

Journal of Cuthbert Powell



Cuthbert Powell; James Daniel Evans

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JOURNAL OF CUTHBERT POWELL.

NOTE.—Cuthbert Powell was only seventeen years of age when this journal was written; he was born in Middleburg, Loudoun county, Va., and was the fourth son of Lieut.-Col. Leven Powell and Sarah Harrison, daughter of Hon. Burr Harrison, of Chappawamsic. Colonel Powell had served through the famous Valley Forge and Trenton campaigns as lieutenant-colonel of Grayson's or the Sixteenth Virginia Line, and subsequently was a delegate to the Virginia Convention of 1788, Presidential Elector in 1796, and Congressman from Loudoun district 1799 to 1801.

Cuthbert Powell settled in Alexandria, and engaged in merchandizing with his brother, Leven Powell, Jr. He became the Mayor of Alexandria, and served a number of terms. There he married Miss Catherine Sims, daughter of Col. Charles Sims, an aid-de-camp of General Washington and his close personal friend, acting as a pall-bearer when General Washington was buried at Mount Vernon. Colonel Sims was one of the organizers and original members of the Order of the Cincinnati. Cuthbert Powell was a man of broad culture and unimpeachable character. He acquired a considerable fortune in his mercantile business, but suffered very heavily both from French spoliation during the Napoleonic wars and from the fall of Alexandria before the British in 1814. He retired, soon after the return of peace, to his country seat, "Llangollen," just out of Middleburg, and engaged in planting. He represented his county in both houses of the Virginia Assembly, and held the office of Justice of the Peace for many years. On the occasion of the visit of the Marquis de Lafayette to America in 1827, Mr. Powell, as the chairman of the Agricultural Society of Loudoun county, entertained at "Llangollen" the distinguished guest. In 1842 he filled the seat in the National Congress that his father had held before him, as a Democrat, however, whereas his father had been a staunch Federalist.

JAMES DANIEL EVANS.

Monday, 19th September, 1796.—Left Alexandria, 4 o'clock in the afternoon, with a fair wind, part John McRea in the Schooner Maria, aground opposite Piscattaway Creek; came to an anchor at night, in sight of Mount Vernon; about 10 o'clock at night the Maria came up with us & anchored; both got under way with the turn of tide & the Maria outsailed us. I suppose, in consequence of our sails & rigging being new & stiff & not working well, the Exchange ballasted too much by the Head. Left home without tinder or fire. At night the Capt. got the tinder box & a paper of powder to strike fire on the quarter deck;

laid the paper of powder open on the hen coop, while the mate was catching fire with powder in the tinder box, & the Captain, Pilot, cabin boy, Cook & Supercargo sitting and standing round. The fire from the tinder box communicated with the powder on the hen coop, set it off & burnt off the eye brows & side locks of all hands.

Tuesday, 20th.—Left Craney Island, the wind N. W., had a sweet day's sail, & made within about 6 miles of ragged point, McRea outsailed us, & we lost sight of his Schooner.

Wednesday, 21st.—Beat down to St. Marys, wind directly ahead & anchored alongside the Mariah at dark, went on board her, & spent the evening.

Thursday, 22nd.—Wind unsettled; when ashore up Smith's Creek with our pilot; McRea & Cap. Spooner with us, & dined. Got a supply of some stores we left Alexand^a without. In the evening the wind blew very fresh, & we got a pilot boat to put us on board, expected to have been capcised in her, it blew so hard & the wind coming in flaws, that we had her laid over so far as to bring the water five planks high on her deck; had a bad, windy night, lightning at the southward.

Friday, 23rd.—About sunrise weighed anchor in company with the Mariah, from St. Marys; blowing a whacking N. Eastwardly breeze as much as we could both carry sail to; while under the land until we weathered point look out, the water was smooth & the Mariah shoved ahead of us. After getting out into the Bay, & the sea making a swell, we brought the Mariah astern, & kept her there about three hours, the wind blowing so hard that we could almost see her keel sometimes. About 11 O'clock, the wind softened so that the Mariah could sett her stay sail & square sail. She then got ahead of us again; the wind continued moderating until night, when we had fallen about 5 miles astern. Be it noted that we were towing our long boat all day, & the Mariah had hers on deck. Made sight of old point comfort & spoke the Mariah in the Morning.

Saturday, 24th.—The Mariah was about a quarter of a mile astern of us in the morning; came up with us by breakfast time; the weather fine & calm; Capt. Spooner asked Capt. Chunn & myself to get on board him, & dine on scapye of a fine young goose. We went on board at eleven o'clock, & continued with

him & McRea until our Schooners anchored at Hampton road, about 4 o'clock in the evening, which they did in consequence of the wind being ahead.

