SOME HITHERTO UNPUBLISHED LETTERS FROM EDWIN BOOTH

Who the devil is Mrs. Edwin Booth of Riverside? Did you ever hear of her? Who is the rival Edwin? Or is it some fraud or practical joke at my expense?

* * * *

"Would I were with thee." I'm sick of this trip. Adieu. Yours ever, NED.

Edwin Booth.

Letters from Booth are always interesting, and this one is no exception to the rule. It was written to his dear friend Charles M. Barras way back in '72. The Mrs. Edwin Booth he so solicitously inquires about seems to have been a myth. No one was ever able to discover who she was. One day a letter came to his wife addressed to Mrs. Edwin Booth of Riverside. She was not the Mrs. Booth, and so the letter resumed its travels; but Booth was always anxious to find out who (as he put it) the rival Edwin was.

Barras was the author of the original "Black Crook." These two men were great friends. Booth used, with his second wife, to spend many of the summer months at Barras' place, Cedarcliff, at Cos Cob, Conn. Booth was so fond of this place that he afterward bought it from his friend, paying $50,000 for it.

Mr. Barras bought Cedarcliff soon after the death of his wife, who died shortly after the production of the "Black Crook." As Sally St. Clair she danced her way into public favor, and incidentally into Barras' heart. Her mother and sister lived with him up to the time of their deaths.

Cedarcliff is a beautiful spot, standing on an elevated bit of ground, surrounded by a very luxuriant natural growth of cedar. It overlooks Indian Point, and from there one can see all the great steamers and vessels coming in from the sea and sailing up the sound. The house itself is of Gothic architecture, two stories high. It is built with rambling old verandas all around it, almost smothered in flowers. The grounds are large, and have many beautiful drives in them. After Booth bought the place he filled the grounds with statuary, and the gleam of these white figures in the moonlight earned for it the title of "Booth's Graveyard."

If the old place could speak, what tales it could tell of the famous people who in times gone by loved to gather there and spend the heated summer months in one another's company! There were Booth, Lester Wallack, Barras, Barney McCauley, Jas. H. Hackett, who with his wife and baby (young James K. Hackett, now playing at the Baldwin) spent many a pleasant vacation there. Edwin Adams, who supported Booth; Harry Meech, at whose theater in Buffalo, the "Black Crook" was given its first production; Pike, of Pike's old opera-house in New York, and many, many others equally well known were among the occasional visitors.

Charles Barras.

After the death of Barras' mother and sister he sold the place to Booth and took up his residence at the St. Nicholas Hotel, New York. Then the order of things was reversed, and now Barras went a-visiting Booth. It was on one of these excursions that Barras lost his life.

One Sunday evening March 30, 1873, he boarded the train, bound for a few days' visit to Booth. As they neared the station he jumped from the moving train and fell through an open bridge, a distance of seventy feet, upon the rocks below. A gentleman by the name of Lane, who was near when the catastrophe happened, had him removed to his home and sent for medical aid. He was found to be so badly injured that recovery was utterly hopeless and in such frightful pain that they were obliged to administer chloroform. He lived until 12 o'clock that night.

Until Thursday his body remained there. It was then removed to the Episcopal church in Greenwich, and from there to Greenwood Cemetery, where he was buried by the side of his dearly loved wife. All the leading actors and actresses of the day were present at his funeral.

Mr. Barras was a tall, handsome fellow with winning ways that won for him scores of friends. His death came as a great blow to many. Hackett was also a great friend of Mr. Barras, and when little James was born it was intended that he be named Charles in his honor, but something interfered and it never came to pass.

