The Port Tobacco Times

AND CHARLES COUNTY ADVERTISER.

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Historical Sketch,

HOW WILKES BOOTH CROSSED THE POTOMAC.

BY GEORGE ALFRED TOWNSEND.

The most dramatic of historical assassinations has had, until now, an unrelated interval. The actor John Wilkes Booth shot President Abraham Lincoln about ten o'clock Friday night April 14th, 1865. Near midnight he and his uninteresting road pilot, David E. Herold, called at Surratt's tavern, about ten miles south-east of Washington, and obtained the arms, field glass, etc., previously prepared for them there. Saturday morning they were at Dr. Samuel A. Mudd's, twenty miles farther on, where Booth's broken ankle was set and a crutch made for him; and that evening the two fugitives were guided in a round-about way to the gate of Samuel Cox, a prosperous Southern sympathizer, about fifteen miles south-west.

The last witness in Maryland ended here. The Government, in its prosecution of the conspirators, took up the fugitive next at the crossing of the Rappahannock River in Virginia, on the 24th of April, having failed to trace Booth a single step farther in Maryland, although he did not cross the Potomac until Saturday night, April 22d. A whole week remains unaccounted for; and for the first time the missing links of the connection are here made public. Probably not half a dozen people are alive who have ever heard the narrative fully told

When Annapolis was a greater place than Baltimore, and the Patuxent Valley the most populous part of Maryland, the main roads and ferries to all powerful Virginia were on the lower Potomac, instead of being, as now, above Washington city. The most important of these ferries crossed at a narrow part of the river, where it is from two or three miles wide, near a stream on the Maryland side called Pope's Creek. Just below this spot, and not far above it, there are deep indentations from the river which narrow the open around over which its banks are. A railroad, built since the war, for this reason has its terminus at Pope's Creek. About five miles north of the terminus is Cox's Station, which is about six miles south of the old court-house village of Port Tobacco. A short distance east of Cox's Station is Samuel Cox's house; a short distance west of Cox's Station perhaps two or three miles is the old Catholic manor house of St. Thomas's, by an ancient church which gives the name to "Chapel" Point. Here the Potomac sends up Port Tobacco River, a broad tidal stream, naturally indicated at the beginning of the war as the nearest safe point for spies and go-betweens to reach broad water from Washington. Mathias Point, on the Virginia side, makes high salient angle into the waters of Maryland here, and is almost in the direct line from Washington to Richmond.

In this old region of the Calvert Catholics, a civilization existed at the close of the last century probably comparable with that of tobacco, and large landed estates, with slaves, were features of the high bluff country, which was plentifully watered with running streams amidst the hills of clay and gravel. But the Revolution emancipated the Catholic worship originally planted on the lower Potomac by the founders of Maryland, and a curious English society took root, with its little churches surmounted by the cross, its slaves attendants upon mass and confession; and much of the country, originally poor, was covered with decaying estates, old fields grown up in small pines, and deep gullies penetrating to the heart of the hills. The malaria almost depopulated the little towns and hamlets, tobacco became an uncertain crop, slavery kept the people poor, and intercourse fell off with the rest of the world, possibly excepting some of the old counties in Virginia in Washington's "Northern Neck."

Soon after the year 1820 Mr. Cox was born in the district below Port Tobacco, and his mother dying, he was put to nurse with Mrs. Jones, the wife of a plain man, possibly an overseer, who inhabited the house She had a son, Thomas A. Jones, who grew up with young Cox; they were playmates and attended the same log school house, and Cox, as life progressed; had the ruling influence over Jones, who was a cool, brave man, but without the self assertion of his comrade, who soon developed into one of the most energetic men in that region.

A portrait of Samuel Cox shows him to have been of an indomitable will, strengthened by that consumptive tendency which often gives desperation to men fond of life. At the breaking out of the war Mr. Cox had thirty to forty slaves, plenty of land, a large house with out-buildings, negro quarters, woodlands, and a superior appearance for those parts. He became the captain of a volunteer company, which he drilled at Bryantown, a small settlement in the eastern part of the county, where the lands were unusually good and the neighbors plentiful in slaves. Hardly one of them an original secessionist, the course of events forced most of those slave holders into sympathy with the South, if not through their sensitiveness about their slave property, yet from the fact that their sons often hastened to cross the Potomac into the Confederate army, while in many cases their negroes slipped off in the oppisite direction within the Federal lines. The responsibility for disloyalty did not rest with these humble people off the great highways of life, but followed from the political consequences of breaking the Union asunder, and leaving them on the Union frontier with all the necessities and traditions of slavery. The Government paid but little attention to them, seeing that they were below the line of military operations, divided by a broad river from the ragged peninsulas of the rebellion; and therefore, there almost immediately sprang up in lower Maryland, a system of contraband travel and traffic which soon demoralized nearly everybody.

