

A Journey Through Time

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By Linda Reno
Contributing Writer

This is the story of a pair of gold spurs that were made in 1863 as a gift for General Robert E. Lee. They were smuggled from Prince George's County into St. Mary's County, to Virginia, and ultimately into the hands of General Lee.

The "cover story" was that the spurs were a gift from the ladies of Baltimore, but they weren't. They had been made at the request of William Alfred Jarboe (son of Matthew Jarboe and Elizabeth Nelson of St. Mary's County) who was then Register of Wills for Prince George's County.

"Only a small number of those who could absolutely be trusted were permitted to subscribe to a fund for the purchase of the gold spurs. George M. Graham, then a prosperous farmer in the county, and secretly an ardent secessionist, gave \$50 toward the project, but the greater portion of the purchase price was defrayed by Mr. Jarboe...."

Jarboe entrusted the spurs to Capt. Charles Caywood, a native of Charles County.

"...the treasured spurs were placed in Caywood's possession by Jarboe, who admonished him never to part with them while he lived until they were given over to General Lee. This caution was unnecessary, as the Confederate spy had often declared that he would never be taken alive."

Capt. Caywood made his way to the plantation of William Joshua Cartwright and his wife, Martha Ann Maddox in St. Mary's County.

"He was accompanied by Capt. Sims, Amos Fauquier, and another man, and in addition to the gold spurs, they had a splendid new musket which Prince George's County friends had purchased for Capt. Dement of the Confederate Army, and had sent it to him for use against the Federals.

It was the intention of Capt. Caywood and Capt. Sims to proceed on their journey that night after partaking of dinner, but a violent storm set in and they were compelled to remain until the following day. Capt. Caywood called his host to one side and showed him the spurs [asking him] to put them away in a safe place for the night. Calling Mrs. Cartwright, her husband told her the story of the spurs and committed them to her keeping.

Mrs. Cartwright hid them in her wardrobe

and the new musket was placed in a corner by the fireplace. After a hearty dinner and a pleasant evening, Mr. and Mrs. Cartwright and their guests retired for the night. As they slept, one of the slaves was en route for the nearest Federal post.

The morning dawned bright and clear. Cpts. Caywood and Sims, under the guise of taking a stroll around the estate, were quietly scanning the coast to see if any bluecoats were near at hand ready to capture them.

Just as breakfast was ready to be placed on the table, one of the children glanced out the window and saw that the house was surrounded by Federal cavalry, who were preparing to dismount. Instantly the child gave an alarm. Mrs. Cartwright hurriedly locked the front and back doors of the house, and then proceeding upstairs, she secured the spurs and secreted them in the bosom of her dress. Then she took the heavy musket—about as much as she could lift—and hid it in the chimney, a loose brick furnishing a support. Returning downstairs, she joined her husband, and was the least agitated of any of the party."

A search ensued and the Union troops never found Cpts. Caywood or Sims, the spurs or musket, but they seized what they considered to be contraband goods.

"Mr. Cartwright, Amos Fauquier, and the other man were arrested and taken by the Federals to Point Lookout. Mr. Cartwright was able to prove that the goods that had been seized were his private property-- he had purchased them with the intention of opening a store on his plantation. After being detained for about a week, he was permitted to return home.

Cpts. Caywood and Simms, who had seen the arriving Federals in time to conceal themselves in the thick brush on the edge of the river, remained in hiding until nearly dusk. As soon as it was dark they secured the spurs from Mrs. Cartwright, also the musket, and departed for the Confederate lines, which they reached without much further trouble."



Lee's Gold Spurs

The spurs were at last delivered to General Lee. Although some claim he wore them when he surrendered his Army at Appomattox, he did not. In fact, he is never known to have worn them. The spurs remain in the ownership of the Lee family and are currently on display at the Visitor's Center at Stratford Hall.

The inscription inside the spurs reads *Semulus Deo Virtus. Presented to Gen. Robert Lee, by his friends and admirers of Prince George's County, Maryland.* Latin translation: Valor has provided [his] spurs.

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