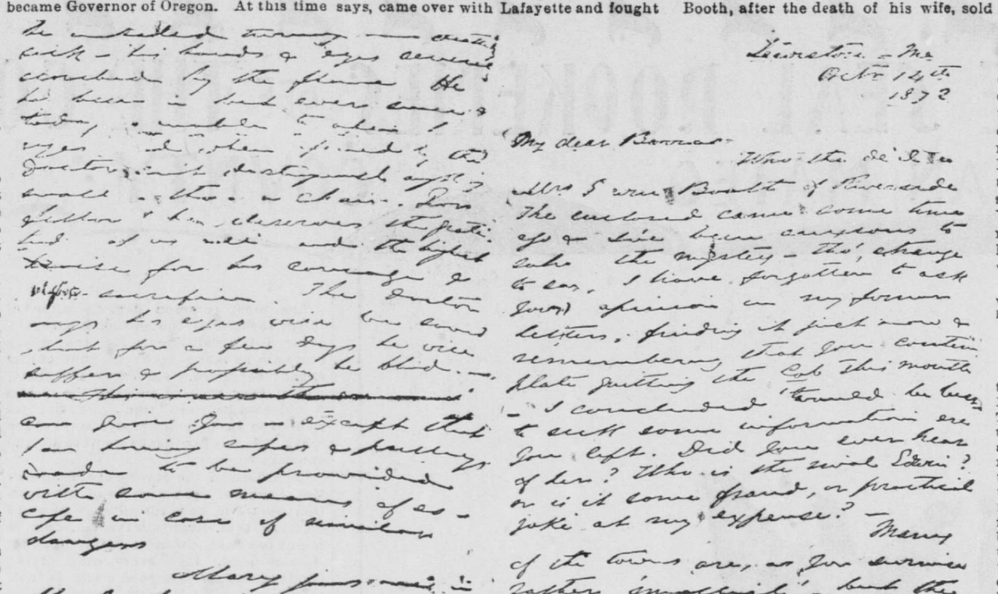
After the first great run of the "Black Crook," which lasted something over a year, the profits were divided up between the four men interested in it, and there was found to be just $140,000 apiece for each one of them. William Wheatley, one of the four, after making his fortune in this way, studied for the ministry and became a clergyman soon after. The others were: Mr. Garrett, Mr. Palmer and, of course, Charles M. B. Barras.

Barras left three brothers, Alfred Barras of Philadelphia, Washington Barras of New Jersey and H. D. Barras of this City. It is to this latter Mr. Barras that I am indebted for these letters and a great deal of this information.

Mr. Barras, to whom two of these letters were written, is now 72 years of age, but as erect and sprightly as many a younger man. He fought in the Mexican War, in Company G, Third Regiment of Indiana Volunteers, under Colonel James Allen, who afterward became Governor of Oregon. At this time he knew Zachary Taylor and many others who have since become famous in history. He has an endless fund of war stories, and nothing delights him more than to be asked to tell them. His grandfather, he says, came over with Lafayette and fought in the Revolution. His father fought in the War of 1812, and he himself in the Mexican War. "We are a patriotic family," he proudly says, and, of a truth, I think they are.

Booth, after the death of his wife, sold Cedarcliff to a Mr. Andrew Luke, in whose possession the place now is. Of Mr. Booth's letters there is nothing to say. They speak for themselves. The two to H. Barras were partly on business, and of course are not so interesting as the other. But the mere name of Edwin Booth signed to a letter is enough to insure its being read. We all know how rich were his words, how great were his ways.

"Take him all in all we shall not look upon his like again." BUD.



LEWISTON, Me., Oct. 14, 1872.

My Dear Barras: Who the de'il is Mrs. Edwin Booth of Riverside? The inclosed came some time ago, and I've been anxious to solve the mystery—tho' strange to say, I have forgotten to ask your opinion in former letters; finding it just now and remembering that you contemplate quitting the "Cob" this month I concluded 'twould be best to seek some information ere you left. Did you ever hear of her? Who is the rival Edwin? or is it some fraud or practical joke at my expense?

Many of the towns are as you surmise rather smallish, but they are all lively and so far I have held my own, my weekly profits being fully up to the average of the larger towns and cities, but I of course expected to almost double them from what I had been told of the great desire to see me, etc. The halls are crowded, but they don't hold much, and this side of Worcester they won't stand New York prices.

The hall here is up two stories, holds about 1000 people, with just one small door for exit. A panic would result in the death of at least two-thirds of the audience and all of the actors, for there is no chance of escape at that end of the hall where the stage is erected save from two windows, from which a break-neck leap would carry us to certain death.

