

# A Journey Through Time

## The **TIMES** Chronicle

Columnist Linda Reno is a historian and genealogist specializing in Southern Maryland history. Mrs. Reno is a member of the St. Mary's County Historical Society, St. Mary's County Genealogical Society, Charles County Genealogical Society, Maryland Historical Society and the Maryland Genealogical Society. She has authored many books and articles on local history. We hope you will enjoy these articles and welcome your comments and suggestions for future subjects.

Dr. Thomas Harris Maddox was born in Charles County on February 25, 1793 and was the son of John Maddox and Martha Harris. About 1818, Dr. Harris moved to Rapides Parish, Louisiana where he established his medical practice and began to acquire property. By 1827, he was said to be "very popular, but he talked too freely, and passed on gossip about a lady in high social circles which provoked Gen. Montfort Wells to take a shot at Maddox as he passed in his buggy. But the shot missed the talkative doctor and hit a third party." This gossip supposedly involved a sister of Gen. Wells.

This would be the beginning of "The Sandbar Duel." Maddox challenged Wells to a duel, but received no answer. Then Col. Robert Crain assumed the part of an offender and challenged Wells, but still no answer. Samuel Wells decided to answer the challenge for his brother.



Historical Marker, Sandbar Duel, Adams Co., MS

A sandbar, located in the middle of the Mississippi River, was selected as the site and the duel occurred at noon on September 19, 1827.

"In the Wells party were Thomas Jefferson Wells, James Bowie, General Samuel Cuny, George C. McWhorters, and Dr. Richard Cuny.

Opposing this group was Norris Wright, banker who had reportedly refused a loan to Bowie, Colonel Robert A. Crain who had killed a man who would not take his note in a rent payment; the Blanchard brothers from Bayou Rapides, one of whom (Alfred) had once shot and wounded, Thomas Jefferson Wells, and a surgeon named Denny.

In due course, the principals with their seconds and physicians met on their appointed field of honor. The friends who accompanied them had agreed to remain a half mile distant from the scene.

Either both principals were incredibly bad shots, or both, at last, used more judgement at the actual duel than they had in arranging for such a display in the first place. When the principals were in place, both fired and both missed. Each reloaded his duelling pistol, and on proper signal aimed and shot again. Neither was touched. Wells offered his apologies, and Dr. Maddox accepted them.

The duelling party started for a willow grove where a refreshment table was set up for drinking to the newly-acquired peace. But General Cuny and James Bowie violated the agreement to stay apart from the duelling field. Cuny called to Crain that now was the time for them to settle their differences and drew his pistol. Instead of firing at Cuny, Crain fired at Bowie, and struck him in the hip. Then Crain was hit.

Dr. Cuny tried to prevent his brother from re-entering the fight, but he could not restrain him. Crain fired his remaining shot at Samuel Cuny and killed him. Bowie, who was wounded, was still able to try to stab Crain with his knife, but Crain, using his pistol as a club, knocked Bowie out.

Norris Wright, the banker, attacked Bowie with his sword cane. The blade struck his breast bone and broke off, but in spite of the bleeding wound, Bowie managed to reach Norris Wright and stab him to death with his famous knife.

Alfred Blanchard was wounded by a shot from a pistol.

Norris Wright and Samuel Cuny were buried in nearby Vidalia. James Bowie was taken to Natchez where he managed to recover.

And, no, you didn't misread. This is the same Jim Bowie who was killed at the Alamo in 1836. Shot twice and stabbed multiple times, he survived this duel that brought fame to him and his "Bowie Knife."

And, just so you know, Jim Bowie had Maryland roots as he was the great-great grandson of John Bowie who died in Prince George's County in 1759.

Dr. Maddox lived the rest of his life quietly in Rapides Parish. The last survivor of the Sandbar Duel, he died January 18, 1888 at the age of 95.

The January 20, 1888 issue of the Baltimore Sun contained his obituary and also referred to the duel. It was also said that Dr. Maddox "spent some time in St. Mary's County last summer visiting Sen. Fred Maddox and others." He wasn't visiting Fred Maddox (his nephew) because he died in 1871, but he may have visited Mrs. Fred Maddox (Susan Ruth Harris) who, in addition to being the wife of his nephew, was also his first cousin.

There's another Maryland connection in this story as well. Gen. Montfort Wells married Jeannette Amelia Dent while his brother, Thomas Jefferson Wells married Martha Lucie Dent, daughters of Hatch Dent (son of Hezekiah Dent and Martha Burch of Charles County). Hatch Dent died in Rapides Parish in 1815. You just never know where you'll find our Southern Marylanders!

For more information on the Sandbar Duel, there's a very good video on line at [http://www.visitnatchez.com/custom/cf\\_includes/video2.cfm?id=38](http://www.visitnatchez.com/custom/cf_includes/video2.cfm?id=38)

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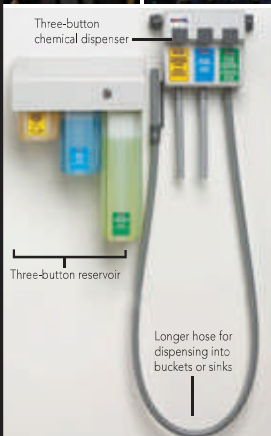
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