Sunday, 25th.—Wind at S° Eastward; did not leave Hampton road until the afternoon. J. McRea dined with us; Cap Parker, his wife & another lady from Norfolk came on board in his Schooner, & continued with us until we saw the light on Cape Henry, the wind getting fresher & blowing a fair breeze, we parted with our pilot about half after 8 O'clock, & soon lost sight of the light house.

Monday, 26th.—The wind continuing a fine stiff northerly Breeze, we discovered the Mariah ahead of us to leeward steering more to the southward than ourselves, & in the course of the day parted with her; in the evening got into the Gulf stream, & had a high rough sea in consequence of the wind being against the current.

Tuesday, 27th.—The wind continued blowing a stiff N° Eastwardly breeze; saw a topsail schoo. steering for the capes; not near enough to speak her; the sun sett in a bank of dark clouds. We got clear of the Gulf stream, the wind shifting to S° & Eas^d.

28th, 29th & 30th.—The wind blowing so hard from the So^d that we could only carry our lower sails reefed. 2nd & 3rd days blowing a gail of wind, we continued 36 Hours laying to, under a close reefed mainsail; the waves running immensely high, sweeping our decks for & aft, & breaking over us sometimes in bodies of water, great enough, I supposed, to have sunk us: the weather dark & cloudy, sometimes violent squalls of rain. At 11 O'clock on Friday the Weather broke away to a fine day, the wind shifting to the westward cheer'd us with a fine fair wind, & appearance of settled weather. Put out lines & got to striking with the Iron at the Dolphin that were playing around us in abundance.

October, 1st.—Pleasant weather; the wind to Southward; saw nothing the production of human art but our own apparatus, & nothing of animated nature but ourselves & some swimming & flying fish.

Sunday, 2nd.—The wind blowing fresh to the Southward all day; saw a brig to Windward, standing to N° Eastward; supposed her a Spaniard from the Havanna homeward bound.

Monday, Tuesday & Wednesday.—Blowing a gale of wind from the southward; forty-eight hours of the time we were laying to, to eastward & north of Bermuda; a tremendous sea rolling; spoke a large copper-bottomed ship with guns supposed an American E. Ind^a Man.

Thursday, 6th.—The wind more moderate, the sea still very high; spoke a large ship from Hamburg for Baltimore, her decks stowed apparently as full as they could stow with passengers; inquired our longitude, & wished each other safe to port. A large land hawk, I suppose blown off from Bermuda in the Gale, kept with us nearly half a day, perched on our rigging, & appeared almost spent with flying. A noddy came on board us, got to nodding, & we caught him; his plumage a dusky body & wings, white head, a long bill & webbed feet, a large flying fish, flying across our deck, struck a rope and fell upon deck.

Friday, 7th.—Went upon deck before sunrise, & had about half a dozen buckets sea water souged over my head; found it very pleasant and bracing, the weather pleasant, the wind still ahead, & has been blowing from about the point we ought to steer for, the 10 last days past.

Saturday, 9th.—Calm & hot weather, scarcely a breath of air stirring; had nothing to do but see our sails flapping out with the rocking of the vessel, & fish for rudder fish; in the evening sprung up a breeze that shoved us nearing 3 miles on our voyage, & by morn^g headed us again.

Sunday, 10th.—Again calm, repeated my bathing in salt water; lay with most our sails down, rolling in a heavy swell of the sea from the northward until sunsett, when came up a squall of wind & rain, in a cloud from N^o Westward black as midnight, and as thick and heavy as I ever saw one; when it came on, it drove us about 6 knots under bare masts.

Monday & the succeeding 6 days.—A settled N^o Ea. wind, blowing fresh; sometimes squally & raining most of the time. These seven days we made a great run, making about 850 miles to S^o., besides diff^{ce} of Longitude. This bad weather kept me in the cabin most of the time: sometimes by way of change, I would go on deck & stand in the rain, until nearly wet, & then down below again; the want of exercise, & eating nothing, made me at last sick. It commenced with violent civil cosmotion in my

belly; for two or three days it continued until increasing turbulence & threatened at last a subversion of constitution, if not total destruction of the body corporate: from being at last drawn into a bow with the most violent gripings & cramp quite up to the Breast, without a possibility of straitning myself, nearly motionless & speech much affected; I believe I should have died pretty shortly; but the Capn had a watercask sawed in two, set in the Cabin & filled with water, made just so hot as not to scald me, into which he laid me for about 15 minutes, & then wrapd me in blanketts; from which I found immediate relief. I account for the attack, from being deprived of using any exercise, from having no appetite to eat anything, & drinking a large quantity of water, scarcely colored with wine; our water, in consequence of the continual bad weather, not having been vented since we came to sea.