Well, on Saturday evening, just before curtain rise, an explosion of gas beneath the stage placed a thousand souls on the threshold of hereafter! You can better imagine the result than I can describe it. Pip was the only unconcerned being among us, Mary is somewhat nervous, you know, but she "fit agin" the trembles like an "'ero," and soon conquered herself. Fortunately the audience was kept in perfect ignorance of all that was transpiring behind the curtain or there would have been "another Golgotha." My assistant costumer, a man who I've had in my employ a number of years, at the risk of his life seized a coat and rushed headlong into the blazing gas, and after some time and with considerable difficulty succeeded in extinguishing the fire. He was scorched badly but held on with bulldog tenacity until he had made all safe and then gave in, but not until he had spoken the lines of the first scene of "Hamlet," the gas he inhaled turning him in deathly sick, his hands and eyes severely scorched by the flame. He has been in bed ever since and to-day is unable to open his eyes, and the doctor can't distinguish anything smaller than a chair. Poor fellow! He deserves the highest praise for his courage and self-sacrifice. The doctor says his eyes will be saved, but for a few days he will suffer and probably be blind.

H. D. Barras.

This is all the news I can give you now except that I am having ropes and pulleys made to be provided with some means of escape in case of similar dangers.

Mary joins me in kindest wishes.

"Would I were with thee." I am sick of this trip.

Adieu!

Yours as ever

NED.

December 6, 1878.

H. D. Barras Esq.—DEAR SIR: Yours of the 4th inst. is just at hand. In reply I have but to say that I am thoroughly satisfied that every penny due for work done at "Cos Cob" for me was promptly paid and that I owe no man a dollar.

But of course in justice to you I will make a search among my papers (which have in the course of time greatly accumulated and become confused) so soon as my wife's recovery from a temporary illness will permit her to assist me—she having had full charge of all my domestic business. EDWIN BOOTH.

Sept. 8, 1875.

H. D. Barras Esq.—DEAR SIR: To-day I received your registered letter relative to the subject we discussed the other day and also concerning the "lodge," of which you doubtless forgot to speak at our interview.

Where my vouchers are I cannot tell; no doubt in the Safe Deposit Company's vaults with all my papers of importance, and which I cannot get at for at least a week.

Whatever the lodge cost every dollar of it was paid to your brother, Charles M. Barras, and the various persons here who furnished lumber, cement, brick, etc. I have all the receipts therefor, but as I tell you they are at present beyond my reach, owing to my crippled condition and Mr. McGonigle's inability to leave his business to assist me for at least a week. So he writes me to-day in reply to the letter I told you would write him concerning the "abstract and the policies of insurance."

He tells me all these policies are wrong and that he has explained to the agent, White, just how they should be made out and send them at once to him before I pay him. Will you please explain this to Mr. Gillette, for I do not wish to be thought negligent in such matters. One would have been partially attended to had it not been for my unfortunate drive.

I am sorry I could not get at these papers at once for I would like to afford you all assistance in my power, but until Mr. McGonigle is at liberty I can do nothing.

Excuse the pencil. I cannot yet guide a pen.

Truly yours,

EDWIN BOOTH.

First Ballet Girl of "The Black Crook."

THESE OLD RELICS ARE REMNANTS OF HISTORY

There is something about a lot of old curios that always attracts. It is a delicious sense of being near to the half-forgotten days of other and greater men. It is what Thomas Carlyle would call a regeneration of hero worship, and he says that is the best emotion of the human breast; and Carlyle says this is dormant in every one of us, and be he right or wrong it is true that we feel ourselves nearer to some vague intangible essence when we fondle the stiff and crackling leaves of a Dickens manuscript or touch a tarnished silver buckle that Washington wore. Some, too, like to read of such things, and it may be interesting to know that there are some of these old, old relics here in San Francisco. Since the old colonial days they have descended from father to son as perpetual reminders of other and more heroic times.

