



Harry E. A. Gutshall

REMINISCENCES OF THE WALKER CHAPEL AREA

By

HARRY E. A. GUTSHALL*

This is a history of Walker Chapel, Virginia, which is situated near the Chain Bridge in Arlington County.

Church, School and Social Conditions

Walker Chapel Methodist Church was formed in 1871 and has been a useful and helpful part of the neighborhood ever since. At this time, it has a full time minister, with the parsonage nearby, to take care of the one church. In the olden days, the minister used to have four charges: Mt. Olivet and Walker Chapel in Arlington one Sunday, and Salem and Vienna (about 17 miles from here) the next. There also was a temperance lodge, no longer in existence, which did lots of good. It was called St. Julian's Lodge No. 220, Independent Order of Good Templars. It was a great force for good in its day and time. It met every Monday night.

We have had great improvements in schools in recent years. About 1892, we had to walk two miles to school over dirt roads, either through mud or dust, to the one-room Carne school, very much overcrowded; at one time there was an *average* of 72 pupils with a peak attendance of 90. There was no plumbing and the water was brought in a bucket kept near the teacher's desk. We could go up and get a drink of water first thing in the morning, and at any time in the day if you specially requested it, you could have another drink. All the pupils drank from the same tin cup. About 1893, the Carne School was merged into a two-room school on Glebe Road; now we have the John Marshall School at that point.¹ The Saegmuller School was built in 1901 where the James Madison Elementary School now stands. This new schoolhouse, with four good rooms filling all the needs of the neighborhood, was dedicated in 1939. Instead of walking to school now the children go and come in buses.

In the early days in this neighborhood, the people seemed to have a right pleasant time among themselves. There weren't many people around, but they had taffy pulls, masquerade parties and the like of that, and once a year we had a Sunday School picnic where we had all the free lemonade we could drink. And then we had a Christmas tree at Christmas time, and a bag of

* Mr. Gutshall (1878 - 1955) married the granddaughter of David Walker who settled in the area along Glebe Road at the head of the Chain Bridge hill in the mid-1800's. Mr. Gutshall was employed as a mail carrier in the District of Columbia but lived in what had come to be known as the Walker Chapel area. Toward the end of his life, he related some of his memories of that area. Walker Chapel Methodist Church, established at the site of the Walker family burying ground, stands on the point between the old and new Glebe Roads leading to Chain Bridge. This article is condensed from those accounts now in the possession of Mrs. John B. Thompson of Arlington, Mr. Gutshall's niece by marriage.

¹ Ed. Note: Since discontinued as an elementary school's address is 4751 - 25th St., North.

candy and an apple, and an orange were given to each of the scholars. Sometimes the teacher would give us a bag of firecrackers, maybe a handkerchief or something like that, which we prized very highly.

At the time I speak of, along about 1890's, the people were very friendly. In case of illness of any kind there would always be somebody to come around and set up and help out when it was necessary. People who were ill with TB, which was very prevalent, were not cared for as they are today when they breathe the fresh air the Lord made for us. In those days the rooms were plastered up with paper and paste in every crevice and crack of the windows and doors so that all the air remained in and no fresh air could possibly get in the room where the sick person lay. At that time, human tuberculosis and bovine tuberculosis were not thought to be related at all. It was many years afterward before the doctors agreed that there was such a thing as communicable tuberculosis between cows and people. Now, of course, things are very different and people realize the value of care and attention and proper medication and proper arrangements to prevent the advancement of TB.

Everything today is much more pleasant. Living conditions are better than in the early days, and while the taxes are higher, we have many advantages that we formerly did not have such as a good hard road, good schools, and road lights at night, garbage collection, ash collection and trash collection, U.S. Mail collection and delivery, and other services which were not in existence in those days. We also have water and sewerage in this part of the County which was a very sore need. Fire protection has been more recently inaugurated in the County and it is a much safer place to live than formerly. Altogether, there has been great progress and improvement in living conditions in this part of the County in the last seventy years, and we feel that it has made Virginia — this part of Virginia — a much more pleasant place to live in. We have many of the advantages of city life right here in the country. And we have a bus service that carries us down into the heart of the city — a great improvement over the times fifty or sixty years ago when the only way to get to town was to walk there unless somebody gave you a ride or unless you had a horse and buggy.

