because of his exalted manhood, for in all the things he did and refrained from doing he was ever and always a real man. And he looked the part. Six feet one and three-quarters inches in height, straight as an Indian, with black hair and eyes, and with perfect Grecian features, his appearance was one to inspire admiration and confidence.

He cherished high ideals, possessed an unfaltering courage and a rugged honesty which became his chief characteristic. His word was his bond, and was everywhere so accepted. He scrupulously kept his every obligation, scorned deception, and knew no short cuts to any goal at which he aimed. He craved success, but would not have it unless he could fairly earn it. His life is an object lesson to every aspiring youth, for it shows the things which may be achieved by honesty, industry and thrift, unaided by any extraneous influence. It shows that the learned professions, politics, the science of war, literature, the arts, the sciences, and great genius are not the only roads to fame and renown; for here was a man who through life's journey traveled none of these roads, and yet so lived and wrought that a generation and a half beyond his death he is still remembered, and because he is remembered it is proposed to give his name to a county of the state.

Mr. Brantley was born in Laurens county, Georgia, Jan. 14, 1832, the youngest child of Benjamin and Elizabeth (Daniel) Brantley. Benjamin Brantley, the father,

was the son of Joseph and Lucy (Bergamont) Brantley. Joseph Brantley was a soldier in the Continental Army under Gen. Nathaniel Green, enlisting from North Carolina, and his wife, Lucy Bergamont, was an English woman.

At birth, Benjamin Daniel was named Joseph, for his grandfather, but his father dying when he was only three weeks old, his name was changed to Benjamin Daniel, Benjamin for his father, and Daniel for his mother. His father was a native of North Carolina, removing from that state to Laurens county, Georgia, where he met and married the woman of his choice. Following his father's death the family remained in Laurens county but a comparatively short time before removing to Montgomery county. In both counties a living was gained by hard work on the farm, and such character of work was his chief vocation until he reached his majority.

In the early fifties, about 1854 or 1855, he followed his older brother, William, to Waresboro, in Ware county, and entered the mercantile business as a clerk in his brother's store. It was while living at Waresboro that he married Janet Baker McRae, the daughter of Christopher and Christian (McCrimmon) McRae, of Montgomery county. To this marriage much of the success that later came to him was due, for his wife proved herself in every way a real help-meet. She freely assumed her share of the bread winning burden, and by her industry, economies and thrift contributed much to the common fund. Her cheerful spirit and even temperament smoothed over many rough places, while her counsel, ever modestly given, was always wise. She was never so much concerned to obtain worldly goods as she was to be sure of upright, Christian living, and her sweet and refining influence



strongly contributed to the strengthening of his high ideals and to the resolution with which he adhered to them. To this union were born seven children: Christian Elizabeth, Margaret Lucretia, William Gordon, Archibald Philip, Benjamin Duncan, John Thomas, and Jeannette Harriet.

In 1857 Mr. Brantley, aspiring to independence and to a business of his own, removed to Blackshear, where he remained until his death. Alex Douglas, of Appling county, contributing something to a small capital fund, the firm of Brantley & Douglas was launched with Mr. Brantley in charge of the business. In those days it was no small undertaking to conduct a mercantile business in Blackshear, for there was no railroad, and stocks of merchandise had to be freighted by wagon train from Savannah, the nearest wholesale center, a distance of perhaps a hundred miles or more. The old Atlantic and Gulf Railroad, although then under construction, had not reached Blackshear.

He chose his place of business wisely, for although Blackshear was without a railroad, it was so located to be, as it became, the trading center of a wide stretch of country, which now includes Appling, Wayne, Coffee, Ware, Clinch, Charlton, and Pierce counties.

It was nothing unusual in those days for wagon trains containing wool, hides, wax, poultry, and a little cotton, to arrive in Blackshear from long distances, and after spending a day or two in traffic and trade, to return on the journey home. The old Lee, Douglas, Taylor, Meeks and Tanner families were prominent among those who made these trips.

In 1870 the style of the firm was changed to Brantley & Co., the partner now being Judge William M. Sessions, then Judge of the Superior Courts of the Brunswick circuit. In 1878 Judge Sessions sold his in-

terest in the business to Mr. Brantley and removed to Marietta, Ga., and the business was then conducted for a number of years by Mr. Brantley alone and under his name.

Later he associated his two oldest sons, William G. and Archibald P., with him, and the firm became B. D. Brantley and Sons. Later still, his son, William G., withdrawing to engage in the practice of law, his son, Benjamin D., Jr., was admitted in his place, and the firm name was again changed, this time to A. P. Brantley and Company, his son, Archibald P., having attained, with his approval and encouragement, a commanding position in the conduct of the business. In 1891, Mr. Brantley having died, the business and as well Mr. Brantley's entire estate, was incorporated under the name of The A. P. Brantley Company, which company, with its many subsidiary companies, has become and is one of the institutions of South Georgia.