There is an old Algonquin pipe, a sign of a treaty never signed and never broken; a desk piece brought from the land of the Sepoy and of Rudyard Kipling; the tooth of a sacred white elephant of Siam, for years worn as a charm by Chan Wang, a former Emperor; a buckle bestowed by "the immortal Washington," as Napoleon called him, and which held in place the knickerbockers of a colonial colonel; some candlesticks that lighted to bed the welcome guest in the days of boundless hospitality. There are other rareties, too, and they all belong to one John J. McCue, who has no desire that his family heirlooms be exploited, but who did permit me to see them, to have pictures made of them, and who told me their various histories as the hard wood in the open grate crackled in a cheerful way while the mellow, orange glow of the lamp fell in a luminous circle over them all.

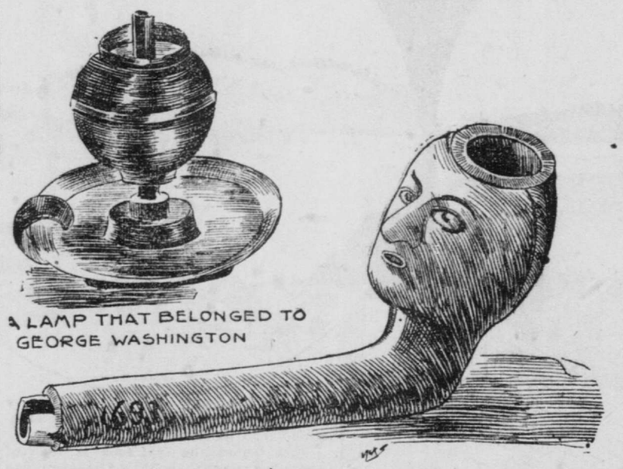
The pipe was most absorbing. It brought back to memory the tales of King Philip's war, and, as I looked, Chingachgook and his son, "the last of the Mohicans," seemed to be fishing again on the banks of the Delaware. From its peculiar fashionment it might have been found in the long-neglected abode of a cliff-dweller near the walls of the Grand Canyon of the Colorado, or in some half-forgotten pueblo of the Arizona Moquis. In this there may be something for the ethnologist, for the clay features are marvelously alike. But this pipe has a fuller and better history. It was last found in the spring of 1858 by Mr. McCue while he was plowing on his father's farm at Six Flats, N. Y., a picturesque spot in "the valley where the Mohawk gently glides," and about two miles from the old Dutch town of Schenectady. A spring freshet had washed over the banks of the peaceful river and in its riotous course had uncovered an old cellar. This marked the site of an old blockhouse that every one had forgotten, and in one corner of the water-washed cavern was found a copper jar. When this was opened the pipe and a copper bell were found within. The bell bore the heraldic emblem of Johannes Peek, the founder of Peekskill. The bell is now in the collection of Union College at Schenectady. On reference to some old family records yet in the possession of Mr. McCue, it was discovered that the pipe was the gift of a Mohawk chief, who thus pledged his word to Johannes Peek never to make war against him nor against his kin. The date cut on the stem was put there in token of the year when the covenant was made, and how well it was kept is a matter of history, since it is stated that at the later "Mohawk Valley Massacre" the house of Johannes Peek was the only one left standing. The chief's name was Thayandoga, of bloody fame.

Chan Wang, Most Holy Emperor of the Siamese and the Most Great Keeper of Keepers of the Sacred White Elephant, must have been as superstitious as his name and title were long, if one may judge from the appearance of his tooth charm. It came from the head of a sacred white elephant and was sawed flat so that it might conveniently fit in the folds of his blouse. So long did he carry it there that the soft bony formation between the ivory ridges is quite worn away. It was supposed to have the power of warding off disease and of protecting its royal keeper from bodily harm. It was found in the streets of a Burmese city just after the riots of 1857, in which Chan nearly lost his life, and only escaped by hasty flight. He is supposed to have thrown it away or to have lost it as he fled. It finally came into the possession of Mr. McCue through his cousin, Captain Oliver Burger, who was a native of Poughkeepsie, N. Y. He was of those "who go down to the sea in ships," being in command of an Indian merchantman at the time of the riots. His vessel was wrecked off the Long Island coast in the great storm of 1868.