Transportation Facilities

One great improvement in this neighborhood was the beginning of the Cabin John car line from Georgetown to Cabin John and back.² It enables folks here to go to town without having to walk four miles which they had had to do up to that time, over very rough roads. Although the road was level, there were long straight stretches of road between turns and rather a wearisome journey. The trolley line began in October, 1895. At that time it was a single track but soon the resort at Cabin John began to be so popular that a double track was built and a 30 minute schedule was kept so that a car

² Ed. Note: This was on the District side of the Potomac River. Of course, returning Virginians still had to walk across Chain Bridge and up the Glebe Road hill.

could be gotten on the hour and the half hour at the District line. From Georgetown to the District line was one fare, and from the District line to the end of the route in Maryland, was another, which didn't seem to bother anybody very much considering the great advantage of having the line, especially in bad weather. It enabled many people to work in town and live in the country who would otherwise have been unable to have done it. There were rare occasions when people were known to have walked all the way from 36th and M Sts. or Wisconsin Ave. out to Walker Chapel and back every day for many years.

One person who did this was Mr. Wesley Havenner who worked for Fauth & Co., connected with the Saegmuller Bausch & Lomb Optical Co. at 2nd and D Sts., N.W., near the Capitol. He rode the cars as far as Wisconsin and M. St., known as the Car Stand, as far as the line went in those days. The cars would come out of the barn and stand there awhile until they got a certain number of passengers, then start down to the Navy Yard. At 7th St. you crossed the street to a booth to get a transfer: yellow card went north and south; green card, east and west.

Prices

This was a time of low prices. At that time, 1896, there existed at 4½ St. and Pennsylvania Ave., a lunchroom known as the Denmark. This was the original 3 cent lunchroom where you could buy a cup of coffee, a piece of pie, a bowl of soup, or any other article for 3 cents. It had tremendous patronage and was a great help to many people who worked on a low income. While people got only little bits of money for work, they also had low prices to pay for commodities. You could get all you wanted to eat for lunch for 9 or 12 cents.

At that time, there was a popular song known as the Cake Walk which ran something like this:

"Bring out the dishpan
Here comes the fishman
Pork chops ten cents a pound."

Liver was 5 cents a pound and was a despised article of food known as bricklayer's turkey. No one today realizes what the prices were like in those days. In 1896, it was possible to buy a tailormade suit of clothes for \$10!

Walker Chapel and the River

Fishing in the Potomac

One of the important and early records has to do with the fishing rights. These started way back in 1634 when the Calverts settled Maryland and through King Charles of England got the ownership of the [Potomac] River. When the District of Columbia was formed from part of Maryland and part of Virginia, the District claimed the rights of Maryland to the river where most of the fishing was done. A law was passed prohibiting fishing by net [weirs]. This was a great setback to many people because they made their

living fishing and were able to buy a 100 lbs. of salt and preserve a couple of thousand herring without much trouble or expense.

A good many of the old fishing stands are on the river above the Chain Bridge. On the East bank and looking north is Abutment Stand, a stand called Tim White, another called Turkeyfoot. On the West side of the river are Reid's Stand, White Stand, Overseer, High Point, Boiling Rock, Flat Rock, Herring Point, and others.³ Down below the Bridge on the western side of the river at Pimmit Run is Pershing Rock, and at the next run, the Gulf Run, is Deep Stand, a very fine fishing stand. Of all the fishing stands on the river, the one called Boiling Rock is the principal shad fishing place where shad may be dipped in greater numbers than at any other point. On the eastern side of the river looking downstream from the Chain Bridge there are two stands: Devil's Hole and Devil's Five Alleys. This part of the river is the only part that is narrow and where fishing can be done. Half a mile below, the river widens out so that fishing with a dipnet on a staff is utterly impossible.

During the early days, many sturgeon were caught in the neighborhood of the Chain Bridge. The usual catch for one person per season was about nine or ten sturgeon. At that time, sturgeon were very cheap and one of about 100 lbs. sold for \$1. The catching of a sturgeon was quite an art. It required a man to have a large barbed hook on the end of a long pole, about 10' or 12' long. He stood quietly near some point where the sturgeon, because of the current, went around a point of rock, as for example at Tim White, and would have his hook all ready in the water. When the sturgeon came near enough, he would hook him and pull him in, after which there was a terrific fight to get the fish out of the water onto the land. Sturgeons were mostly cut up and boiled to get the oil. The steaks were not considered worth much in those days; the price has gone up to 90¢ or \$1 a lb. Sturgeon fishing occurred as late as about 1890. Since then pollution in the river and fishing nets in the lower Potomac region have kept the sturgeon from coming up here so that at the present time the sight of a sturgeon is a very rare one indeed.

