

HOME TO FRANKLIN!
Excerpts from the Civil War Diary
of
George Randolph Snowden
CHARLES H. NESS

AFTER receiving his discharge from the Union Army on April 18, 1864, Captain George Randolph Snowden left Washington, D. C., on a long, circuitous journey home to Franklin, Pennsylvania. The following account of that journey is recorded in excerpts selected from Captain Snowden's manuscript diary which covers his nineteen months of service in the 142nd Pennsylvania Volunteers and his life as a civilian in wartime Franklin.

As a young officer, George Snowden was no stranger to bloodshed. He was cited for bravery in the Battle of Fredericksburg where 270 members of his regiment were killed, wounded or missing. He also fought in the Battles of Antietam and Chancellorsville and narrowly escaped death at Gettysburg. Then, in the spring of 1864, Captain Snowden faced another ordeal: a wartime journey home by train, boat, buggy, stagecoach and farm wagon. Along the way, the twenty-two-year-old officer recorded his impressions and observations of life on the home front and included biting comments on politics and the discomforts of travel. He also expressed his thoughts concerning the war, his sorrow at the death of his colleagues and his concern for the future. On April 18, 1864, however, the future meant only one thing to young Snowden — a quick and final departure from Washington, D. C.

Monday, April 18, 1864

From Washington to Philadelphia

Shortly after 9 o'clock I walked over to the office of Colonel Andrews, Paymaster General . . . office was full of officers who were there on business similar to my own. I was obliged to wait a long time. I grew impatient as I realized I might be too late to make the 11:15 train for Philadelphia. I was provoked at the Paymaster who acted as though he knew I was in a hurry and was determined to keep me there

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as long as he could I hope never to return to Washington. It is to me a very disagreeable city We had a long train but it was not very well filled. In something less than two hours we arrived in Baltimore. Here our cars were drawn through by horses, the locomotive having been left at the B. and O. R. R. Depot. We were taken in charge by the W. P. and B. R. R. Company¹ noted for its lack of energy, want of any disposition to accommodate and for lagging behind the spirit of progress of the age Between three and four o'clock we reached Philadelphia crossing the Schulykill on the new bridge — the old one having been burned down last winter. I walked up Broad Street to Uncle James' house²

Tuesday, April 19, 1864

Philadelphia

Uncle has prayers every morning. After breakfast we walked down street near the State House. After staying there a while, I walked to Girard Avenue to call on my Uncle Judge Thompson Aunt Mary and Cousin Sallie were in the reception room. I was glad to find them enjoying excellent health. They dislike living in Girard Avenue as near them is the military headquarters of the city and they are much annoyed by soldiers The Judge is as well as usual and fears that our country is going to ruin. It is his opinion that the South will succeed in achieving independence and that our now loyal states will be subdued into several confederations instead of one as now. It is a very gloomy view to take and it seems to me a very improbable one They all seemed glad that I had left the Army.

Wednesday, April 20, 1864

Philadelphia

I took a walk. Met Major Epley, D. B. Irvin, John Park, Sam Brown and a number of Venango people. The Girard House³ is the headquarters of the oil men. Fortunes are being made in a few days. Everybody seems to have gone mad on the petroleum question. Many

1 This was probably the Philadelphia, Wilmington and Baltimore Railroad Company.

2 James Ross Snowden was a lawyer with a distinguished career in public service on local, state and national levels. He was educated at Dickinson College and came to Franklin where he was admitted to the bar in 1830. He was appointed Director of the U.S. Mint in Philadelphia from 1846 until 1861. From 1861 until 1873 he was prothonotary of the Supreme Court for the Eastern District. Charles A. Babcock, ed., *Venango County Pennsylvania, Her Pioneers and People*, 2 Vols. (Chicago, 1919), I, 109.

3 The Girard House was built in 1850-52 and opened in the latter year. It was considered a first-class hotel with "every facility for travellers from the various railroad stations." Thompson Westcott, *The Official Guide Book to Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, 1875), 64.

of the Philadelphia people have been badly sold by purchasing worthless lands In the afternoon, Uncle James and I called on Chief Justice Woodward, our defeated candidate for Governor, who lives in a handsome house in elegant style We next called on Major General Patterson⁴ whose establishment, the largest private residence in the city, is on the same street. The veteran and Mrs. Patterson, both unwell, were in the upstairs sitting room. Naturally our conversation turned upon the war. The General's criticisms were very sharp — equally complimentary and the reverse. He considers Fitz John Parker the finest and best general in the country Newton is a fine modest soldier with the eye for position Meade is a soldier, a gentleman and a patriot; Doubleday should be called double-skulled and is as stupid as Warren is smart. Henley is a good and brave soldier Reynolds had no superior in the Army. The General feels very sore in regard to the injustices done him respecting Bull Run.⁴ His report he cannot get permission to print. He is confident of setting himself right before the country