Thomas A. Jones, who had somewhat risen in the world and had a few slaves, sympathized warmly with the South; he owned a farm right at Pope's Creek, the most eligible situation of all for easy intercourse with Virginia. His house was on a bluff eighty to one hundred feet high, from which he could look up the Potomac to the west, across Mathias Point, and see at least seven miles of the river-way, while his view down the Potomac was fully nine miles.

The moment actual war broke out, and intercourse ceased at Washington and above it with Virginia, great numbers of people came to Jones and to that of his next neighbor on the bluff, Major Roderick G. Watson, asking to be sent across the Potomac. These fugitives were of all descriptions: lawyers, business men, women, resigned army officers, adventurers, suspected persons,—even the agents of foreign bankers and of foreign countries.

Major Watson had a large frame house, relatively new, two stories high, with dormer windows in the high roof, and with a servants' wing. He had a son in the Confederate army, and grown up daughters; and his house became the signal station for the Confederates across the river, one of his daughters setting the signal, which consisted of a shawl or other black object, put up at the dormer window, whenever it was not safe to send the boat across from Virginia. This window was kept in focus from Grimes's house on the other side, about two miles and a half distant,—a small low house, planted at the water's edge from which the glass could read the signal, which no Federal officer, whether in his gun-boat or ashore, could suspect. Major Watson was somewhat advanced in years, and died while his neighbor Jones was serving an imprisonment in the Old Capitol prison.

On Jones's return to his home, he therefore became the most trusted neighbor of the Watson family, and they accommodated him as he assisted them. The young lady in the family was as enthusiastic for the Confederate cause, and as discreet in all her talks and walks as Jones himself, on whose countenance no human being could could ever read what was passing within his mind. He had attended to his fishery and his farm until the war broke out, without having had an incident to mark his life: but suddenly there was an incursion of strangers to whose needs his rooted ideas of hospitality no less than his sympathy for the Confederates, led him to hearken. His farming was almost broken up, and he took to crossing the river nearly every night, and sometimes twice or more of a night, with boats, sometimes rowed by two pairs of oars, at others by three, while he steered with an oar in the stern. The interlopers could ride down from Washington to Pope's Creek in six or seven hours, and Jones could put them at Grimes's house opposite in less than a hour. The idea of making money in this traffic never seems to have occurred to the man at all; he regarded these strangers as intrusted to his care by Providence or pity; and although his liberty was constantly in danger, he seldom received more than a dollar or two for taking anybody across. Some persons argued with him that he did not charge enough, and told him to look out for his family and the future; but, as the sequel will show, he did a vast amount of hard and dangerous labor for next to nothing, and in the end the Confederate Government also left him unpaid.

The original rebel route from Pope's Creek to Richmond was through Fredericksburg; but this being considerably to the west, a new route was opened over the old road to Port Royal on the Rappahannock River. Adventurers were taken by Jones or his neighbors across to Grimes's, who, assisted by one or two of his neighbors, carried them by vehicles in three or four hours to Port Conway, where a ferry was maintained across the Rappahannock River to Port Royal, and eighteen miles beyond it the high road from Washington to Richmond was open. Mr. Jones says that he may have crossed the Potomac one hundred times before he was arrested, but has no record of the days.

In the latter part of June, 1861, General Sickles came with troops to the lower Potomac to keep a watch on the contraband intercourse. Grimes was found on the Maryland shore and sent to Fort Delaware. Jones was arrested when he returned from his visit to Richmond and sent to the Old Capitol prison at Washington, and kept there six months. He was allowed to write to his family, subject to the inspection of his letters, and to talk to any of them when an officer was by. This imprisonment, together with his adventurous cruises previously, sharpened his wits, increased his knowledge of men and the world, and educated him for the official position he was soon afterward to occupy of chief signal agent of the Confedracy north of the Potomac. Misfortunes, however, attended his affairs. His wife, who had a large family of children, was taken sick through care and confinement while he was absent, and died. His farm was mortgaged, and, not pursuing the regular vocations of peace, the mortgage slowly ate up the farm, and near the close of the war he had to remove from his river-side residence to an old place called Huckleberry, about two miles and a half inland.