The C & O Canal

An important part of the history of this neighborhood has to do with the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal, finally completed to Cumberland, Md. in 1850, since many of the people who lived around here worked on the canal as maintenance men, lock keepers, and so forth. Some of the names I remember were Moore at the 1st lock, King at the 2nd, and at the 3rd lock, Burdette and many people named Pennyfield.

Many canal boats carrying coal came down the 180 miles from Cumberland to Georgetown. They were drawn by mules and carried about 100 tons of coal apiece. They came down through the locks. At one place

³ Ed. Note: cf. Ludwell Lee Montague, "Thomas Lee at the Spout of the Potomac"; *The Arlington Historical Magazine*, Vol. 4, No. 2, p. 34. for the names of some of these stands in the 18th Century.

there are seven of these locks coming down a steep grade called the Seven Locks. At other places the levels were quite long and continued until they got to Georgetown at Rock Creek and then into the Potomac River. About thirty years ago, the B & O Railroad built a spur of its road from Cumberland to Georgetown to bring the coal down. This was because the canal would get washed out almost every time there was high flood water. It cost so much to repair the towpath and the canal generally that it was discontinued.⁴

Some of the most important people and some not so important worked driving mules on the towpath from Georgetown to Cumberland. There is a legend that among them was President Garfield who drove mules up the towpath as a boy from Washington to Cumberland and back several times. This is hearsay as it was a long time ago.⁵

Chain Bridge and the Mouth of Pimmit Run

This is a part of the history relating to the end of the Chain Bridge, the western end, events that occurred there, and the buildings that were there at different times. About 1885 or along there, maybe before that, there were the ruins of an old paper mill at Chain Bridge, just between the old Georgetown-Leesburg Pike and the Pimmit Run. There is a little greensward located there, perhaps as much as an acre of ground, all covered with grass. The paper mill had been fed by water power from the Pimmit Run where there was a millrace on the western side of the Run.

Since the time of the paper mill, an electric company, the Columbia Light and Power Co., I think it was called, built a building there to produce electricity. It furnished a few lights on the Canal Road on the way to Georgetown, and one light in the middle of the Chain Bridge. It was quite a curiosity to many people who went down there to see the electricity being produced. Very often large groups of people from the Walker Chapel neighborhoods would go down to see the tremendous, rapidly moving condensers that moved the generators. This lasted for quite awhile, until about 1890 or 1894 when the plant fell into disuse. It finally crumbled down and was moved away by a firm known as the Brennan Construction Co. which operated the stone quarries close by. This company had its own railroad tracks and brought the stone up there and crushed them and sent them down to the scows anchored at the river here at the Chain Bridge, near the western end of the Bridge, where there was a sort of arrangement to release the load of crushed stone automatically into the scows.

Later, after an injury to Mr. Brennan of the Construction Co., all of the lumber and machinery was bought by the District of Columbia Government and taken to Occoquan. And for a long time there wasn't anything there until the Mackey family built houses there. These also have been removed.

⁴ Ed. Note: Operations on the C & O Canal actually were discontinued in 1924.

⁵ Actually President Garfield did work for a short time on a canal boat in 1848 but it was on the Ohio and Erie Canal and the connecting Pennsylvania and Ohio Canal and not the C & O Canal. (cf. *The Diary of James A. Garfield*, ed. by Harry James Brown and Frederick D. William, Michigan State University Press, 1967, Vol. I, p. xv, p. 8, and p. 12.

Going back to about 1880, the greensward was used every Sunday afternoon when many people came from Virginia, Maryland, and the District to congregate there at the tavern. Many peanuts were consumed and there was lots of conversation going on, especially on nice days. The young ladies and the young gentlemen would meet there on the greensward and a photographer would set up his tent and take tintype pictures of anyone who wished to have his photograph taken. All of this made it a very interesting gathering place and, of course, the beautiful scenery of the river, looking towards town, was always worth looking at.

About 1920, the little bridge across the Pimmit Run fell down under a truck carrying a load of stone. This necessitated the building of a new bridge which was not finished until about 1923. During the interval, a distance of about 200 feet had to be covered by a vehicle taking a detour of about 9 miles. The County constructed a small catwalk across Pimmit Run where the old bridge had been, but that was very unsatisfactory since vehicles still had to go the long way round to get from one side of the Run to the other.