Thursday, April 21, 1864

Philadelphia

Will Thompson, the Judge and I strolled up and down Chestnut Street met Ed Evans who is here on business. He starts tonight for Franklin About half-past eleven Uncle James, Rob and myself started on our expedition to New Jersey. Arriving at the Gloucester Ferry, we found ourselves too late for the boats. Walked down South Street. Hired a boy to take us out to the Monitor Saugus.⁵ Uncle introduced himself to Lt. May, the executive officer, who was very polite and kindly showed us all the curiosities. One is struck by the massiveness of the concern. In the tower are two immense guns, bore 16 inches in diameter and throwing a solid shot weighing 460 lbs. . . . the turret and about two feet from the top of the deck are above the surface of the water — all else below. Lt May showed us all through the elegant stateroom of the officers — the engines and indeed everything to be seen. The officers were at dinner. They live much more comfortably

4 General Robert Patterson was in command of the Military Depts. of Pa., Del., Md. and D. C. when ordered in mid-July 1861, to prevent Johnstone from reinforcing Beauregard at Bull Run while McDowell advanced. He failed to engage the enemy in battle explaining that he had not received orders to attack. Much criticized for this, he was mustered out 27 July 1861. Mark Boatner, ed., *Civil War Dictionary* (New York, 1959), 623.

5 The *Monitor Saugus* arrived in Philadelphia on April 6, 1864, from Wilmington, Delaware, where she had been built and came to the Navy Yard to receive stores. J. Thomas Scharf and Thompson Westcott, *History of Philadelphia*, 3 Vols. (Philadelphia, 1884), I, 814.

than the officers of a regiment in the field. The Saugus is a diamond-shaped ironclad impervious to shot, shell or water

Monday, May 2, 1864

Philadelphia to Hogestown

Took an early start. Bid them all good-by. Uncle James came over. Will went with us to the depot. Was introduced by my Uncle James Thompson to Judge Read and again to Judge Strong, all of the Supreme court bench had a crowded seat near the stove — nearly roasted. Beautiful country through which we came — rich and populous. At Harrisburg took the train for Mechanicsburg — 7 miles distant — a town of 1000 population. A mail boy with a buggy enquired for "Captain Snowden." On telling him I was the man, he said Mrs. Snowden sent him for me. Three miles to Hogestown over a rough country road. Reached Hogestown about 4 o'clock. Met my Aunt Margery Snowden, my cousins Sallie and Mary and my grand Aunt Maria Gustine — all well and glad to see me of course — being so much a stranger.

Tuesday, May 3, 1864

Hogestown, Cumberland County, Pa.

Up early. Aunt and her family are early risers. Aunt Margery looks old and care-worn; her face is wrinkled prematurely Aunt Maria is terribly down on the war as it interferes with her remittance from her sister in the South. Aunt Mary keeps the Post Office In my walk out the road I recognized the place tho (in '48) I was only 7 yrs. old when here last — and then but a week. Cousins and I walked out to Silver Springs Church. Was introduced to their pastor and his wife Went to Uncle Isaac's grave from stone turnpike walked on. Mary showed me where the rebel headquarters had been — a brick house near the church.

Wednesday, May 4, 1864

Hogestown to Harrisburg

Aunt Margery says the rebel troops last summer did not do half the damage that the home militia did. At her house the latter destroyed a cherry tree which the rebels at her request let alone. She repeated her efforts to get a horse to take Aunt Sallie and me to Carlisle — a trip I was desirous of making — but failed. Hogestown is a magnificent village of between one and two hundred population situated in a wonderfully rich and beautiful valley about seven miles from the South Mountain Range. Land is very fertile and almost pure. McCormick, an attorney, was buying up a number of farms. Said to be afraid of his

greenbacks depreciating. Aunt urged me to stay a day or two longer but I concluded I had better not. Reached Mechanicsburg in time for the three o'clock train. In Harrisburg stopped at Herr's Hotel. Met Colonel McCalmont and General Tom Rowley on the street walked with them up to the Capitol and into the gallery of the Senate. Phil Raymond, who is clerking in the Senate, took me inside the bar. Saw Mr. Hage, Charley Lamberton, Speaker Penner in the Chair, Hersher Clymer, John Latta, Charley McCandeen of Butler. As a whole, the Senate of Pennsylvania is a very inferior body tho there are good men in it