Monday, 17th Octo'r to 19th.—The weather almost calm, with some squalls of rain from the north; spoke a Brig from N. York bound to Barbadoes. I continued so weak, from my illness that I could scarcely drag one foot after another upon deck. Got a trade wind & continued in company with the N. Y. Brig, keeping her astern of us. Passed the latitude of Antiqua.

Thursday, 20th.—Continued sailing with a fine trade wind & pleasant weather; saw three sail, steering for different Islands. Breakfasted on flying fish; 2 fine ones having dropt on deck in the course of the night.

Friday, 21st.—Made sight of our land before sunrise, directly ahead of us; the wind continuing light all day, we did not weather the southeast end of the Island until 4 O'clock, continued running down for St. Piers, during the early part of the Night. Fell in with a British Frigate, to windward of the Island, & brought to, by her tender; asked a few questions politely & dismissed, without being asked for Papers, or coming on board us.

Upon a pretty accurate calculation, with the assistance of the Captain, be resolved: that fifty W. India passages might be made & that so much bad weather as we have had, would not fall to the lott of more than two or 3 of them; upon summing up the weather it may be divided thus, six days blowing gales of wind; six days calm, twenty days rain, ten days wind pointedly

ahead our passage from land to land made in twenty-five days. God be thanked for all things.

Sunday & Monday.—Trying the Marketts in S' Piers; got acquainted with Mr. Gay, who was very friendly in assisting me to find a purchaser for my cargo; also Mr. Brady, by whom I was treated with much hospitality, & assisted in my inquiries; was introduced to a Mr. Craig, a native of Baltimore, and resident of Fort Royal, who also took pains to serve me; was also introduced to a partner of the House of Winter & C^o, considerable purchasers of American produce. Tuesday, went to Fort Royal, to endeavor to sell to Mr. Desborough, victual Agent to the Navy, without effecting a sale.

Wednesday.—Left S^t Piers at 11 OClock, for Antiqua, with Col. Talbert, of N. York passenger; who came to the W. Indies, commissioned by the President, for obtaining the release of American Seamen, impressed in the British Navy; he had succeeded so far with Adm^l Parker as to have 30 or 40 American disch^d, with a promise that more respect should be paid to their protection in future.

Thursday, 27th Octor.—Sailing with a pleasant breeze under the land of Dominco; at night made in sight of the So. end of Guadaloupe, & 2 small Islands called the Saints.

Friday.—Sailing under the land of Guadaloupe with a pleasant breeze; spoke a N Eng^d Schooner from Martinico homew^d bound, made the Island of Mont-Serrat; the wind blowing to the westward for the 2 last days past, with some rain & thunder; passed a little Island at the N^oEnd of Guadaloupe, called by the Frenchmen Englishman's head; I suppose from its being a very thick, round Nob.

Saturday.—Sailing close in with the land of Mont Serrat; blowing a light westwardly breeze; made the Islands of Redondo & nevis, to Leeward, and Antiqua to windward; at 1 OClock got becalmed between Mont-serrat and Antiqua, in company with the Schooner Miraculous Pitcher, from Baltimore, owned by an Englishman in St. Vincent's, under American colours, & commanded by an American Cap; they put out their boat, & came on board us; the Cap^t & owner; who mentioned that he had a Brother a Merch^t in Balt^o. While they were on board we discovered a Schooner bearing down on us from Guadaloupe; she

had got a breeze from a little cloud & rain that had prevented our seeing her until she had got within about 2 leagues of us; the owner had been inquiring of us, whether we had seen any cruisers, and expressed his fears of falling in with them on his passage to St. Vincent, where he was bound. They hurried on board, & a breeze springing up, bore away from us to get well off from Guadaloupe. As soon as we were well ahead from each other, steering different courses, we discovered the schooner which had been in pursuit of us, alter her course, and give chase to the Mir^s Pit.; as soon as they discovered it, they crowded every sail, and steered for Mont serrat, expecting to get protection from the fort; the Privateer, with a crow'd of sail, pursued him, & some time before sunset came so well up with him as to commence afire at him; a cloud getting over them, we could not discover whether he was taken; but suppose he must have been, as the Privateer had cut him off from the land, & almost got up with him, when we saw them last. We made sight of the island St^t Christopher, & at dark lay off & on before the Harbour of St. Johns.