The Drover's Rest

Over on the Conduit Road, now MacArthur Blvd., there was a place near what is called Reservoir Road where cattle were kept for sale in the Washington markets. It was generally known as the Drover's Rest. This was not a building but cattle pens. The cattle were brought by train somewhere up to Langley and pastured there to be fattened prior to being killed. They were driven in herds down the Pike and across the Chain Bridge and down the Canal Road in charge of drovers. The rules at the Chain Bridge were that there should be only twenty head of cattle in a drove, and the droves should be 175 feet apart, each in charge of a drover. Sometimes the droves would stampede and break away from the drover and they had a good deal of trouble with them. They would wander over the steep hills on the District side of the Chain Bridge, and walk through fences and otherwise cause a good deal of trouble. When they got down to the Drover's Rest the butchers would buy them for meat and take them to the various slaughterhouses which existed in various parts of Georgetown and Washington. One of them was on the Canal Road right near the Overhead Bridge, just below Chain Bridge, at what is now Weaver St. It was run by a man named Woody, Mr. William Woody. About a quarter of a mile further down, his brother, Ed Woody, had another slaughterhouse. They slaughtered sheep, cattle, and calves and sold fresh meat in the Washington markets.

Some of the cattle that were brought across were very savage and had to be hornswaggled. I remember one steer with a nose ring and a man on either side with a pole fastened to the ring. The steer had a board across his forehead fastened over his horns, and his horns were tied with a heavy rope fastened to his ankles just above the hoof. In that way he had to keep his head down and was kept about 6 feet away from each of his drivers. Sometimes sheep were brought down across the Bridge to the Drover's Rest but there wasn't much trouble in handling them.

The Rest came to be considered unsanitary because it was right across the

road from the reservoir from which water was distributed for the people of Washington. Finally it was abandoned. After that I think the Drover's Rest and the slaughterhouses were moved across the Long Bridge in the neighborhood of where the Pentagon now is. That is a very long time ago and that part of the County was primitive in those days: brickyards and lumberyards, and other facilities of that kind which were of very little use to look at but were very useful for utilitarian purposes. We had to have lumber and bricks and some place to take the cattle.

The Drover's Rest was operated by a family by the name of Tavenner. They were much upset when it was decided that it was unsanitary and had to be removed. Now the one in the neighborhood of the Long Bridge has been discontinued to make way for such great improvements as the Pentagon and the Washington Airport.⁶

The Walker Chapel Area, the Civil War, and a Story

Down Glebe Road toward Chain Bridge there are some very large trees. In particular there are two large tulip poplar trees which were used as signal stations during the Civil War and still remain there. All of the other trees between the forts were cut down so as to clear the view entirely and completely between Fort Ethan Allen and Fort Marcy, the fort upriver across the Pimmit Run valley, named after the Civil War for the then Secy. of War, William L. Marcy.⁷ Remains of that fort are still there. Right near the fort was fought a duel between Henry Clay and John Randolph. The dueling ground is just to the north of the fort, probably 50 or 75 feet.⁸

At the turn of the road a hospital stood in amongst the big trees. Some of the patients at the hospital survived the war. Many years afterward, one of them came back to visit the family that lived there. This was in the 1890's. The family, by name of McNeir, all went visiting one day. When they came back they found that the old gentleman, the former patient, had stepped off a distance from the house and dug a hole. They found that an iron pot had been buried on the side of the road, a few inches deep. The feeling was that during the war this soldier had deposited this pot there and even though it was so near the surface they had never known about it. The McNeirs never saw him again. That is the story about the pot of gold.

More Tales from the Past

A Ghost Story

There was a strange story about a ghost down at the same place where the Civil War hospital had been. Everyone would have doubted it if it had not been for the fact that there was a horse tied to a tree by a heavy chain.

⁶ Ed. Note: The Tavenner land became the subdivision of Relee in Arlington and this has given way to a highrise office building.

⁷ Ed. Note: This is a misunderstanding. A. G. O. #18 under date of September 30, 1861, designates this fort as Fort Marcy in honor of Brig. Gen. R.B. Marcy, Chief of Staff for Maj. Gen. George B. McClellan. William Marcy was Secretary of War 1845-1849.

⁸ Ed. Note: Others have located the dueling ground differently in relation to the fort. No exact site has yet been established.