It is difficult when looking at the plant of this company as it is today, with its many ramifications of mercantile business, bank, cotton ginnery, fertilizer plant, acid chambers, tobacco and potato warehouses, to recall its humble origin in the little store house which Mr. Brantley built in 1857. Gone long ago is that little store house; gone, too, is the neat and modest log cabin in which he made his first Blackshear home; gone, too, is Mr. Brantley, but verily his works live after him.

The business founded by him and long conducted under his personal direction was in the nature of a supply business. His customers came from all the adjoining counties, and he furnished to them, not only the supplies of all kinds needed by them, but a market for all their products. It was a business which caused him to acquire an extensive acquaintance, with the result as a general rule that each new acquaintance proved

a new friend. It enabled him to extend many favors, and knowing well as he did the hardships of adversity his ear was always attuned to hear the cry of the needy and distressed.

He made many trips throughout the territory he supplied, and the knowledge he thus acquired, coupled with the knowledge gained from those with whom he came in daily contact, kept him informed at all times of the conditions existing throughout this territory. He knew how the people lived, and how they could better live; the character of their homes, and how they could be improved; and as he knew, so he taught. He knew upon what products the people relied for a money return, and he was quick to tell them of other products affording a better and more certain return.

For a number of years after he established his business the most of the money in circulation in his territory came from timber floated down the river in freshet times to the mills at old Burnt Fort, and from the sale of wool. Sometimes the freshets did not come and the logs rotted on the ground. The growth of the country made sheep raising more and more difficult, and he constantly urged the people to give more and more attention to the growing of cotton and other crops, and he encouraged them to do so by erecting a cotton ginnery and a small plant for the making of fertilizers. He was ever ready to furnish facilities for the development of new industries. He had been quick to discover the possibilities of the soil around him and ever strove to develop them. His love of the farm continued throughout his life, and the planting and growing of crops was his chief recreation. He taught the people that their yellow pine trees had a value aside from their timber by erecting and operating the first turpentine still in Pierce county.

His knowledge of the territory in which he did business showed him its latent resources, and to the development of these resources he gave freely of his time and ability. He believed in and encouraged progress, and not progress in material things alone, but in moral and spiritual things as well. He saw the need of school houses, and encouraged as well as aided in their construction. He contributed to and urged the building of churches and supported every moral movement. Possibly when all has been said in praise of him that could be said, it will be agreed that great as were his works as a public benefactor, his greatest work was in the example he set and the influence he exerted as an upright, loyal citizen. He was a faithful apostle of law and order, and frowned upon every violation of law, no matter how trivial it might be. He always paid homage to the law and to the constituted authorities and encouraged others to do likewise. He lived a clean life, and was possessed of few if any vices. He eschewed all intoxicants, and did so in times when the general rule was otherwise. He never acquired a taste for or the use of tobacco, and he never knew one playing card from another.

The many manly qualities and virtues he possessed, and the public services he rendered did not go without recognition from the public during his life time, and more than once he was called upon to fill public office, notwithstanding the fact that he cared nothing for publicity and never sought political honors. During the Civil War while he was serving as a private in the Fourth Georgia Cavalry, he was elected by the votes of this regiment, resident in Pierce county, to the office of clerk of the Superior and Inferior Courts of that county, which office he creditably filled until 1868, when he retired. He represented Pierce county in the Georgia

House of Representatives one term (1873-74), and later was called to the office of county treasurer, which office he was filling at the time of his death, following a continuous service therein of about eighteen years. He was for some time secretary of the Masonic Lodge at Black-shear.

Mr. Brantley was not permitted to live the allotted three score years and ten, but he lived long enough to see the fruition of his early aspirations, to see his chosen section climb to a position of power and importance in the affairs of the state; to see the people he loved grow in peace, comfort and plenty, and to see his children full grown men and women, and to know that each of them had been true to his teachings, and that not one had brought the slightest taint upon his name.

He did not die ripe in years, but he did die rich in the knowledge of a good name given by him to his descendants and still preserved, and rich in the love and affection of a great people whom he served long and well. His sainted wife survived him for several years, and then joined him in a glorious reunion in that Beautiful Beyond for which she had prepared him and herself long years before.

From the Savannah "Morning News" of Sunday,  
August 15, 1920.

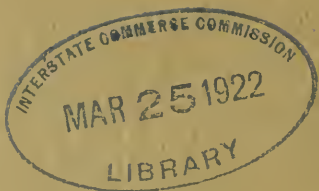




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