

ST. JOHN'S HISTORIC CEMETERY ASSOCIATION

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TWO BROTHERS

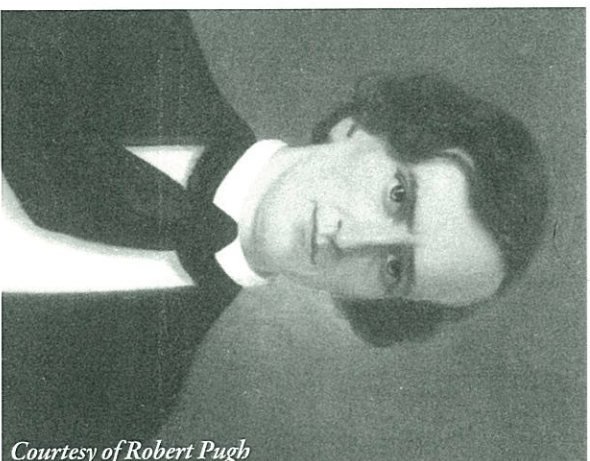
*To My Sons, On Going to
the Rescue of General
Taylor: 'Tis your country
that calls you, Her
summons obey; Away to the
rescue, My brave boys away.*

During the War with Mexico, two sons of Judge Thomas Clark Nicholls served as volunteer officers for the United States in Mexico. Named Robert Welman Nicholls, born 1815, and Edward Fitzgerald Nicholls, born 1819, they were elder brothers of Francis T. Nicholls, later a Confederate general, twice state governor, and Chief Justice of the Louisiana Supreme Court.

The war began in 1846, and the Nicholls brothers enlisted, becoming part of the 2nd Regiment in General Persifor F. Smith's Brigade of Louisiana Volunteers. The company was commanded by Colonel James H. Dakin and assisted by West Point graduate Captain Albert Gallatin Blanchard. Volunteers from around the country normally gathered and organized in the muddy fields of Chalmette, located below New Orleans. From there, the volunteers sailed to the south Texas coast and eventually transferred to Matamoros, Mexico. Their hope was to earn glory, to experience adventure, and to uphold the honor of their country. Military distinction was an ambition of many of the officers who joined in that war. The brothers also counted on serving with their fellow Louisianan, "Old Rough and Ready" Zachary Taylor, whose victories in Northern Mexico captured the imaginations of so many Americans.

Welman and Edward Nicholls lived in Donaldsonville, and both led active lives. Welman, the eldest, was a prominent attorney, and Edward was mayor of the city in 1844 and clerk of the state district court in 1846. A third brother, Lawrence Drake Nicholls, enlisted, but soon illness forced him to return home from Mexico. In March 1847, he was chosen as Clerk of Court in the place of the absent Edward Nicholls.

After the first three-month-long tour, the Nicholls brothers remained in Mexico and



Courtesy of Robert Pugh

ROBERT WELMAN NICHOLLS

became part of a newly organized group of 94 volunteers under Captain Blanchard. Named the Phoenix Company, it participated in the hard fighting leading to the capture of Monterey on September 24, 1846. At the time, Welman Nicholls, a lieutenant, was aide de camp for General Taylor. By all accounts of newspapers and first-hand reports, the volunteer soldiers of the Phoenix Company, foremost among them the two brothers from Donaldsonville, fought heroically against a professionally trained Mexican Army. According to W. W. Pugh, his brother-in-law, Welman first raised the American flag when the Bishop's Palace was captured.

The Phoenix Company was disbanded in May 1847, after taking part in General Winfield Scott's siege of Vera Cruz in March 1847 and the Battle of Cerro Gordo in April. Edward F. Nicholls remained listed as a 2nd lieutenant in Captain Blanchard's Company until then, but official records do not include Robert Welman Nicholls through that time period.

With the permission of General William J. Worth, Welman had returned home after the Battle of Monterey to attend to his ailing father, Thomas Clark Nicholls, who died on June 12, 1847. Welman replaced his father as

judge of the 4th Judicial District in July 1847, and served in that capacity until his death in August 1849. Upon Edward Fitzgerald's return from Mexico, he practiced law for a short time, but he soon commenced the study of medicine at the University of Louisiana in New Orleans. After his schooling and two years of experience at Charity Hospital, Edward practiced medicine in Donaldsonville. His life ended in a fall from his horse in December 1851.

Both men were interred in Donaldsonville. At some point, they and other deceased Nicholls family members were moved and reburied in the Ridgelyfield Plantation cemetery near Thibodaux. Their remains were transferred to the St. John's Historic Cemetery by Josephine Nicholls, according to a Nicholls descendant, Josephine Ware Wallis.

On his way home to his plantation in December 1847, General Zachary Taylor was given a lengthy welcome in New Orleans. After leaving the city, he traveled upriver aboard the steamboat *Missouri*, accompanied by an aide de camp, one Captain Garratt. The boat stopped in Donaldsonville, where the Nicholls brothers welcomed General Taylor. According to newspaper reports, the General and his aide walked through crowds to the home of Judge Nicholls, who by then was Robert Welman Nicholls. According to a newspaper account, "as the old hero came into the room, there was a great rush—or, as an old campaigner styled it, a regular stampede—towards him, to get hold of his hand, or to snatch the long-to-be-remembered kiss from his weather-beaten cheeks. . . . The old General seemed not to be seriously discomfited by the sturdy attack, but maintained himself against the severe pressure to which he was subjected, with the constancy worthy of a hero of a hundred fights." After "much hilarity and many roasts and speeches," Taylor resumed his voyage to his home in Baton Rouge. It was only one of several such interludes to see old friends and comrades in arms.

**TO THE GREAT GOD OF BATTLES,
THAT RULES IN THE SKIES,
TO THE GREAT GOD OF BATTLES,
MY PRAYERS SHALL ARISE.**