Thursday, May 5, 1864

Harrisburg to Pittsburgh

I was very sleepy and it was with a good amount of resolution that I got up when the darkey called me in time to take the Western train it was 2:15 when we got under way for the West. Having secured a comfortable seat, sleep came — restless sleep though. Breakfasted in Altoona. Reached Pittsburgh about one o'clock. Missed the 3 o'clock train for Freeport having forgotten where the Allegheny R. R. Depot was Went to my hotel. With difficulty I secured a room downstairs opening on the hall leading to the dining room. The other bed was occupied by a stranger.

Friday, May 6, 1864

Pittsburgh to Freeport

Dark and smoky. I could hardly realize that the sun was hid so long by the dense black smoke always overhanging the city I reached the night depot — if it may be called such — at the right time and secured a seat for Freeport. Fare one dollar, distance twenty eight miles. Read the news. The Army of the Potomac has moved across the Rappahanock. The next news may be of a battle. How heartily I wish that victory may crown the banners of that Grand Army which has borne the burden for so long I trust my friends will come out of the conflict unharmed. Two hours to Freeport arriving at 9 o'clock. Crossed the Allegheny on a skiff which was very full. Fare only ten cents — very cheap. Had no difficulty in finding my uncle Dr. Snowden as the town has improved or changed none since my visit in the fall of 1861 Uncle Charles returned from his professional calls. He has more practice than he can attend to.

Sunday, May 8, 1864

Freeport

. . . . Uncle Charles and I attended services in the Lutheran

Church. A divinity student preached a tolerable sermon long enough in all conscience as it was fifty minutes being delivered on the text "Watch Ye, Stand fast in the Faith, Quit you like men, be strong." I Corinthians 16:13 . . . a sleeping man snored during the sermon to the amusement of several young ladies who brought their handkerchiefs into play to keep from laughing.

Monday, May 9, 1864

Freeport

. . . More fighting in the Wilderness . . . Alex. Scott came up. Very sociable gentleman . . . he enquired for a horse and buggy to take me over to Butler. No livery stable in Freeport. The town is decidedly behind the age. Intended to have gone this morning but there was no way of which I could go. Was introduced to Squire McKee, member of the House of Representatives of the State from Armstrong County. Have no desire to go to the Legislature when such men are sent. The time has passed when it was an honor to be sent to the Legislature. Afternoon passed pleasantly enough talking with Aunt and Cousin Mary Jane. Uncle returned in the evening . . . Eliza, his oldest daughter of his present wife, graduates at school next month and is expected to come home during the summer — hardly "home" for she makes her home with her aunt and uncle. She doesn't like Freeport. Neither do I. Mean town — no public spirit — no life. In the evening Mary Jane and myself attended a meeting of the Soldiers Aid Society in Weaver's Hall. Any number of young ladies there . . .

Tuesday, May 10, 1864

Butler

. . . Cloudy and dark and cool. Although up early we did not start until after 8 o'clock. Took time in crossing Buffalo Creek. Had to get out and keep the buggy from upsetting in the mud. Bridge over the creek up but not crossable — will be in a few days . . . had a slow horse . . . owner said we must not whip him or he would get sick. Couldn't fool Alex who is "some" on horses. Roads dry but not worn smooth yet. Grain looks thin. Quite a contrast to the Cumberland Valley but pretty good country for all. Got along very slowly. It was half past 12 p.m. when we reached Aunt Bredins . . . glad to see me, they said, although they were cleaning house. Parlors out of order. Aunt and Vie were assisting to sew their beautiful new velvet carpet . . .

Wednesday, May 11, 1864

Butler

Another edition of the deluge. Seems to be no end to the rain. Kept in the house all day for which I am not very sorry though I would like to have visited George Bredin's grave. What a sad warning to us all was his death. He was so talented that his loss was not confined to his family but injured the community⁶

Thursday, May 12, 1864

Butler

Raining again expected to be able to start home today but was disappointed as no stage through to Franklin. Took (a first rate) dinner at James Bredins. He is a very clever man and said to be a superior lawyer Mrs. White and Annie were at Aunt's this evening and took tea. Annie is a very fine girl — smart witty and amiable. Vie says all the young ladies are going to be old maids. In the evening Vie, Annie, Mag and I went to Zimmermans to a meeting of the Ladies Soldiers Aid Society. There were a great many there. Miss Heziah Walker entertained the company by hugging John Purviance occasionally and in fun calling him "her John." It was fun for everybody but John. Was introduced to Miss Maggie Stewart and several other ladies. Dott Bredin was the prettiest and maybe the smartest girl in the rooms although there are better looking girls than she in the world. She is a great Democrat company broke up early. Dry affair I thought.

