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RECOLLECTIONS OF A REFUGEE

by
John B. Douglas

(Reminiscences of Lynchburg and Virginia
during the Civil War
Written about 1900)

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CIVIL WAR
BIOGRAPHY
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RECOLLECTIONS OF A REFUGEE

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(Reminiscences of Lynchburg and Virginia
During the Civil War,
Written About 1900)

Gift: Barbara E. Douglas, Collingdale, Pa., great-neice of the author, Nov., 1978

34	558	740	Joseph Douglass	47	M	"	Machinist
35			Elijah Douglass	33	F	"	wife
36			Jeremiah Douglass	13	M	"	
37		*	John Douglass	11	M	"	
38			Joseph Douglass	7	M	"	
39			Mary Ann Douglass	7	F	"	
40							

* THE AUTHOR, ON THE 1860 CENSUS OF THE
 Eastern District of Campbell County, Post
 Office: Lynchburg.

Recollections of a Refugee

When Fort Sumpter was fired on I was a school boy twelve years of age and a resident of the quiet and at that time, unprogressive old town of Lynchburg, Virginia. My Father was a Union sympathizer, but had little or no influence over my political opinions. These were molded entirely by my school companions who, it is needless to say, were all loyal southerners and many of them gave up their lives in defense of their principles.

Slavery existed, but it was mild in comparison with the states farther south. There were no such barbarities as is depicted in "Uncle Tom's Cabin". Now and then there would be cases of apparent cruelty, but in the great majority of cases the slaves lived very happily with their masters. At the intersection of Bridge and Main Streets stood the old Market House, the lower part a market, the upper part a jail. On the Main Street front there was a large block, very much like butchers use for chopping meat. On this block it was the custom to place slaves who were to be auctioned. I have seen men, women and children sold here to the highest bidder. These sales made no impression on me at the time. I remember one case of cruelty that came under my observation which I no doubt would have long since forgotten but for a remark made by my Father, which proved prophetic, and was fulfilled in less than one year. It was about a year before the war when Father and I were walking across



a long narrow bridge that spanned a deep ravine on Church St. (This bridge I learn has long since been torn down and the ravine filled in) when we heard loud cries coming from a house at the end of the bridge nearest to Clay Street. When we approached we saw a white man flogging a negro woman. Whether she deserved it or not, I do not know and did not care at that time and would as I said have forgotten the incident, but for the words my Father uttered. In his indignation, he turned and addressing no one in particular, although there were several present, said "Some day this will be wiped out in Blood".

The Virginians were hot blooded and quick to resent insult or injury. I remember on one occasion seeing a crowd gathered nearly opposite the office of "The Daily Virginian", and hurrying up I found a man lying on the pavement shot through his neck, and dying. The man who shot him gave himself up and proved to the satisfaction of the jury that the man killed had wrecked his home, and the verdict was "justifiable homicide". A very short time before that there had been a battle between employees of two newspapers, over remarks made derogatory to some of the editors. This occurred on the corner of Clay and Church Streets, and I believe resulted in one death. I simply mention these to show the temper of the southern people at the time of which I am writing.

But, to return to my subject, when news came that Sumpter was fired upon the town fairly seethed with excitement. Men stood on the street corners in groups discussing the news. Companies

were formed and when the news came on the seventeenth of April, sixty-one, that Virginia had seceded, it met everywhere with approval and was cheered to the echo. The southern youth rushed to arms. No compulsion at that time was needed. The town was soon stripped of all its young men. Then Bull Run added fuel to the flames, and older men enlisted and there remained only the old men, women and boys. Of course I omit the negroes. Then came rumors of uprisings of the negroes. Where they originated no one knew. But they became so persistent and caused us so much uneasiness that the old men and boys formed themselves into vigilance committees and patrolled the town at night. We carried shot guns, single barreled pistols and ancient muskets. In fact, any weapon we might have. We met at a party's house, whose name I have now forgotten, but who was at that time one of the prominent men of the town, and after partaking of a cup of real coffee, each started out on his beat. Mine was on the outskirts of the town near College Hill, and was very lonely. I confess that I was compelled to pull my cap down tight on my head to keep my hair from lifting it off and it always has remained a question with me how I should have acted if a crisis had arisen. However nothing out of the ordinary happened. The rumors subsided as did also our enthusiasm. The news began to filter in of reverses. Tobacco factories were turned into hospitals and filled with the wounded; prisoners came in by the car load and the fair grounds were made a prison camp. I then became a newsboy and sold papers to the prisoners and through the hospitals. Often in passing through the hospitals some wounded soldier would stroke my hair and tell me about his boy he left at home. The next morning I would find the cot

empty or his body covered with a sheet. Somebody's Father had died during the night unnoticed and unwept.

