

# BETZVILLE TALES

Balkins Schwartz and the Shadow

By Ellis Parker Butler  
Author of "Pigs is Pigs" Etc.  
ILLUSTRATED BY PETER NEWELL

Last Tuesday about five o'clock Balkins Schwartz, who was at one time one of Betzville's most respected leisure-classists, walked up to Uncle Ashdod Cloutz's back door and asked for five dollars. He said that if he couldn't have that he would willingly accept a square meal, a pair of shoes, a toothpick, or any old hunk of chawing gum that might be sticking on the underside of a chair or table. He finally compromised on a chew of fine cut tobacco. From the story told to Uncle Ashdod we judge that Balkins has been having a hard time of it since he left Betzville and went west. Uncle Ashdod happened to remark that Balkins was so thin he hardly cast a shadow, and Balkins immediately burst into tears. He said he couldn't bear to hear a shadow mentioned after what had happened to him in Colorado.

Balkins said that as soon as he struck Colorado he knew he was in God's country, and he decided he would settle down there if he could find anyone that would feed and lodge him free gratis, and give him clothes for nothing, and the first week he was there he found the right widow, and they were married in June, and Balkins settled right down to work at his job, which was pulling a rocking chair into the shadow of the house and dropping off comfortably to sleep between meals. He said he liked the job first rate, except that the sun out there keeps moving all the time, and

tance to get in the shadow again, but the next moment he realized that he settle down about a half a mile away, it away. He says he saw the house was still in the shadow of the house. Yes, sir, he says it was a fact, he was still in the shadow of the house! He said he did not try to account for it at first, but in a minute he figured that the shadow must have been very loosely attached to the house, and that when the wind struck the house it was blowing so high that it did not touch the shadow at all, but just wrenched the house loose from the shadow, and left the low-lying shadow where it was.

At first, Balkins says, he was mighty pleased—mighty pleased—because he did not have to move his rocking chair, but the next moment he began to weep, for he saw that he would have to walk all the way to the house every meal time, and then walk the half mile to the shadow for his nap, and if it came to that, he might as well be tramping again. He says he put up with it for a week, for the widow's sake, and tramped back and forth between the house and the shadow three times a day, and then he got sick of it. He said he felt that a location half a mile away from a house was no place for a house's shadow, and he was looking at the shadow moodily one day when he noticed that the shadow was curling up a little at one edge, and that gave him an idea. So he got the ox team and



He Was Looking at the Shadow Moodily One Day When He Noticed That the Shadow Was Curling Up a Little at One Edge.

the shadow of the house would shift around somewhat, and then Balkins had to get up and move his chair into the shadow again. And nothing he could say would make the widow tote his meals out to him—he just had to brace up and walk into the house for them at meal time, or go without. But he was pretty reasonably happy. He said he would sit there in the shade and slumber, and when he wearied of that he would sit there and doze, and between times he would get a little change by sitting there and sleeping.

Balkins said he couldn't imagine but one thing that might spoil his happiness, which was that the house might take fire and burn down, and then there would be no shadow of it for him to sleep in, and he said he had awful nightmares right there in the daytime, dreaming he was trying to save the shadow of the house, and the shadow slowly disappearing as the house burned, and then he would awaken and find that the sun had moved around and was shining on him, and he would have to get up and go to all the exertion of moving his rocking chair into the shadow again.

Along about August 6th, when the sun was at its hottest, Balkins was sitting there in the shadow of the house when one of those awful Colorado winds came up. Biff! It came, with the suddenness of an explosion, and struck the house full force, and the first thing Balkins knew the house was sailing away through the air. He said that for a minute he could hardly realize it. It was a medium high wind—about ten feet high—and down where he was there was not a ripple of air—not enough to rock his chair—but it caught the house and whooped and his first thought was that he must get up and tote his chair all that dis-

hitched it onto the loose edge of the shadow and drove the ox-team in the direction of the house. At first the shadow seemed to be following all right, but when he got about half way to the house he saw he was mistaken; the shadow was not following, it was fastened tight to the earth at the other end, and it was just stretching out long and thin, like a sheet of rubber. But he goaded the oxen on, and drove up to the house, and nailed the end of the shadow to the side of the house. It wasn't much of a shadow in that shape. It was stretched out half a mile long, and correspondingly narrow, but Balkins said he thought he could make it do, for it was wide enough to set a rocking chair in.

But that night a terrible thing happened. The widow heard a noise in the chicken coop and got up to see what was the matter, and just as she stepped on the shadow the far end of it came loose and it snapped like a rubber band. Balkins said it snapped up against the house with a noise like a cannon. Naturally a shadow that has been stretched half a mile and then suddenly loosened at the far end would do that. It completely killed the widow; killed her thoroughly, it struck her so hard, and broke the rocking chair, and Balkins says that when he went out and saw that rocking chair all smashed, he didn't have the heart to remain, and he come away.