On a previous voyage this Mr. Burger had touched at Bombay, where a boatman sold him a curiously carved desk piece. It is a massive thing carved from solid ebony. At each corner there is an elephant, perfect in detail even to the ivory tusks, and all about it there are many nooks, cunningly concealed, which open at the touch of a spring. It was made at the behest of a Maharajah of Singapore, who gave it to Captain Henry Wilson of her Majesty's Indian troops at Singapore in 1863. It was in the nature of a peace offering, and it was thought might in a measure atone for some of the many lives lost in the Sepoy rebellion. The cunning workmanship and ivory mountings make it quite valuable.

But an old brass snuff-box with Egyptian figures carved in bas-relief takes one back again to the Mohawk vale. This is another of the relics of Johannes Peek and was brought over from Rotterdam with him when he came in 1654. Johannes was the great-great-great-grandfather of Mr. McCue, and this old box, which was the best thing of its kind in Rotterdam and the envy of all the town burghers, has been handed down from father to son during all the intervening years. The first one to have it after Johannes was Louis D. Peek. When but a child of 12, before the convention with Thayandoga, Louis was kidnaped and carried off to the Mohawk country. Before he finished with them the Indians found that they had caught a Tartar or a thrifty Dutchman, which is worse, for so quickly did Louis learn the language and so strong in him were the traits that made his father wealthy that he became an Indian trader, and in the seven years he was away waxed rich and returned with the patents to enormous stretches of land, portions of which are yet owned by his descendants.

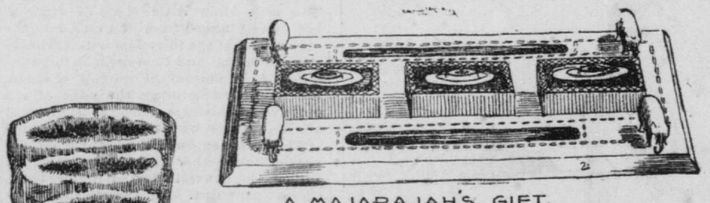
In the early days, too, the Peeks were the keepers of the key to Fort Schenectady and this old key Mr. McCue still has. It will be remembered by those who know the early history of the colonies that in 1692 Fort Schenectady was burned by the French and Indians and this and the ensuing massacre are known in history as the Mohawk Valley massacres. The forts in those days were only stockades and this one in particular stood on the edge of the settlement. It was meant for a place of refuge, but the Indians came upon the settlers at dead of night, fired the stockade and many dwellings and then massacred the affrighted men, women and children as they fled from their burning homes. Of the scene J. Fenimore Cooper has written a magnificent description. The flames lighted the sky for miles around and the next morning all that was left of Schenectady was the house of Johannes Peek, the maker of the treaty with Thayandoga. The key was found after the fire, buried in a heap of blood-soaked ashes near the site of the gate. Near it, too, were found the skeletons of many who had attempted to gain entrance, but who had been murdered and scalped on the spot. The key has every appearance of having passed through the fire, in addition to which it is very rusty. This Mr. McCue attributes partly to the blood with which it was encrusted when found. It has never been out of the family and its authenticity is beyond question.



A LAMP THAT BELONGED TO GEORGE WASHINGTON

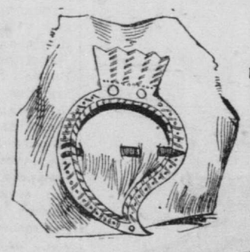
CHIEF THAYANDOGA'S TREATY PIPE.

JOHANNES PEEKS SNUFF BOX.



A MAJARAJAH'S GIFT.

THE TALISMAN OF AN EMPEROR (AN ELEPHANTS TOOTH END VIEW)



A PRESENT FROM GENERAL WASHINGTON

THE KEY TO FAMOUS OLD FORT SCHNECTADY.

GENERAL SHERMAN'S UMBRELLA.