Food and clothing became scarce, and the Spectre of famine became visible to all except the rich. Even the rich suffered many hardships. Shoes sold at twenty-five dollars a pair regardless of sizes. Flour could not be bought. Tea, coffee and sugar were luxuries enjoyed only by the wealthy, and the less favored ones began to look around for substitutes. Persimon buds, sweet potatoes and rye were roasted, ground and used as coffee. Raspberry leaves dried in the sun were used and made an excellent substitute for tea. Bran sifted from corn meal was used by the very poor for bread. Salt became very scarce. For sugar sorogum molasses was used. This was made on an island in the middle of the James River. I think they called it at that time "Daniel's Island". The cane was squeezed between wood rolls and boiled in an open pan over a wood fire. As primitive a sugar manufacturing as I have ever seen. It was nauseous looking but sweet to the taste, and we had no choice. I helped to fill the larder to a certain extent by gunning. I used common powder by grinding it fine in a coffee mill. Why I was not blown to pieces has always been a mystery to me. I cannot account for it in any other way than this, that Providence is especially careful of Fools. The shot I manufactured myself. The modus operandi would not interest the reader, so I omit it. My Father, in the early part of sixty-one, laid in quite a large amount of flour and bacon, but these were now becoming very scarce and he began to see starvation ahead. The Government was issuing rations of cornmeal

and salt to the heads of families, to be paid for at the prices then current. He had to take an oath as to the number in his family, and was given a certain amount for each member.

About this time the South suffered a great shock in the death of Stonewall Jackson. He was the idol of the South. They all loved him and had the utmost confidence in his abilities. His loss was irreparable. I remember standing on the hill overlooking the railroad as the funeral train pulled slowly in. The booming of the minute guns and the sobbing of bystanders made a deep impression on me. I followed the funeral procession through the town with many of my school fellows, and although we were boisterous and mischief-loving boys, yet that funeral march was as quiet and as orderly as any that I have ever seen. After this, things became rapidly worse, and Father communicated with friends in Richmond and found that passports could be bought by those who were too old or too young for active service. He was not the man to hesitate when he made up his mind, and in a very short time he sold everything he possessed, and we started by train for Richmond. It was on April 17, 1864, just three years after Virginia seceded from the Union (which occurred on April 17, 1861) and I remember how sad I felt at severing old associations, but my boyish exuberance soon returned and when we arrived in Richmond, I had almost forgotten my sorrows. It was the first time I had seen Richmond and there were many things to interest a healthy boy. So many things attracted my attention that for the time being, I forgot the past and lived in the present.

Father found that passports could not be paid for in Confederate money, but must be paid for in greenbacks or gold. He had to do some hustling around Richmond and among the prisoners to get the amount necessary. Twenty-five for one was what was asked and given. This was done on the quiet as the authorities did not look with favor on this kind of trading. I went with him and it required several days to get what was necessary for our purposes. Those who were fortunate enough to possess either gold or greenbacks were loath to part with them, but by the influence of friends and the willingness on his part to pay whatever was asked, he finally got together enough to see him through. Our next move was to go to General Winder's office which was in the Public Square. I remember seeing the statues of Clay, Webster, Patrick Henry and a large statue of Washington on horseback. This could be seen out of the window as we waited for an audience. Hat in hand we waited not knowing how we would be received. Visions of the prison I had passed and repassed in our wanderings (this was a large brick structure which was known as Libby Prison. It was at one time a tobacco factory) arose before me, and I fairly trembled as I waited. Finally we were ushered into the presence of General Winder who in a rather pompous manner demanded our business. This my Father explained in as few words as possible. Much to our surprise the passports were made out and handed to us and were paid for in gold and greenbacks. Just what we paid for them has long since passed from my memory, although I was present and a party to the transaction. Our next move was to find some means of getting through the lines

in the time allowed by our passports which was, if I remember rightly, ten days from the date on which they were written.

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With the assistance of friends by Father without much delay succeeded in finding and making arrangements with a party who owned three covered wagons. He was to take us to the Potomac for if I remember rightly seventy dollars per head. We were joined here by several others. Our party now consisted of three men, three women and seven children, one child being but six months old.

