



CAROL STUART WATSON

*The Beall-Dawson House, c. 1815  
home of the Montgomery County Historical Society  
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## THE ADVENTURES OF A REVOLUTIONARY HERO

by Samuel G. Mathews<sup>1</sup>

On a bright May morning in the year 1775 four brothers might have been seen leaving their old Colonial home in Montgomery County, Maryland, to join the Continental Army massing under Washington in New

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1. This unusual story appeared in *The Patriotic Marylander*, a quarterly publication of the Maryland Daughters of the American Revolution, in December 1915. It was contributed by Mrs. Matthew Gault of the Maryland Line Chapter. Since copies of that publication are now rare, we are reprinting it for your information and enjoyment. Explanatory notes have been added on page 9 to identify people and places referred to in the story.

Jersey. Four finer-looking young men perhaps would have been hard to find in the ranks of the army than Henry, Samuel (the grandfather of the author of this sketch), Philemon and Charles Greenberry Griffith. They were rare specimens of manhood. The writer of these lines even after an interval of sixty years could bear his testimony of admiration for the personal appearance of these old heroes of the Revolution, tall, erect and courtly in their ways. The writer used to visit very often in his boyhood days the old home of his grandfather and as he often sat spell-bound taking in every word of the recital of some incident or stirring event of the war he often wished that if he ever grew up to be a man that he would be such a one as his grandfather and his great-uncle, Colonel Philemon. They were almost identical in appearance -- the same tall, erect figures and in their general bearings and ways they were counterparts. It is rarely now in this, our day, that we meet with these old-school gentlemen. But as I started out to give the adventures of my great-uncle Charles I must return to my original plan. He being full of the spirit of life and adventure concluded to join the navy, a small affair in that day, a fitting contrast to our present one with her steel-clad dreadnoughts throwing shells that would splinter one of those old wooden hulks into kindling wood in the twinkle of an eye. And so he enlisted and took his place on a man-of-war according to his desire, but found little to attract his adventurous nature for the first few months; until the next year in an engagement with the enemy off the Jersey coast they were captured. And now I will tell the story in his own words.

All hands, officers and crew, were placed aboard a British man-of-war and sails hoisted for old England to find a safe deposit for their prisoners. After many days on the Atlantic, off beyond the Azores, one morning we discovered a small speck on the ocean. It seemed to be headed our course. At first we paid no attention to it, but on the following morning we noticed the same craft but much nearer than it had been the day before. When the midnight watch was set aboard our ship everything seemed to be in order. Shortly after they heard a commotion and on going to the vessel's side found the craft had been fastened to the man-of-war and in less time than it takes to jot it down the Algerine pirates were clamoring over the ship's rail by the hundred, and so it turned out that a pirate ship had been following us for two or three days to give us an attack at night. At that time these pirate bands infested every high sea on the face of the globe where the sail of commerce was spread. No ship was safe in crossing the Atlantic. Resistance was impossible in our case. There they were, four hundred armed to the teeth. They soon had us shackled and down in the ship's hold. They hunted the officers in their berths and the crew in their quarters. So here we are, victorious British man-of-war officers and crew and thirty of us Americans prisoners all on the same level in the hands of victorious pirates bound for their home in the north of Africa.

Upon our arrival at Algeria we were set up at public sale. My lot fell to an old man some distance in the interior. There I was taken and for twenty long years suffered in bondage, privations and hardship that it would be hard to express. At the end of this time a band of Turkish traders came into the country buying slaves and I was