Friday, May 13, 1864

Butler and on the way to Franklin

. . . . Miss Annie White spent the forenoon at Aunt's. She is a very agreeable young lady amiable yet witty with enough Irish about her to make her manner peculiar at last the stage came around. It was a miserable hack. At Lowry's I was told the reporting of General Lee's surrender of 40,000 men was not confirmed by later telegrams. Too good to be true. At Lowry's owing to our being so much crowded there was nearly a fight. The travellers were cross but not always without reason. Nine men and a boy besides carpet bags and band books were crowded into three seats. Once started, good humor was

⁶ Cousin George Bredin, a sergeant in the 134th Pennsylvania Regiment, was killed in the Battle of Fredericksburg at the age of twenty-two. He had graduated from the University of Pennsylvania with honors and had begun the study of law in Butler prior to entering the service. Upon learning of his cousin's death, George Snowden wrote in his diary on December 18, 1862: "The report of the death of my talented cousin struck me with regret and astonishment poor George, how I regret seeing you for the last, last time on earth."

restored but for the mud and rough road we could have got along well enough. At first we were all disposed to talk but after a while it required an effort to carry on a conversation. We had a slow driver who rested his four horses every few minutes. Some of the passengers walked some. It was between four and five o'clock when we left Butler and after ten when we reached the notorious Stone House.⁷ As usual there was a rough ragged crowd in the barroom. Tolerable supper. Five of us had the hack to Harrisville. Was sleepy but couldn't sleep. Roads awful. Mud with no bottom to it.

Saturday, May 14, 1864

Franklin

At midnight we were between the Stone House and Harrisville. Awful roads. Driver disposed to make good time but unable to do so. Before reaching Harrisville we broke a king bolt. Out in the mud to put another in. Not far from the town the leather springs which held up the hack broke. Driver got a manure wagon to take us in . . . travelled very well from Harrisville with two of the horses hitched behind. Tried in vain to sleep. Rough time. Mud flying at every jolt. At Mechanicsville we traded our team and manure wagon for another team — double — and a clean mud wagon. Stayed long enough for breakfast. Did not feel like eating. Got a good seat beside the driver who is proprietor of the line — a surly fellow to strangers. How glad I was to get back to old Venango. We were a long time coming. Fourteen miles. Very bad road near where Frank Alexander used to live. Broke down again right in the middle of a deep mud puddle. Got out and fixed it up. Rain came on. Got out at Kinnear Hotel crossing the street very muddy. Met father there . . . Mother and Jennie were rejoiced to see me . . . called at Mr. Heydrick's [law] office. Mr. Heydrick⁸ looks very well. Met many friends by whom I was welcomed home . . .

Monday, May 16, 1864

Home

. . . In Mr. Heydrick's office met George Plumer. Looks well. Doing nothing. Capt. Dorr an elegant gentlemen is killed and Captain Lloyd

⁷ Stone House, the hotel at the crossing of the Butler and Mercer and the Pittsburgh and Franklin stage routes, was built in 1822, on the site of the Douglass log house, afterward the John Elliott tavern. Robert C. Brown, ed., *History of Butler County, Pennsylvania* (Chicago, 1895), 618.

⁸ Christopher Heydrick, who was appointed to the State Supreme Court in 1891, was instrumental in the application and development of the law as it related to the many intricate problems connected with the oil industry. Babcock, *op. cit.*, 425.

is wounded. Cols. Dana and Musser also wounded Heydrick proposed terms of co-partnership — did not hesitate to accept. Hyle, Heydrick and Snowden! First year am to get one-fourth of the profits. After that, until otherwise agreed upon — one-third. All unfinished business, all stationery etc. to be turned over to the firm Little did I think when commencing to study Latin under Mr. H. that I would ever be his partner. What else is before me? Who knows?

In the years that followed, civic and military duties were constantly before George Snowden. He became Mayor of Franklin and Colonel of the Third Regiment, Pennsylvania National Guard, a unit which he commanded during the Pittsburgh Riots. Later, as Major General of the Pennsylvania State Militia, George Snowden commanded troops during the Homestead Riots and retired with that rank shortly before the Spanish-American War. He died in Philadelphia in 1932 after leading a distinguished career in law and public service.