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We started from Richmond going in a northeasterly direction on what was called at that time "The Old Plank Road". The first day we passed over the Chickahominy Creek and over the battlefields where McClellan met with disaster. I remember seeing the bones of horses piled up in heaps and the trees riddled by grape shot and musket balls. When tired riding, the younger members of the party would get out and walk. I remember crossing the Pamunkey River on a rope ferry raft. The river was not very wide at this point. In fact, hardly worth mentioning had it not caused us some trouble with the horses and also I might say, some amusement. Safely over this we kept on in the same direction to the Rappahonock which we reached about seven o'clock on the evening of the second day. As we entered the Town of Tappahanook we noticed that the streets were deserted, and as twilight was gathering we wondered why there were no lights in the houses. As we drove down the principal street toward the river we came to an old Inn which was evidently the only house in the town occupied. We asked for lodgings, but were refused on the plea that the house was full. The innkeeper advised us to break into any of

houses and we would find everything necessary for our comfort. This my Father refused to countenance, so we crossed the river on ferry boats rowed or poled across. I knew not which as I was dead tired and fell asleep and was oblivious to my surroundings until we arrived on the other side. Here we found an empty house of which we took possession.

It was the latter part of April and rather chilly at night so we gathered some fagots and kindled a fire in the center of the room, and as there was no floor or roof we had no difficulty with the smoke. We were hungry and sleepy. We had a bag of hard tack with us which we found had grown very hard with age. One of the party had noticed fishermen on the shore and at his suggestion several of the party went out to interview them, and came back with a fine large shad. This we roasted on the coals, but as we had no salt, our appetites did not respond in a manner that might be expected from hungry stomachs. The major part of us preferred hard tack soaked in water to a planked shad without salt. We sat on the floor with our backs against the wall, and slept as soundly if not as comfortably as we ever slept in our beds at home. When we arose in the morning we spent very little time on our toilet. We got up and shook ourselves and again resumed the journey.

The country through which we passed was beautiful. The fruit trees were in bloom and the trees along the roadside were in leaf. Birds were flitting here and there, and all nature seemed happy. Our journey to the Potomac was without incident. We arrived there and then found that we were very close to its mouth,

and that it was very wide at that place. To get to the main body of water we would have to go a considerable distance through very shallow water. The owner of the team notified us that his contract ended here, and after many regrets that he could not be of further use to us, turned his face toward Richmond and left us to our own resources. We found a farmer in the neighborhood who undertook for a consideration to find a party who would row us over the river. We stayed with this man for two or three days before he succeeded in finding a man who had the courage to run the risk of capture by Union gun boats which were constantly patrolling the river. We concluded to make the first trial on Sunday night. There were three boats, each manned by two negro rowers who were supposed to know the channels. We started about eight o'clock. The sky was overcast with heavy clouds which betokened a storm, but we had overlapped our time and were in dread that we would be brought back to Richmond, so we decided to risk it. The darkness became so dense that the rowers lost their way and ran us on a sand bank. Then it began to rain and we were in a miserable condition. I sat in the bow of one of the boats and in looking around I saw to my left what I thought were the outlines of a house. I called the others attention to it and they agreed that it was, and by considerable exercise succeeded in getting the boats off the sand bank and turned them in the direction of the house. We landed on a muddy bank, climbing this as best we could in the darkness. We finally reached the house. It was at that time a fine old Virginia mansion surrounded by large oak trees, and had many acres of good land which showed

evidence of having been well cultivated before the war; but to return to my story, we knocked at the door quite a while before we received any response. We had about made up our minds that it was empty and were thinking of forcing the door when a window in the second story was raised and an old man put his head out and demanded what we wanted. One of our party told him that we were refugees and wished shelter for the night, that there were women and children, one of which was a babe and that we were all thoroughly wet, all of which he listened to and then told us we could not come in his house. Our spokesman replied that it was the first time he applied to a Virginian for hospitality and was refused. This seemed to cut the old man to the quick, for he immediately came down in his night clothes and bid us welcome. We soon had a fire of logs and stood around it until our clothes dried on us, for we had no changes, our manner of travelling would not permit us having any baggage. We stayed here about three days and while here enjoyed ourselves as well as could be expected. There was one drawback to our pleasure. The trees and grass were full of wood ticks. These buried themselves in our flesh, and caused no little annoyance and some amusement. The amusement consisted in pulling them out, while with healthy boys it was not as absorbing as base ball it helped to draw our attention for the time from our miserable condition. On the following Wednesday at dark we bid our host farewell after paying him liberally and turned our faces toward the Maryland shore. We had to row for about a mile through marshes. The water was quite deep at high tide and we