Mr. Jones was released in March, 1862, by a general jail delivery ordered by Congress under the belief that the prisons were full of innocent men. He took an oath that he would not communicate with the enemy again, and was informed of the penalty of breaking it. He returned to his house on the river bluff, and soon an armed patrol and steam vessels were maintained on the river, and the Federal officers boasted that they had a spy on every farm. One of the fine old mansions on the river, Hooe's house, which had been the almost immemorial ferry house, was set on fire by the Federal flotilla and burnt for having given harborage to one of Grimes's boat parties.

Grimes again communicated with Jones, and asked him to go into an undertaking to carry the Confederate mail from Canada and United States to Richmond. Jones replied that the risk was too great, and that his duty to his children required him to stay home, although his heart was in the Confederate cause, and he would give it any assistance possible. Upon this, the Confederate signal officer, Major William Norris, who had been a Maryland man and is still alive, held an interview with Jones, and asked him to make charge of the rebel communications, stating that they were of the utmost consequence to the management of the Confederate cause and its intercourse with the outer world, the Federal blockade now being well maintained and every portion of the border closely watched, while the broad Potomac River and the pine covered hills of lower Maryland offered almost a sure crossing place. Finally Jones said that if he were given absolute control not only over the ferry, but over all agents to be retained in Maryland, the names of none of whom he should be called upon ever to mention he would undertake the work. He said to a Confederate agent: "It is useless to expect me to maintain a boat service with you. You must keep the boat on the Virginia side, cross to my beach, and bring and take the mail there, so that I cannot be suspected." He then indicated a post office in the hollow of an an old tree which grew near the foot of his bluff.

His previous observations on the river had shown him that toward evening, when the sun had fallen below the Virginia woods, there was a certain grayness on the surface on the water, increased by the shadows of the high bluffs, which nearly erased the mark of a boat floating on the Potomac. The pickets that were now maintained along the bluffs were not set till toward night. Therefore it was arranged that the Virginia boat should come in just before the pickets were set, and its navigator noiselessly take out the mail from the old tree and deposite the Virginia packet, and then, with scarcely a word whispered or a sign given, slip back again to his Virginia cove. Generally the boat was hauled ashore in Virginia out of the observation of the patrol gun boats and their launches, and sometimes it was kept west of Grimes's house, but sometimes back of Upper Machodoc Creek, which is six miles due south of Pope's Creek, only about twelve miles from Port Royal.

When the rebel mail had been left in the stump, Jones, obtained it, either in person or by one of his faithful slaves. It is a singular fact that not only were women the best co operative agents in this spy system, but the slaves, whose interests might be considered as opposed to a Southern triumph, frequently adhered to their masters from discipline or affection. Jones had a slave named Henry Woodland, still alive, who not only pulled in his boat to Virginia during the early months of the war, but, imitating the habits of his master, was discreet down to the time Booth escaped, while probably suspecting, if he did not know, all that was going on. He and his master seldom informed each other upon anything, and did not need even to exchange glances, so well did they know each other's ways. The negro was nearly a duplicate of his master in methods, went about his work without speech, and asked no questions. Two other negroes, named John Swan and George Murray, pulled oars in Jones's boats in the early part of the war. One of these, it is believed, turned spy upon his master, and finally ran away, but was sent back to Jones by the commandant of the camp, received a flogging, and some time afterward deserted to a vessel in the river.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Photographing the Lightning.

A Bohemian observer, Mr. Robert Haensel, of Reichenberg, has succeeded in accurately photographing a flash of lightning. His pictures of which he has taken several, show the light of the flash under the form of long, continuous sparks, traversing the atmosphere. With the spark the landscape also is well produced and means is given for estimating the length of the luminous train, which in one instance is calculated to be 1,700 metres, or more than one mile. Wheatstone demonstrated by direct experiments of great ingenuity that single flashes of lightning do not last more than a millionth part of a second. We may judge from this of the wonderful sensibility of the new gelatine-bromide plates which permit of the taking of correct views under these conditions.
—*Philadelphia Press.*

Select Reading.