taken to Turkey and there sold to a man in the country some sixty miles from the capital. I had gotten from bad to worse, for there for fourteen years I suffered privation and hardship far beyond anything I had ever known in Algeria. At the end of this period a grandee from the capital saw me at the home of this old, cruel Turk and, liking my appearance and manner, bought me at a big price and I was taken as head waiter to his castle in Constantinople. There I had six years of the best life I had ever known in all my long days of bondage. He was kind to me. I seemed to suit him and he gave me liberties that were not accorded to the rest of his slaves and I should have been more grateful to him for all this, but liberty is sweet. The desire for freedom seems to be implanted in every human breast. I saw my opportunity and I could not help but embrace it, so I made my way out of the castle by night and out of the city before daylight appeared. How I accomplished this is a mystery to myself, but I had made up my mind I was not born a slave and would not die one if there was any way to prevent it. As I was attired in the garb of a grandee's servant, I attracted but little attention outside the city, everyone supposing I had been sent on some message by my master. I was thoughtful in providing myself with food for several days, so I passed on elated with my success thus far. I took my course due north so as to pass around those spurs of mountains which extend down close to the Black Sea and which is the beginning of that great chain which extends in a westwardly direction all the way across the continent of Europe. So having passed around to the north of these mountains I now turned my face westward to begin my long tramp of more than three thousand miles. How I could ever accomplish it I knew not, but was determined to make the trial, so on I journeyed for several days without any molestation. But when I reached the borders of Hungary my passport was demanded by an officer. Now, thought I, my trouble has commenced. Of course, my old master in Constantinople had furnished me with no such document and not having the wherewithal to bribe the official I was arrested and thrown into prison and there remained for the space of many weeks. Finally the keeper told me he had orders for my release. Oh! what joy it gave me. I could scarcely realize the truth that I was free again. He had treated me kindly during my imprisonment. I had learned to admire him for his goodness to me. We parted good friends with many kind wishes for one another, and I started again on my long journey. And now let me say that the events of the next four years would fill a volume with its sorrows, its disappointments, its sufferings, its cold by winter and heat by summer and all other ills that human flesh could possibly be heir to. Let them all go with the other hardships and privations that I had known in my past life. And here I stand on this beautiful summer morn in sight of Havre on the east coast of France, and as I look up what is it that greets my eyes? Can it be? Yes, there it floats at the topmast of a vessel that lay in harbor -- the stars and stripes of my own native land that I had left forty-seven years before, then a colony of Great Britain, now a great and happy country honored by all nations on the face of the globe.

My heart was full. I clapped my hands in joy. I could hardly realize what I had just beheld. I was soon at the vessel's side and went aboard. Was the captain in his stateroom? Would like to see him if he was not engaged. The cabin boy soon returned saying that the

captain would see me. I was shown to his quarters. He was a tall, fine-looking, graceful man and received me kindly. I was soon relating to him in a concise form my adventures for the last forty-seven years. He laid down his paper and seemed to be very much interested and looked as though he thought I was telling the truth. When I had finished he asked me if I had eaten breakfast. I told him I had not. He ordered some for me in his cabin. While I was partaking of my meal he asked me many questions about my past life. He seemed to be much interested in the manner the pirates had captured the British man-of-war.

I had a good breakfast, the first time in seven years that I had eaten at a table. When I had finished I told him I had no money but was somewhat acquainted with sailor life and would be glad to work my way to New York if he had a place for me. After a moment's silence he said he would make a place for me and that we would sail in two or three days. "Have you a place to stay?" he asked. I said no. "Then make yourself at home aboard the brig until we are ready to sail." I thanked him kindly for every courtesy he had shown me. "Are you an American?" I asked him. "I am," said he, "and proud of it. I am very near your old home. I am a native of old Fairfax, Virginia, and I am proud of that, too." He then gave me somewhat of his life's history. His name was Harrison. His father was a man of wealth and had given him an education and when he had graduated from the university wanted him to take up the law as a profession, but from his earliest boyhood his heart had been on the sea and so he told his father. Both of his parents violently opposed him in this and used every argument in their power to try and dissuade him from his course, but in vain. He seemed so bent on his early inclination for the sea that they finally yielded, deeming it fruitless to oppose his wishes longer. And so he shipped before the mast on a vessel that plied between Baltimore and Rio, South America, and there he remained until he mastered all the duties of a sailor's life. Promotion after promotion had followed until finally he was offered command of the vessel (the old captain being worn out and was about to retire). This he gratefully declined, having in view the purchase of a vessel of his own. And shortly afterward he purchased the brig that we were aboard of on that day in the port of Havre. In due time we weighed anchor and set sail for New York. Had a safe passage but a long and tedious one. We were met by adverse winds which drove us far out of our course and were nearly two months in making the voyage. The captain had assigned to me no fixed duties, so I came and went very much as I pleased. I ate with him every day in his cabin and had learned to esteem him very highly. He was a perfect gentleman, so different from the ordinary run of sea captains. When we landed in New York and as I was about taking leave, thanking him for his kindness, he pressed a package in my hand, saying: "Take this, you are a good way from your old home. This may be of service to you." As I was protesting, "Now, captain," he raised his hand. "Hush, hush, hush; don't say a word and now, good-bye. I wish you God-speed and I want to exact this promise of you. When you reach home drop me a line to let me know that you have looked on the faces of your kindred once again. As I shall remain in port about four weeks you will have ample time to let me know." "I surely will." Captain Harrison said, "and now good-bye again." We clasped hands warmly. "I