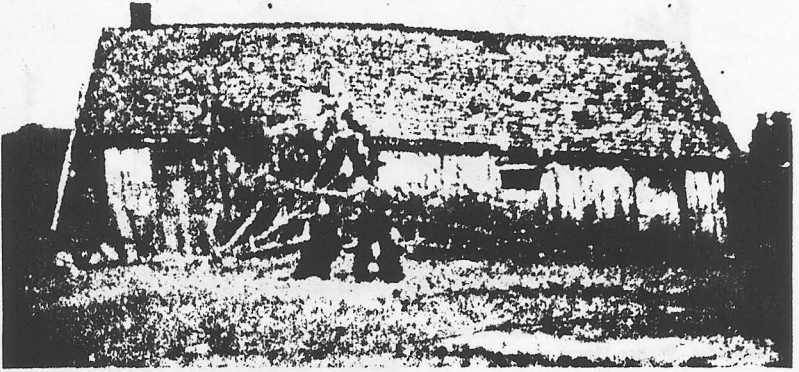
Whatever it was that was walking up the valley, just below this house, it scared the horse so that he broke his chain and got away. The people thought that even though they had doubted the ghost or whatever it was, the horse was not mistaken and therefore they think it must be a true story; but no one knows the answer to it.

A Murder Story

Many years ago, along about 1890, an old man named Dotson bought some land and later sold a small portion along about what is now the 4300 block of Glebe Road, to a fellow named Charlie Low. Charlie Low used to run the engine down at the Bridge where they made electricity at the Columbia Electric Light and Power Co. Charlie was comfortably satisfied with the piece of land and seemed to be getting along very nicely. But he had a wife named Rose who was inclined to wander a bit and she took up with another man whose name I don't recall now, but he displaced Charlie Low. Well, Charlie didn't like it. He told me so, and he used to carry a pistol and threatened to kill this man if he didn't stop breaking up his home. At any rate, this man and this woman got to quarreling coming up from town one night and they got across Chain Bridge starting up the hill (which we have known as Bridge Hill because of its length and crookedness and steepness) and they quarreled all the way to the top of the hill. When they got up near old Fort Ethan Allen, at one of the ditches that cross the road in the 4300 block of Glebe Road, that quarrel seemed to culminate and so far as anyone knows, this was what happened: The man cut the throat of Rose Low and killed her. It is believed that thereupon her brother, known as Harcum Digges, came out from near the center of a white fence and clubbed this man to death. Nobody knows exactly what happened but their bodies were found the next morning at the edge of the moat. Harcum Digges soon after left this locality and has never been heard of since. I don't know what happened to Charlie Low. This tragedy occurred about the year 1896.

The Story of the Mystery Woman

This is the story of a strange lady named, as far as we know, Mrs. Kelly. No one ever knew her real name, but she answered to Mrs. Kelly. She came from somewhere, we don't know where, about 1880 and settled about half a mile above the Chain Bridge on the Pike which is now called Fairfax Road [Chain Bridge Road or Rt. 123]. Mrs. Kelly rented this place from Mr. Vanderwerken and settled there to live and lived to be a very old woman. She came there with all her goods and property at night and stored them in the building and nobody ever saw them until after her passing. At that time they were all taken out and sorted and found to contain jewelry and fine clothing and shoes and other things of value. But they were somewhat deteriorated because of age. The authorities wanted to bury her there on the spot, but the owner of the land, Mr. Grunwell, would not permit it. So her goods and chattels were sold and the money used to purchase a lot in Walker Chapel Cemetery where she was buried.



The "Goat Lady's" House, Chain Bridge Road, 1898.

During her lifetime she told fortunes and raised goats, and in general, managed to get along somehow or other. Many of the younger people used to like to go up there and have their fortunes told. Many of them took things to eat like potatoes and canned goods and things like that in payment for having their fortunes told. She would generally start out by saying: "a ring and a rap at the door, a bundle came, title deeds to some property". She usually said the same thing each time.

She lived about the same from one year to the next and there was very little change in her manner of living or in the number of goats she had. Most of the time she had about 26 goats and sometimes as many as two cows. She didn't have a garden or anything like that. Now and then she would sell a goat but was always very anxious that whoever bought it would be very careful with it. She was very fond of the goats and no matter how savage they were, they weren't bad with her.

She lived in the front room of the house, a very small room where the goats and all went through in order to get to their place in the back part of the house. She had her stove and her meals and her bed in this small room, about 4' by 8'. The rest of the house was quite large and had a good rainproof roof. At first she was dressed fairly well and looked like most anyone else. But in her latter years she dressed in a very poor manner and looked very poor and had no shoes and you could see the toes of her feet sticking out wrapped in burlap sacks and such arrangements as that for shoes.

Altogether she lived in very squalid conditions. It seemed to be the way she wanted to live. She lived entirely alone and didn't bother anyone. She would welcome anybody who came there and it might be said she spoke in a manner which indicated she was fairly well educated and was above the average person — she might be termed as having class. Many people went to see her and everybody liked Mrs. Kelly. She was a kindly person.