A Grateful Dog.

Captain Burton, the Oriental traveler, is British consul at Trieste, the Austrian seaport He and Mrs. Burton are in the habit of spending two or three days each week at a rustic inn in the mountains above Trieste. While there, an interesting incident occured which showed the gratitude of a dog.

The landlord of this inn had a dog of nondescript breed, but with a great deal of sense and a grateful heart, and he attached himself very warmly to the English lady and gentleman, whom he must have recognized as friends of his race.

The landlord, who was probably aware that too much meat is not good for dogs, used to be in the habit of shutting him up on Sundays, lest he should go from table to table and be overfed by the visitors.

Mrs. Burton tried to mitigate this hardship by saving her own scraps and taking them to the dog, that he might not think himself forsaken; and he quite understood her kind motive.

Now it happened one week that Captain Burton was taken ill at this mountain inn, and was obliged to remain there three whole days in bed.

His four-footed friend knew and interpreted it after his own fashion, and the method of this doggish reasoning was this: I used to be shut up that I might not have any meat, and Captain Burton is now being treated just the same."

So when his master threw him some meat, he did not eat it, though he took it in his teeth and growled ferociously if any one offered to come near him

By-and-by, when he saw the way clear, he took the food in his mouth and trotted off to his friend's bedroom door, where he sat very patiently till some one opened it to come out.

This was the dog's opportunity, and he rushed in, jumped on the bed, laid the meat down within reach of his mouth, licked his hand, and trotted away again.

His meaning could hardly have been clearer if he had been able to talk; and you will not be surprised to hear that his friends adopted him as one of their own circle, and having so good a master and mistress is now one of the happiest dog in the world.

A Race With a Whirlwind.

A remarkable and thrilling incident of Tuesday's storm was related to the reporter by a person who was traveling on a train of the Chester and Lenoir Narrow Guage Railroad at the time the incident occured. The train had passed Lowerysville and was speeding in the direction of Lincolnton, when all on board were startled by a roaring sound that could be distinctly heard above the noise of the train, and on glancing back they saw an immense whirlwind tearing along the railroad track, following directly behind the train at a rapid rate. The engineer was among the first to see it, and realizing what the consequence would be should the whirlwind overtake the train he pulled the throttle wide open and an exciting race begun. The whirlwind was not more than 500 yds. behind the train, and the anxious passengers soon became aware of the fact that it was gradually gaining upon them. There were several ladies in the car and they cried and carried on at a terrible rate, while the men danced about the car in their excitement, vainly yelling at the engineer to put on more steam. The race was kept up in this way for two miles, when the train turned a curve in the road. As the whirlwind struck the curve it left the railroad track, speeding its way straight on through the fields. At the time it left the track it was not more than 300 yards behind the train It was a thrilling race and all the passengers blessed that curve from the bottom of their hearts.—*Charlotte Observer.*

Geographical Curiosities.

We mentioned the fact that a person could so stand in Port Jervis, N. Y., that one foot would be in New York, the other in Pennsylvania, and with his hands reach New Jersey. A gentleman in this city gives us a better item than the above. He says that at one point on the Connecticut river, where the eastern shore is New Hampshire and the western shore is Vermont, one may so place his foot that part of it may be in two States and four towns, viz.: The States of Vermont and New Hampshire, and the towns of Fairlee and Tethford in the state of Vermont, and Lyme and Oxford in the state of New Hampshire. If anyone can give us any geographical facts of a similar character more remarkable we shall be pleased to chronicle them.

The Lonesomest Man in the World.

Dave Walker, of Anderson's store, was one of the best North Carolina soldiers that Lee had. Dave was in Richmond some time since, and sitting at night in the St. James hotel he heard a fellow with a cocked hat on talking every body nearly to death about the war. He said he had been a colonel. Finally he drew a seat up to Dave and asked him if he was in the war. Dave said, "Yes, he was there."

"What position did you hold?"

"None, sir," said Dave. "I reckon I'm the lonesomest man in the world."

"Ah, why so?" asked the colonel.

"Why," said Dave, "I was a private in the war, and I am the only one I have ever seen since."