never shall forget you," and so we parted, feeling as though I was taking leave of an old friend of a lifetime. God bless Captain Harrison. When I reached the gang-plank to leave the brig I found the whole crew lined up waiting to take leave, and as those warm-hearted tars grasped my hand I found each one was leaving a coin in my palm. "Now, boys," said I, "stop this. I won't have it." Then a murmur went up all along the line and I saw that they would be offended if I did not accept. They had heard my story of bondage and privation and hardship and imprisonment many times and a warm friendship had sprung up for me in those honest, sailor hearts. I shook hands with everyone as I passed down the line and with tears in their eyes they cheered me with good-will.

And now I stood on terra firma, on the soil of my own native land. Oh, how I was thrilled with gladness to think that I stood once more a free man on the soil of my dear, native America! All my toils and sorrows were left behind; all my days of languishing were gone. No pen can describe the emotions that sprung up in my breast at the thought of being home again.

I soon ascertained that there was a line of coaches between New York and Baltimore and was soon at the stage office to learn that a coach would leave next morning at 7 o'clock, so I had my name enrolled as a passenger and was off again to hunt up a hotel. I found comfortable quarters nearby, had my supper and retired early to dream of "Home, Sweet Home." I was up early in the morning and soon after breakfast was at the stage office on time. Our coach was pretty well filled with passengers outside and in and we were soon rolling along on our journey southward. Six days was the time between the two cities and they had regular stopping places and did not aim to go beyond. We had fine accommodations all along the route, nice, clean beds and good meals. We stayed in Philadelphia on the third night. I, of course, had not seen it since we marched through at the beginning of the war to join the army and I could but notice the great changes from the then scattering villages to the now populous city. What changes I encountered on every hand as we passed along.

When we arrived in Baltimore I found still greater changes. I used to come here often in my boyhood days before the war and then this was a mere straggling hamlet. I seemed a stranger in a strange land, although I stood on my native soil within a few miles of my native home. Every face was the face of a stranger. I learned afterwards that I had three nephews in the city who would have welcomed me with open arms, but I knew it not. I was not even aware of their existence. After a lapse of forty-seven years how should I know?

I was on my way to the west side of the city to see if I could find some one from the section of country some twenty-five miles west when, just ahead of me, two gentlemen met and stopped. As I came up to them I heard one ask the other: "Well, how are things getting along in old Montgomery?" At the mention of that name I came to a quick halt. I glanced back over my shoulder to find the questioner had gone on while the other gentleman was coming my way. As he approached I stepped to his side and touched him on the shoulder. "You

will please excuse me," said I, "but did not the gentleman that just left you ask some question in regard to old Montgomery?" "He did," says he. "That was an old schoolmate of mine, reared near my old home, and he just stopped me to ask about the well-being of his old friends and neighbors." He seemed to be a very agreeable gentleman and answered my questions very politely, not in the least put out by my stopping him on the street. When he had finished answering my questions I said to him we were not schoolmates or reared together, nevertheless Montgomery is my native home also and it seems like a providential circumstance that I should discover you at this moment when I was on my way to the west end hotels to see if I could meet with some one from my section of country.

"What part of Montgomery were you raised in?" said the gentleman? "In the northern part," said I, "some two or three miles from the Potomac River." "The northern boundary of the county; that corresponds exactly with my locality; would you be kind enough to give me your name, please?" "Griffith," I answered. "Griffith," he repeated in astonishment. "Do you happen to know any one by that name?" said I. "If you had asked me if I knew one hundred by that name I think I could answer truthfully in the affirmative, for I have a large portion of Griffith blood in my veins. I am well acquainted with the family and I am sure there are at least one hundred in our locality. Now, to which branch of the Griffiths do you belong?" "My father was Colonel Henry Griffith and my brothers were Henry, Samuel, Philemon and Joshua. And now would you oblige me with your name?" "It is Howard and I occupy the old Colonial home of your father, the late Colonel Henry Griffith. At his death it was sold, as all the heirs were settled on their portions and the home place was reserved by him for his lost son Charles, but he not turning up and all the heirs supposing him dead it was sold to my father, the late Dr. Wm. Howard, of Brookfield, and I have lived on it ever since.