Sunday, 30th October.—Came to an anchor in St. Johns Bay; got lodging at Mrs. Keys, with Col. Talbot. Monday & Tuesday, trying the Markett. Sold my cargo to Mrs. John Taylor, Shewington & Dixon & Dan^l Hill, Jr.; from which time to 17th November, engaged in landing our corn & bread, & taking in our return cargo.

Rode across the Island with Cap. Jacobs of Hallifax, to English Harbour, to see the Dock yard; among other ships of war lying there, saw the Roe Buck, a 44 gun Ship, which was on the American Station last war, & was up the Potomack; met with unusual delay in doing my business, from continual rain, alarms on the Island & field days, when the Merchants and clerks were attending military duty. Col. Talbot left Mrs. Keys the day before me for St. Kitty. The Merchants with whom I was acquainted, exclusive of those to whom I sold, were M^r Campbell Brown, M^r George Furnace, M^r Chris^r Camm & Mess. M. W.—Dow & Co. The Principal and almost only production of Antiqua is Rum & Sugar; which is inferior to none in the W Indies, Jamaica excepted. They commence cutting their cain about Xmas; & the last of January, begin to bring some of the new

crop to Markett. Their Imports are Indian corn (on which and Salt Herrings the Negroes are fed altogether, the Island affording scarcely any Yams or other Root), Flour & Lumber, with some Corn and Rye flour. The Soil very rich & the country in high cultivation, affords a beautiful variety in riding across it. The negroes appear to experience a great deal of severity from the number of wretched objects among 'm.

Friday, 18th November, 1796.—Left St. Johns, the wind light; did not make more than five and 20 miles from the land.

Saturday.—Sailing with a fine breeze, the weather clear, and the following Islands in view: Antiqua, Monserrat, Redondo, Nevis & St. Christophers; were brought to by the British Frigate Mermaid; her boat came on board with an officer, who overhauled our papers, examined the Hole of our Schooner, asked questions with a great deal of Insolence, and after detaining us some time was pleased to permit us to make sail; made the Island of St. Ustatia.

Sunday.—Made the Island S^t Bartholomew, S^t Martins and Anquilla; the weather fair, with a fine trade wind.

Monday, 21st.—The wind continuing a fine trade left Anquilla about Sunrise, passed the little Island of Sambrera, and made a good day's run.

Tuesday to Friday.—Continuation of pleasant weather & fresh trade winds, tho the wind sometimes so far Northwardly that we couldn't lay our course. Saw one Sch^r steering due west, another N^a West.

Saturday.—Quite calm, the weather still pleasant. 'Tis always pleasing to see the Sun rise at Sea. (This morning 'twas highly so.) The horizon to eastward was almost hid with small columns of white clouds a few minutes before the sun appeared; they began to receive a colouring, & until some time after Sunrise, continued to display the most pleasing & highly coloured scenery imaginable; continuing as the Sun got up to vary & still brighten their colouring. The more distant clouds, according to their distance, more or less tinged, & the beams of the sun just appearing on the sea, quite smooth, hightened the beauty of the scene beyond description.

The winds shifting all day, blew lightly all round the compass & settled again at N^o East, where it started from. The Sun sett nearly in the same beautiful manner she rose.

Sunday, 27th.—After a squall, which came suddenly on from the N^o Ea^d in the night, & was near carrying Masts & rigging over our sides, we had a settled fresh breeze from the Ea^d.

Monday.—The wind favourable; in the afternoon shifted round to Westward, and got calm.

Tuesday, 29th Novem.—Met with a No West wind blowing fresh in latt. 24, the first thing that reminded us that we were clear of the W Indies—sett our teeth to chatter^s.

Wednesday, 30th, to 6th Decem.—Pleasant weather, tho cool; the winds continuing westwardly, varying from N. W. to S. W. these seven days, gave us 8 Degrees of latitude. Tho. this has been a continuation of fine weather, yet from each succeeding day's exhibit^s a precise sameness to the former, the time has been made more tedious; at sea a change of weather is some recreation, even if the change is not for the better; but nothing can be more highly so than a change from dull cloudy weather & a contrary wind, to their reverse; a change in the rolling of the sea & vessel, from change of weather, the sight of & speaking another vessel at sea, & the sky differently interspersed & shaded with clouds, afford the only variety at sea, yet these changes afford much greater pleasure than a person who never experienced them would suppose.