He told Uncle Ashdod that the only thing he had left of those happy days was a small piece of the shadow he cut off as a memento. It looked to Uncle Ashdod like a small piece of shingle at first, but when Balkins held it up in the sun in the right position Uncle Ashdod saw that it had its shadow with it all right. It did for a fact!

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# George Washington's Neglected Birthplace

by WALDON FAWCETT

**G**EORGE WASHINGTON's home and tomb at Mount Vernon have become a Mecca for continual pilgrimages by the people of a grateful nation, to say nothing of the frequent visits of distinguished foreigners;

but, odd enough, the birthplace of the Father of His Country, located some miles nearer the mouth of the Potomac, is neglected and to a considerable extent unknown. Fortunately a movement has been recently inaugurated to restore and preserve Wakefield plantation, where Washington was born and where he spent his boyhood. This project is coincident with the plan for the restoration of Stratford, the birthplace of Robert E. Lee.

The opportunities for a memorial shrine to the military leader of the confederacy are, however, somewhat superior to those at Wakefield, for whereas the ancestral home of the Lees is yet standing in a fair state of preservation there are no remnants of the old buildings at Wakefield save some tumble-down log structures of uncertain origin which are reputed to have once served as slave quarters, but which are now utilized as corn cribs.

The old manor house in which George Washington opened his eyes upon the world was burned in the last century, but the brick chimney, within the arch of which four people could sit, and the cornerstone with a portion of the foundation were saved. Shortly before the civil war the historic farm passed into the hands of a family which at the outset showed



A NEGLECTED GRAVE OF ONE OF THE WASHINGTONS

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MONUMENT ERECTED AT BIRTHPLACE OF WASHINGTON



TUMBLE-DOWN CABINS AT WAKEFIELD PLANTATION



GRAVE OF THE FATHER OF GEORGE WASHINGTON

some appreciation for its associations. A succeeding generation, however, demolished the chimney and the remnants of the walls in order to secure the bricks.

A marble slab, bearing an inscription giving the date of Washington's birth and other information, which had been set into the great arch of the fireplace above mentioned was removed to the old family burying ground, but in placing it beneath two ancient fig-trees, planted by the

mother of Washington, it was broken and its fragments lie there today, moss-grown and vine-covered. Later on picnic parties landed on the sandy beach and made such a practice of carrying away the bricks as souvenirs that John W. Wilson, the owner of the farm, took steps to prevent further trespassing. Only a few of the old bricks, together with the cornerstones, are now left. These bricks, by the way, were brought over from England nearly two centuries ago, serving as ballast for the vessels, which also brought all the woodwork and other furnishings. The broad portico of the old house faced the Potomac, which is here miles in width, and in the estimation of many persons the view at this point surpasses that at either Arlington or Mount Vernon.

In the year 1895 the national government erected at Wakefield a miniature copy of the Washington national monument with the inscrip-

tion "Washington's Birthplace," and in small letters at the base the words: "Erected by the United States, A. D. 1895." Latterly plans have been projected for rebuilding the old mansion, placing in a conspicuous portion of the structure the few bricks remaining from the old house and using the original cornerstone.

In the old family burying ground at Wakefield there has recently been put in place a granite slab in memory of Augustine Washington, father of George Washington. This stone was provided by the Society of the Colonial Dames of America. In this graveyard, also, is a marble slab bearing an inscription that indicates that it was placed in its present position in 1729.

Probably the principal reason for the neglect of Wakefield by the tourist throng that visits Mount Vernon is found in the isolation of Washington's birthplace. In conjunction with the erection of the governmental monument at Wakefield a substantial pier was built extending some distance out into the Potomac, but this pier is now in shoal water and none of the larger steamers plying on the Potomac can reach it. In consequence the only available means of reaching Wakefield is to take passage on one of the steamers bound for Colonial Beach, the leading summer resort of the lower Potomac, and upon arrival at the beach to either charter a launch for a considerable drive over roads that are none too good. Even this time-consuming method of making a pilgrimage to Wakefield is impracticable in winter.

Washington is the mightiest name of the earth—long since mightiest in moral reformation. On that name a eulogy is expected. It cannot be. To add brightness to the sun or glory to the name of Washington is alike impossible. Let none attempt it. In solemn awe pronounce the name and in its naked, deathless splendor leave it shining on.—Abraham Lincoln.

America has furnished to the world the character of Washington. And if our American institutions had done nothing else that alone would have entitled them to the respect of mankind.

sumptuous provision was enjoyed with much hilarity, tempered, however, with moderation."

Besides the birthright balls there was another feature of the early celebrations in Alexandria which was peculiar to that town. Washington had founded an orphan asylum there and when on his birthday there would be a meeting, with an orator, in one of the churches, the orphans were conspicuously present and came in for a special piece of oration. The account of the meeting in 1840 says that after the oration a collection was taken up for the benefit of the asylum.

The Alexandria celebrations were often addressed by G. W. P. Custis. In 1811 Richard B. Lee was the orator. Some idea of newspaper methods of that day may be had from the fact that although the celebration that time was mentioned in the Gazette of February 23, it was not until February 25 that a real account appeared.