"But now, my dear kinsman, the day is passing and we have quite a jog before us. Go and get your baggage and then we will have some lunch and be off on our journey and then a few hours' ride will bring you in sight of the old mansion in which you first saw the light of day."

And so we were soon on the road, seated in Mr. Howard's comfortable carry-all behind a nice pair of bays. He moved off at a lively gait, but, oh! how changed seemed everything. Occasionally some old landmark greeted my eye. When we crossed old Snell's bridge her old stone arches seemed the same; in fact, it looked more like home than anything I had seen in all the long years of my absence. As we journeyed on I gave him a sketch of my adventures. I could often see the tears coursing down his manly cheeks. We were now on the old Baltimore Road, as we used to call it, and nearing the town of Unity, in which the recruiting officer had his quarters when we enlisted in the army and when our brother Joshua became so incensed because the officer would not enroll him on account of age (being only sixteen), but he was nearly as tall and soldier-like as any of his older brothers. Just beyond the town there is quite a stretch of forest of half a mile or more. The sun was nearing the western horizon, when,

on coming out from the shadow of the forest into the open fields beyond, turning suddenly to the north, a scene met my vision that I shall never forget. There lay my old Colonial home bathed in the sunset glory of my very earliest recollections. I sat in my seat entranced. No tongue can express the emotions that sprung up in my breast and in very joy I cried, "Home, Sweet Home; home again, home again from a foreign land."

Mr. Howard had made himself a very agreeable traveling companion on his way up from the city and kindly pressed me to stop with them over night, but I asked them to excuse me. My brother Samuel lived only a mile ahead and I was so anxious to see some of my kindred that I had been absent from so long. We started on at quite a pace and in a few moments were in sight of my brother Samuel's residence. Everything looked natural here. It was the same old place I had known from my boyhood days and where he had resided ever since the war. He was seated out on the porch and as we pulled up at the stile he came down the yard to greet us. As he neared us Mr. Howard called out: "Cousin Sam, I have a surprise here for you. Look at this stranger and tell me who you think it is." And as he said to us afterwards, "from Henry Howard's manner it seemed to flash through my mind all at once, can it be our long-lost brother Charles?"

We had already alighted from the carriage and was ascending the steps of the stile, and as I looked upon his tall, erect figure and unmistakable Griffith features I knew it must be so and with one accord we embraced each other and wept like children. Mr. Howard had turned now and was off for home, so we passed on into the house, where we found all excitement and joy. The news had spread all over the place and messengers were soon dispatched to Frederick County, where my brother Philemon and two sisters, Mrs. Hall and Mrs. Burgess, resided, and the next day early my brothers and sisters were all around me, except my younger brother, Joshua, who had emigrated to Kentucky long years before. So they made known to me the expressed desire of my father in his will that "if his lost son Charles should ever return he was to be made equal with the rest of the heirs," and, said they, we are now ready to carry out faithfully that command, but I told them: "My dear brothers and sisters, I don't want your lands and belongings. They would be of no use to me now. All I desire is not a shelter from the storm but a shelter and rest after the storm. They stayed several days and had a grand family reunion before returning to their homes.

How distinctly does the writer of these lines remember his dear, old grand-uncle when only a boy of six years. He had taken a great liking to my mother, also another niece, Mrs. Ruth Warfield, daughter of Colonel Philemon. She lived at Bushy Park, near my father's home. So he spent a large part of his time between these two favorite nieces and for about two years we had the privilege and pleasure of listening to the many interesting stories of his life that he knew so well how to relate. Indeed, it was a privilege and pleasure that I shall never forget to the latest hour of my life. So the time passed on. We were always sorry when he went away even temporarily and always glad at his return.

I think it was in the summer of 1830. He was spending a few days at Bushy Park. It was a very warm night and being in the habit of walking in his sleep it was supposed he became worried by the heat, got out of bed and walked out of the large window that was open from the floor up. Be that as it may, in the morning his lifeless form was found in the yard below. We were all overwhelmed with sorrow at the sad event.