experienced no trouble reaching the river. Our boatman told us that the river at this point was about ten miles wide. It was dark and we had no means of corroborating the statement, so I give it for what it is worth. I sat in the bow of the boat and could plainly see light from the Light House to my right. The wind was blowing briskly and the waves breaking against the bow of the boat would drench us thoroughly and kept some of the party continuously bailing out the water. The captain of the boats warned us to keep very quiet and would not allow us to speak above a whisper. We learned afterwards that he was a deserter from the Union Army and feared capture. I could see lights from vessels passing up and down, and was told that they were Federal gunboats. I never expected to live through that night. It was the roughest and most miserable one I have ever experienced, and I felt deeply thankful when the boats grounded in shallow water near the Maryland shore. We were about half a mile from the shore and were carried there on the backs of the negroes. A large tree had been uprooted and lay along the shore. In amongst the roots we crawled and made ourselves as comfortable as we could until daylight came at last and we found after climbing a steep bank that we were in an old field that was once a woods with stumps about three feet high, and as thick as they could possibly be. We finally worked our way through until we came to a road. We did not know what direction to take so we sat down and waited. After waiting about one hour a country man came along in a wagon. He told us that we were about ten miles from Leonardtown and offered to take us there for a certain sum. We gladly accepted and women

and children got in, the men walking along side. It was nearly noon when we reached Leonardtown. It was the first time I had seen Union soldiers who were not prisoners, and although our disreputable appearance was against us, they treated us very kindly, so much so that it made a very deep impression on me at the time, an impression that fifty years has not obliterated. After resting here for a couple of days, we succeeded in hiring several teams to take us to Washington. There being no railroad from Leonardtown to Washington at that time, our trip through Maryland was not attended with the same privations that we experienced through Virginia. There were numerous small villages along the route where we could get plenty to eat and a place to sleep. We cut rather grotesque figures and caused no little merriment to the inhabitants as we passed along. Our clothes were home made and the fit was anything but perfect. The caps we wore were made from canvas, the peaks from boot legs and varnished. Some of us wore clothes several sizes too small. Some several sizes too large. The shoes we wore were English brogans from blockade runners. We wondered at the time why we attracted so much attention. In some places we were kissed, in other places cheered as we passed along, and it has been a question in my mind as to who were the honest ones. The ones who cheered or the ones who kissed us. It was early in May and the journey through Maryland was a thing long to be remembered. The trees were in full leaf, and there was a riot of wild flowers along the roadside. The wood was full of birds and butterflies and we boys amused ourselves running ahead of the wagons chasing butterflies or plucking wild flowers. After sunset we could hear

the whippoorwill's peculiar note, and the bobwhites calling to one another.

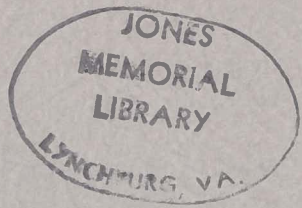
There were many small towns and hamlets along the road where we got plenty to eat and good accomodations at night. One in particular I remember. It was called B Town. The landlord was not inquisitive. Did not seem to care where we came from or where we were going, but bent all his energies in trying to fill us youngster for we seemed to be hollow down to our shoes. When we hesitated, the good man forced us to eat more and when we left his Inn, it was with many regrets.

When we approached to within about fifteen miles of Washington, we were overtaken by a gentleman riding horseback. There accompanied him a wagon driven by a negro and in the wagon was an old negro woman. The gentleman in conversation with my Father told him that his name was Mudd and that he was a physician and was taking the old woman to Washington to set her free. He said all his children had grown up and left him and he asked Father to give him my sister who was at that time four years old. He pleaded a long time for her but Father was firm in his refusal. We learned afterwards that our roadside acquaintance was none other than the party concerned in the assassination of Abraham Lincoln.

On arrival at Washington we took the train for Philadelphia, and here I must bring my reminiscences to a close as I do not think my subsequent life would be of any interest to your readers.

J.B. DOUGLAS

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Douglas



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Virginia Room
Jones Memorial Lib

JOHN F. TAYLOR

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