

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.

By Linda Reno
Contributing Writer

On April 3, 1846 a meeting to transact business occurred in Charlotte Hall that would result in the death of one of the participants and the arrest of two others for murder. What happened that day was reported in newspapers all over the U.S. as far away as New Orleans, Louisiana and Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Those involved were George G. Ashcom, James Thomas Blackistone, John Henry Thomas, and George Thomas. Before the meeting even started, Ashcom and John Thomas became involved in a heated argument. Ashcom complained that William Thomas (John's father) had cheated Ashcom's sister in a previous business transaction "to which Mr. Thomas replied I am responsible for my father's acts. In reply Mr. Ashcom said I will not consider you responsible (I will here say Mr. Ashcom is between 50 and 60 years of age; John H. Thomas between 21 and 22) so far as my sister is concerned. She has a son able and willing to avenge her wrongs, to whom I refer you. Mr. Ashcom afterwards characterized the conduct of Mr. Thomas' father in strong and harsh language. Mr. Thomas remonstrating that the present was not a occasion to settle such matters, Mr. Ashcom said I wish the whole community to know the conduct of your father and spoke of it in strong language."

According to Blackistone, Ashcom raised his loaded whip to strike John Thomas. George Thomas (John's uncle) intervened, hit Ashcom and jerked the whip from his hand. "As soon as he lost the whip, Mr. Ashcom raised his vest



Trinity Episcopal Church, St. Mary's City. Burial place of George Ashcom.

and drew a dirk with a blade some five or six inches long, and pressed upon the retreating gentlemen, making lunges at them, fortunately without doing injury, until they became crowded together at the door, and here, as he had his arm raised and was apparently in the act of plunging the weapon into the breast of Mr. George Thomas, John H. Thomas drew a pistol and fired, the ball penetrating the skull above and behind the right ear."

Dr. John Broome (cousin of George Ashcom but also related by marriage) disagreed with Blackistone's account saying "The Friends of Mr. Ashcom have seen with regret publications circulating through the State in regard to the melancholy affair transacted at Charlotte Hall on the 3rd inst. calculated to forestall the public mind, and leave with it impressions in glaring and positive opposition to the facts in the case.

Wishing nothing more nor less than that strict justice be done to all parties to that unhappy affair, I submit the following statement, based upon facts of positive proof, and on evidence of indubitable validity; fully corroborated by the concurrent testimony of the many witnesses present upon that occasion, and by the deposition of Mr. Ashcom himself (taken by a Magistrate of intelligence far above the general order of such officers) when calm, in the full employment of all his mental faculties, and fully aware of his impending dissolution:

.....At this stage of the affair, Mr. Blackistone and Mr. George Thomas advanced towards Mr. Ashcom. Mr. Blackistone uttering the following "I will not allow such epithets to my father-in-law." [James T. Blackistone was married to Ann M. Thomas, sister of John Henry Thomas. The Thomas siblings were the children of William Thomas and his first wife, Elizabeth Tubman].

The recontract ensured; Mr. Ashcom's riding whip was wrested from him, and with it a severe blow was inflicted on his head. Mr. Ashcom advanced towards them, Mr. George Thomas holding in his uplifted hand a pair of fire tongs--Mr. Blackistone pointing a pistol at the person of Mr. Ashcom, who (with drawn dirk) remarked "Shoot--I do not regard your pistol."

At this stage of the affair, (a gentleman interposing to prevent Mr. Ashcom's advance) John H. Thomas, who was standing aloof some 8 or 9 feet behind Mr. Ashcom, took deliberate aim with a pistol, and lodged its contents in the back part of his head, a little above the occipital protuberance. He fell apparently lifeless; and there lay smothering in his own blood--an upright and valuable citizen--an efficient member of his church--the friend, yet the main stay and support of the numerous poor of his neighborhood. Here I would close, but my connection with Mr. Ashcom requires that I should briefly consider that marvelous card, over the response by the name of James T. Blackistone, appearing in the Baltimore Patriot of the 6th instant, which has been seen (by all knowing the facts in that affray) with perfect surprise and complete astonishment."

To be continued.

Dear Readers, you will note that I often use italics in relating a story as I am quoting from an original source, e.g., newspapers, wills, letters. Space limitations prohibit inclusion of sources in the articles, but if you want them, contact me.

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