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Major George Rainsford Fairbanks

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MAJOR GEORGE RAINSFORD FAIRBANKS.

BY F. P. FLEMING.

Major George Rainsford Fairbanks, the first president of the Florida Historical Society, whose likeness appears in this number, died at his summer home in Swanee, Tennessee, on the third day of August, 1906, in the eighty-seventh year of his age. He was born in Watertown, New York, on July 5, 1820. At the age of nineteen, he graduated from the Union College, Schenectady, with the degree of B. A. Later he received the degree of M. A. from his alma mater, and the same degree from Trinity College, Hartford, Connecticut. At the age of twenty-two he was admitted to the bar of New York, and the same year (1842) he came to Florida, settling in St. Augustine, where he entered upon the practice of his profession. For some years he filled the position of clerk of the Superior Court of the Territory, and afterwards the United States District Court. He was a member of the State Senate from 1846 to 1848.

Casting his fortune with the State of his adoption, after Florida seceded from the Union, he heartily espoused her cause and that of the Confederate States, which he served throughout the war as a Major in the Commissary Department. After the cause failed, he exerted all his energies to aid in repairing the wreck of war and disasters of reconstruction.

Major Fairbanks took an active interest in horticulture, and was an extensive orange grower when that was the principal industry of the State. He was president of the Florida Fruit Growers' Association and also of the Florida Fruit Exchange. Of a cultivated mind and fond of literary pursuits, he found a congenial field in the research of the history of the State of his adoption. In 1856 he was prominent in organizing "The Historical Society of Florida," located at St. Augustine, of which he was one of the vice-presidents, the president being Hon. B. A. Putnam. On April 5, 1857, he delivered a lecture before the Society on the early history of Florida, a copy of which, presented by him, is in the collections of the Florida Historical Society. In 1858 he published "The History and Antiquities of St. Augustine." This

volume was revised and reissued in 1868, entitled "The Spaniards in Florida" etc. In 1811 he published "The History of Florida." This was revised and added to by him, bringing it up to date, and republished in 1898, and a third edition was issued by him in 1904, including a chapter on the Jacksonville fire of 1901. In 1905 he wrote and published a "History of the University of the South." The foregoing were his principal literary productions, but he contributed besides many valuable newspaper and magazine articles.

Major Fairbanks was brought in full communion with the Episcopal Church by Bishop Elliott of Georgia on his visit to St. Augustine in 1844, and from that period of his early manhood until, in the fullness of years he was called to reap the reward of a well spent life, he was a faithful, active and consistent member of that church, and a delegate to all but one of its Triennial General Conventions from 1853 to 1904, the only exception being that one held in the time of war, when he attended the General Convention of the Church in the Confederate States.

Major Fairbanks was one of the leading spirits in planning, founding and promoting the University of the South and shared actively in its reconstruction after the withering blight of war had destroyed almost everything connected with it except the faith and zeal of its promoters. At the time of his death he was the last survivor of those who had participated in its organization in 1858, from which time he was continually a member of the Board of Trustees, and for many years occupied the responsible position of Commissioner of Buildings and Lands. In 1866 he built a cottage on the University grounds, on which he resided about six months of every year, devoting his time, talents and energies to the good of the University which he was permitted to live to see take a proud position among the great educational institutions of our country. Soon after his death a distinguished speaker, referring to his having been at the Chapel, said: "On his way home he met the vice-chancellor, and by his request went into his office to act for the last time in his time-honored capacity of counsellor and adviser. His hand was on the map of the University, its business was in his head and its interest upon his heart, when the change came which forever closed his consciousness to terrestrial affairs."

Upon the organization of the Florida Historical Society in November of 1902, all turned to Major Fairbanks as its proper head and he was unanimously chosen president, holding such position to the time of his death.

His name, influence and energies were potent factors in the success which the Society has attained, and his memory will ever be an inspiration to those who labor in the fields of Florida's history and for Florida's prosperity.

Report of President F. P. Fleming to the Annual Meeting of the Florida Historical Society, Held November 19th, 1907.

Gentlemen of the Florida Historical Society— It gives me pleasure to again greet you on this occasion of the annual meeting of the society. Though we have failed to accomplish within the past year all that we had hoped, much has been done to encourage us in the work which promises so much for our State. At the time of our last meeting, as then reported, we were in debt considerably more than the small balance in the treasury. By securing six life members, paying \$50 each and collecting all but a small portion of the annual dues of members, we have been enabled to pay off all indebtedness, and, by the employment of an assistant to the secretary, to keep the room of the society open during the year for three days in each week and to add, by purchase, to our collection of literature, with a balance in the treasury of \$86.79.

In accordance with a resolution adopted at the last annual meeting, a neat pamphlet, containing the report of the president, the constitution and by-laws of the society and a list of membership, was published, which has been sent to all members and many others in the state.

A great effort was made to get some state aid for the society through a small appropriation by the last legislature. I prepared a bill for that purpose, which I placed in the hands of the senator and a member of the house from this county, whom I personally interviewed on the subject. I also wrote, asking the influ-