And thus ended a very eventful life and at its close a very sad and tragic ending. Farewell, our dear old uncle Charley.

The material for this little narrative was gathered over eighty years ago in my boyhood home in old Maryland and readers of these lines will please be indulgent in their criticisms as memory of the long, long years ago was all I had to call upon to aid me in the task.

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EDITOR'S EXPLANATORY NOTES

In the original publication the author, Samuel G. Mathews, is identified as "one of the pioneers of Howard County, who settled on a homestead west of Seward in 1869." At the time of the original publication (1915), he was 89 years old. Since he was only six years old when Charles Griffith died in 1830, Samuel must have remembered this story more through family tradition than through hearing his great-uncle recount it.

Many facts, however, can be confirmed. Henry Griffith, the father of Charles Griffith, was born in Anne Arundel County on February 14, 1720. Henry had four children by his first wife, Elizabeth Dorsey: Sarah, Henry II, Ruth, and Rachel. By his second wife, Ruth Hammond, he had nine children: Samuel, John Hammond, Philemon, Charles, Ann, Joshua, Eleanor, Elizabeth, and Ruth.<sup>2</sup> Four of his sons, Henry II, Samuel, John Hammond, and Philemon, served in the Revolutionary Army.

Henry Griffith owned large tracts of land in Anne Arundel, Frederick, and Montgomery Counties. At about the time of the American Revolution, he lived on the north side of the road from Unity to Etchison on part of a tract of land called "Tusculum."<sup>3</sup> The property is known today as "Tusculum Farm." At his death in 1794 Henry left to his son Henry II "Two plantations whereon his two sons now live," to Samuel he left the "plantation whereon he now lives," and to Joshua he left "my dwelling plantation."<sup>4</sup> These plantations were apparently contiguous. There is no mention in the will of his missing son, Charles.

The land inherited by Joshua was sold to Henry Howard of John on May 15, 1807.<sup>5</sup> By this time both Philemon and Joshua Griffith were living in Frederick County. The Mr. Howard who Charles Griffith found in Baltimore must have been a son of this Henry Howard. The home of Henry Griffith II was known as "Edgehill;"<sup>6</sup> it is located just off Route 108 and is still owned by descendants of Henry Griffith II.

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2. R. R. Griffith, *Genealogy of the Griffith Family: The Descendants of William and Sarah Maccubbin Griffith* (Baltimore, MD: Press of William K. Boyle & Son, 1892), pp. 5 and 6.

3. Roger Brooke Farquhar, *Historic Montgomery County, Maryland, Old Homes and History* (Baltimore, MD: Monumental Printing Co., 1952), pp. 297-300.

4. Montgomery Country Wills, Book C, p. 152.

5. Montgomery County Land Records, Book N, p. 237.

6. Farquhar, *op. cit.*

Samuel Griffith married, first, Rachel Warfield, and, second, Ruth Berry. One of his children by his second wife was Catherine (Kitty) Griffith who married James B. Mathews of Howard County;<sup>7</sup> she was the mother of the author, Samuel B. Mathews.

The daughters of Henry Griffith who are mentioned in the story are Ann, who married Nicholas Hall,<sup>8</sup> and Eleanor, who married John Burgess.<sup>9</sup>

"Bushy Park," where Charles Griffith died, was the Howard County home of the Warfield family located northwest of Glenwood.<sup>10</sup> The house, which burned in 1933, was built by Dr. Charles Alexander Warfield, one of Howard County's most colorful Revolutionary heroes and later one of the organizers of the Medical and Chirurgical Society of Maryland.<sup>11</sup> Colonel Philemon Griffith's daughter, Ruth, married Charles D. Warfield,<sup>12</sup> and she was the niece of Charles Griffith living at "Bushy Park" in 1830.

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7. J. D. Warfield, *The Founders of Anne Arundel and Howard Counties, Maryland* (Baltimore, MD: Regional Publishing Co., 1967; originally published, 1905), p. 449.

8. Montgomery County Wills, *op. cit.*

9. Griffith, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

10. Warfield, *op. cit.*, p. 444.

11. Celia M. Holland, *Landmarks of Howard County, Maryland* (1975), p. 25.

12. Warfield, *op. cit.*, p. 349.