During the civil war the celebration of the birthday ceased. Alexandria was ardently southern in its sympathies and was, moreover, too much in the track of war to take notice of even its own pet anniversary. It was not until 1870 that it began a feeble revival of the old festival. That time there was merely a presentation of a stand of colors to the cadets of St. John's academy by the young ladies of Mount Vernon Institute.

In 1872 the cadets paraded and there was a birthright ball once more. In 1876 a real celebration was arranged, to which "thousands of strangers" came and upon which occasion "the houses that were mourning at Lee's death"—Robert E. Lee—"all displayed the American flag." Many houses displayed pictures of Lee and Washington side by side. But there was no birthright ball, and on the platform of the speaker's stand there was a vacant chair placed to honor the memory of G. W. P. Custis, "the old man eloquent."

Since 1876 the celebrations have been rather irregular in the town which originated them. But of late years a society has been formed which arranges and carries out an elaborate programme every alternate year. Whereas the orphans used to be a center of birthday attention, the interest is divided now between the firemen and the soldiers.

Last year there were detachments of federal troops and of United States sailors in addition to the District militia. Washington has a permanent claim to pose as Alexandria's "favorite son" and these biennial affairs are the biggest things of their sort in the country. February 22 is the Alexandrian's glorious Fourth.

## STARTED IN VIRGINIA

Come, boys, close the window and make a good fire. Wife, children, all snug all around: 'Tis the day that gave birth to our country's blessed air. Then let it with pleasure be crowned. Dear wife, bring your wine, and in spite of hard times On this day at least we'll be merry; Come, fill every glass till it pours o'er the brim. If not with Madeira—then sherry.

—Old Song.

**T**HE foregoing verse is from one of the old birthday songs in honor of George Washington. These songs were sung even during the lifetime of the first president. For Washington was alone among Americans in having his birthday regularly and publicly celebrated during his lifetime.

The honor of having originated the public observance of February 22 is one of which the town of Alexandria, Va., is jealously proud. Alexandria was Washington's county town. He attended church there; he voted and paid taxes there; his physician lived there; he bought of its tradesmen, contributed to its charities, was head of its Masonic lodge, organized its fire brigade.

Washington and Alexandria either contradict the theory that a prophet is not appreciated at home or they are an exception to prove the rule. Right after the close of the revolution Alexandria began to celebrate the birthday of her hero.

Perhaps the old town had acquired the habit, for the birthright balls in honor of King George had been the climax of social functions under the old regime. At any rate never was allegiance more ardently transferred and the new birthright balls became even more elaborate than the old. Alexandria having set the fashion, other places took up the custom. In 1784 the French officers who had served under Washington celebrated February 22 in Paris; that is to say, it was not then February 22, but according to the reckoning of that day, February 11.

While he was president the birthday was always celebrated at the city which was the capital for the time being. At night there were gala performances at the theaters and a ball which the president and his wife attended.

It is recorded that one of these balls in Philadelphia was enlivened by the fact that many of the young ladies were twined among their curls bandeaued embroidered with the words, "Long live

the President!" On these occasions the president and Mrs. Washington were conducted to a sofa placed under a canopy. The president did not stay there much, but moved about among the other guests with the dignified courtesy which always marked him in society.

On his birthday in 1797 he and Mrs. Washington were in Philadelphia. The ships in the harbor were dressed with flags and the houses were decorated. Every half hour the church bells rang. Government officials and foreign diplomats called to congratulate him. The ball at night was in the amphitheater, specially floored and decorated. There were about 500 guests and according to an eye witness "every countenance bespoke pleasure and approbation; even Democrats forgot for a moment their enmity."

The next year, 1798, Washington attended the celebration given by his friends and neighbors at Alexandria and some accounts declare that it was the last time he did so. He was at Mount Vernon in 1799 on his birthday, it being the occasion of one of the greatest festivities in the history of the mansion, the marriage of Nelly Custis. The ceremony was performed at early candlelight in the banquet room and was attended by the gentlefolk from all the country around.

In spite of the wedding, however, Washington seems to have slipped away for a look in on the doings at Alexandria; for there is an account of that celebration in an old copy of the Alexandria Gazette in which his presence is mentioned. The great event of that particular day was a sort of sham attack on the town by three companies of local infantry. They were embarked on the armed schooners Neptune, Trial and Mercury and succeeded in making two landings, but after "a heavy and continuous street fighting" were finally compelled to surrender.

The general had arrived soon after the affair began and when the evolutions were closed he "presented his highest respects to all the parties engaged in them." Apparently being due for the wedding eight miles distant, he did not remain for any of the dinners which followed and at which so extreme a number of toasts were drunk that one trembles at the thought of how the youthful soldiers acquitted themselves at the ball in the evening.

That was the last of his birthdays which Washington himself lived to celebrate, but his home town faithfully continued the custom. G. W. P. Custis, the grandson of Mrs. Washington, spoke at the public dinner in 1849 and said it was the sixtieth celebration of February 22 which he had attended in Alexandria. The account of that dinner, by the way, says that "the