Up in the reading-room of the Baldwin Hotel there has stood in one of the mineral cases for many months a little old lamp of the pattern of the revolutionary days. It is well made after the fashion of the time and is wholly of brass smoothly turned. It is made in four pieces. One of these is the handle, which is strongly riveted to the plate where the flint and steel were kept. To this is riveted the reservoir, which will not hold more than a tablespoonful. Into the reservoir the wick-holder screws, and the wick channel, which looks like a large needle hollowed, is pierced in one place by an oblong opening, into which a needle or pin was inserted and thus the wick pulled out and snuffed. Opposite the opening in the channel there are many scratches, as though the lamp had been used late at night and many times. Attached to the handle of the lamp there is this inscription:

This lamp was used by George Washington in his campaigns for American independence. Presented to E. J. Baldwin by Mrs. S. N. Williams, wife of the president of the Jersey Central Railroad, May 31, 1894.

Mrs. Williams had it, it is understood, from her grandfather, whose father was an aid of Washington and who stated that he saw it in use many times at Valley Forge.

But the prize of the whole collection is a silver knee-buckle presented to Mr. McCue's grandfather by General George Washington himself. The manner of its coming into the possession of the family is thus told by Mr. McCue: "My great-grandfather, J. J. McCue, was a colonel on the staff of General Washington. He had one child which he named for the Washington family, as they were friends before the war. That child was my grandfather and was named Moses Washington Barker. He was born November 28, 1760. He was aged just 14 when the revolution began, and his father took him with him in camp, where he remained throughout the long struggle. With the declaration of independence he was mustered out with honors and a good education obtained from his father during the long evenings about the campfires. On his birthday, 1774, he was presented by Washington with a pair of silver knee-buckles. One of those he kept and the other he gave to his youngest daughter, my mother, who in turn gave it to my father. He carried it in his pocket-book for more than fifty years. Indeed, it was in his pocket-book when he died. From his effects I secured it, and I shall later give it to my son."

* * * * * * *

And thus ends my story of the far-away days of the colonial time, of other climes and other people.

A Freak Among Flowers.

Now and again, in exploring American woods and swamps, botanists have come across floral curiosities that almost bridge over the great gulf that divides the animal and vegetable kingdoms, says the Designer. One of these, to be met with nowhere in the world save in North Carolina, is scientifically classified as Dionœa muscipula, but is colloquially known as "Venus' fly trap."

In appearance the extraordinary plant is prettily but unassumingly the leafless flower stem, running from six to eight inches in height and surmounted by a cluster of five petaled blossoms, rising erect like a rosettelike bed of leaves. It is in the edge of the leaves that the death-dealing apparatus is set—for this modest little plant, which is so delicate that it dies of the slightest injury to root or stem, sustains its life by feeding upon the unwary insects that chance to alight upon its leaves, enticing them to their destruction by exuding from the edges of its fatal traps a viscous fluid, somewhat resembling honey.

The traps consist of two soft, velvety leaves fringed with delicate bristles and hinged together on one side. The unsuspecting fly, lured by the honey, alights on these bristles in anticipation of a feast, but at the first touch of its feet the hinges close, the two leaves come together, the bristles interlock and the hapless insect is imprisoned in a cell from which escape is impossible.

Under the stimulus of the victim's struggle the tiny glands with which the inner walls of the trap are furnished pour forth a secretion which Darwin analyzed as a vegetable gastric juice, resembling that which insures digestion in animal life. Under the influence of this curious fluid the fly is actually digested alive, and its juices being extracted the trap doors are reopened and the skeleton is flung out.

The scientists declare that the plant unquestionably lives upon the juice of its victims, but one or two expert florists take exception to this statement. It is worthy of note that, although the habit of the plant is carnivorous, experiments have proved that it lives longer and thrives better when so inclosed that no insects can reach it—a superabundance of its favorite diet apparently rendering it even more delicate than it is by nature. The set of muscles controlling its leaves are said to resemble those of the human eyelids.—New York Herald.

Philadelphia has a greater mileage of electric railways than all of Germany.