Wednesday, 7th Decem'r.—A fresh south^{dly} wind blowing all day continued to increase, & four O'clock in the afternoon blew a heavy gale; from which time to 8, we skudded under a close reef'd foresail; the wind then hawling to Westward, & blowing still more violently, the Capt. hove the vessel to, under balanced mainsail. A landsman must have a considerable share of Philosophy to stand undaunted at the scene presenting itself from the companion door at 9 O'clock at night. The wind blowing violently hard & whistling through the water shrouds & rigging, left a gloomy hollow sound, aptly consonant to the scene. The night was dark & cloudy, particularly to N^oWestward, from whence there were continued flashes of lightning, which tended to heighten, at intervals, the gloom occasioned by a black skud, that was continually passing over us, as swift as the wind itself; & not a star visible. This was the view above us. That all around us was the Sea, which by this time was running very high & breaking at every wave, with a body of froth; had the appear-

ance (tho it was a terrible likeness) of an extensive plain covered with drifted snow; the spray flying from each breaking wave, resembling the snow still drifting. Such was the appearance. The effects on us were: that at one moment we were raised to the summit of a wave, for the purpose of being dashed the next moment in the hollow of two, & engulfed perhaps until our resurrection to the next, in froth of water sweeping over our decks; sometimes a wave coming rather out of the usual course, would strike the vessel with its full force; & so forcibly as to lead you to suppose your ship carpenter an honest man & faithful workman? However, the feelings of a Landsman may be affected in such a situation, they must be the more composed to see with what entire indifference the common Sailors attend to their duties.

With the Helm lashed a-lee, they have nothing to do but take their watch by turns on deck; observe them then; they are twisting their chew of tob^o in their jaw to the tune of some old sea song; lapping their bodies with their arms to keep themselves warm, if they are not at the time holding on to something to keep themselves from being washed over; give them a glass of rum, they receive it as the greatest blessing; damn their eyes by way of thanksgiving, & never seem to mind the storm. After blowing 36 hours, the wind moderated; it then shifted to N^owest, & continued at that quarter until the 12th, during which time we made scarcely anything on our voyage.

7th to 14th December.—A continuation of N^oly & W^{ly} winds for the last 15 days without intermitting more than once or twice, & then for only a few hours. On the 14th made the latitude of Cape Henry; I found that we were out of our reckoning. O Patience! thou art a virtue worthy our most studious cultivation; thou ever carryest with thee thy reward, & amply distributest it among those meek mortals who deign to associate & commune with thee; assist me now not only on supporting with Christian fortitude a vexatious disappointment, but in recording the particulars. After being at sea a length of time considered a long passage, elated with the expectation of getting into the Capes in half a day, we made the latitude we wished, & hove our lead for soundings; we had as we supposed crossed the gulf stream the day before, & every man could plainly see symptoms

of approaching land; some saw grass & sticks swimming; some knew it from the feeling of the air & water; & every one discovered it from the water changing colour. About dusk we hove to cast the lead; & at the same time saw a sail a considerable distance to the westward of us; which as it was steering directly for us, had exactly the appearance, we supposed, the light house would have at that time in the evening; & I myself at first entertained hopes of seeing the light displayed as soon as it grew dark. But here were we disappointed; an hour after we hove the lead, the sail came up with & spoke us; it was a brig from the Cape, which she had left 3 days before, & had been running all that time before a strong wind; she informed us that we were nearly in latt. 70, rather more than 300 miles to eastward of Cape Henry. At this time the wind was just a head, blowing fresh, with the appearance of settled weather; which opened to us a prospect of 12 or 15 days, beating to windward, with a norwest wind cold enough to freeze the ends of the noses on your faces.

Monday, 18th Decem'r, '96.—Made sight of the land about sixty miles to Southward Cape Henry. Since speaking the Brig in lattitude 70, we have had favorable winds, except about 10 hours while crossing the gulf stream. We then met with a chilling N° west wind. While rolling in the gulf stream, fell in with a N England schooner bound to N° Carolina. We kept company some time, & saw each other get our decks well swept & washed in salt water. The wind getting to Southward, continued so, & raining until we made the land.

RESOLUTIONS OF LOUDOUN COUNTY.

“LOUDOUN COUNTY A HUNDRED YEARS AGO.

In 1877-'78 the following article appeared in a Leesburg (Va.) newspaper.—JAMES D. EVANS.

“Major B. P. Nolan, grandson of Burr Powell, has just put us in possession of a verified copy of the proceedings of a public meeting held at Leesburg, Loudoun county, on the 14th of June, 1774—nearly one hundred and five years ago. It is interesting,