

George Soule'

We were on our way back from the Dallas, TX area to visit our latest family addition. She is our sixth great grandchild, a bundle of joy named Maya Olivia. We decided to stop in Hot Springs, AR to, as they say, take in the waters. As an added treat after the thermal baths, Val and I had a "couple's" massage.

The proprietress/masseuse had her spa in their private home located in an affluent, gated subdivision a few miles south of Hot Springs' bathhouse row. As soon as I entered, I knew there was something distinctive about the house and its occupants. There were old books, portraits, photographs, even an antique wooden radio. There were oriental rugs on the floor. The magazines in the waiting area were different. Instead of the usual People, Us, and other low brow publications found in most waiting rooms, they had Conde Nast and National Geographic. We were greeted by the other masseuse, a tall, sturdy African American named Emricka. After hearing me call attention to the books and art, she fetched the home's owner, Evan Soule' Jr., whose wife operated the spa.

Mr. Soule' then proceeded to tell me about his great great grandfather, George Soule', whose portraits were displayed prominently. In one, the bearded Soule' wore the uniform of a Confederate officer. Soule's life story is inextricably linked to New Orleans, with a name that sounded French. But in fact he was a northern transplant. Born in 1834 in Barrington, N.Y., he led a somewhat peripatetic life after the death of his father, when George was only 4. He moved with his mother and stepfather, first to Illinois and then Missouri. Soule' tried his hand in medical school, then law school in St. Louis. Apparently, neither profession captivated the young George. He decided on a business career, graduating from Jones' Commercial College in St. Louis in 1856. He then embarked for New Orleans, a one week trip down the Mississippi via steamboat.

Mr. Soule' indicated that there was a dearth of information about George's ancestors. However, there is a George Soule (without the diacritic), sometimes written as Sowle, who was a passenger on the Mayflower, and a signatory to the compact. One account states that the New Orleans Soule' was a descendant of the Mayflower passenger. That would have to be sorted out at a later time, The genealogy of the descendants of the Mayflower survivors is well documented, but the New Orleans Soule' isn't listed.

Observing that New Orleans didn't have a commercial school, the freshly minted 22 year old founded the eponymous Soulé Commercial College and Literary Institute. Starting in a single room, the school progressed to the point where, in 1861, it was chartered by the Legislature of Louisiana to "confer degrees and grant diplomas." A concise biography of George Soule', focusing on his textbooks, innovative curricula and progressive thinking, was written by Vahé Baladouni of the University of New Orleans and published in the Accounting Historians Journal..

At the outbreak of the Civil War, Soulé became an officer in the Confederate army, rising to the rank of Colonel. A year after the war started, Soule' was captured during the Battle of Pittsburg Landing, also referred to as the Battle of Shiloh, in southwest Tennessee. Lasting only two

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days, it was the bloodiest battle of the war up to that time, with hundreds of Confederate soldiers taken prisoner. Soule' was transferred to Camp Chase, a prisoner of war facility in Columbus, OH. Soule' spent seven months in captivity, before being repatriated in a prisoner exchange at Aiken's Landing in Virginia. Perhaps anticipating the possibility of capture, Soule' even worked out a code with his wife that would allow them to communicate without arousing the suspicions of censors. Evan Soule' indicated that the Colonel had plotted an escape, writing to his wife in a poem that had been previously designated to mean such an event. But the prisoner exchange took place before Soule' could carry out his escape plans. It was fortuitous that the escape plan never materialized. He would have had to travel 500 miles just to return to the scene of the battle.

Returning to New Orleans after the war, Soule' not only ran the school, but wrote textbooks for its courses. His magnum opus was the thousand page Soule's Philosophic Practical Mathematics, published in 1910. Although that is five decades after he started his school, the book's predecessors date back to the years after the Colonel's return from the war. The first was Soule's Analytic and Philosophic Commercial and Exchange Calculator. This was followed by newer editions, with the 1910 edition double the size of the original. His books survive to this day, both digitized and print edition. Amazon carries no less than seven different titles, although there is probably a great deal of overlap in the contents. On June 5, 1918, Tulane University conferred on George Soule' the degree of Doctor of Laws, Honoris Causa.

Sadly, the school closed in 1983. It was the oldest commercial school in the south and a well respected institution in Louisiana. George's great grandson Evan Sr. was still involved with the school, serving as Secretary-Treasurer. From 1923 until its closing, the Soule' school was located at the Buckner mansion in New Orleans' Garden District. Today the building, restored to its former glory, lives on as a 20,000 sq. ft. vacation rental. But the mansion is better known as the location for the TV show *The American Horror Story*. After Hurricane Katrina in 2005, the family decided to depart for a location less prone to natural disasters. That is how the remaining Soule' descendants wound up in Hot Springs.

This just goes to show, you'll never know what you might encounter whenever you sign up for a couple's massage. By the way, Emricka was wonderful, providing an eclectic mixture of aromatic oil, hot stones and deep tissue massage. The thermal baths were terrific too. There are only two public baths left in Hot Springs, the Quapaw and Buckstaff. If you are driving along I-30 southwest of Little Rock, make a detour to Hot Springs. Step back in time to take in the waters. The tubs, sitz bath, needle showers and cooling rooms are all original, dating back over 100 years. We even brought back some spring water. There is a fountain on bathhouse row where the locals bring their containers to replenish with spring water. Take that, Perrier. I wish there was a hot spring closer to Cincinnati.

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