

The Surratt Courier

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Louise Oertly, Editor

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2026 ANNUAL SURRATT SOCIETY CONFERENCE

The Surratt Society will hold its annual meeting, virtually via Zoom, on the afternoon of Saturday, April 25, 2026. Per the Surratt Society's Bylaws, the meeting will include the election of officers. Following the brief business meeting, there will be two speakers. The agenda, the proposed slate of officers for 2026-27, the speakers, and the Zoom link will be posted shortly. We will convene at 2:00 pm ET and should finish by 4:30 ET.

The "Conference" is open to all, and details on how to attend will be on our events page.

OTHER ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Surratt Society will not operate **Booth Escape Route Tours** this April. However, BERTs (as they are known) are being independently arranged by a very popular narrator of past Surratt Society BERTs, Dave Taylor. For those who are interested, visit

<https://lincolnassassinationtours.com/>

We are frequently asked about the status of collecting **Surratt Society Dues**. They were suspended in 2020. Access to the *Surratt Courier* online is open to the public and we are working on a better definition and the benefits of "membership" in the Surratt Society (which is a separate entity from the Surratt House Museum). Until then, all are welcome to enjoy the Surratt Society's newsletter.

The renovation of *Rich Hill*, the home of Samuel Cox, is nearing completion and should be open the first weekend of April. For more information on *Rich Hill*'s history, read the following stories or visit their website at <http://www.richhillfriends.org>

This newsletter is the Surratt Society's bimonthly publication. The Surratt Society's website is surrattmuseum.org. Contact us at surratt.society@gmail.com or by mail at: Surratt Society, 9201 Edgeworth Drive #3853, Capitol Heights, MD 20791-3853.

The Surratt House Museum, a historic property of the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission. The Surratt House Museum's phone number is (301) 868-1121 and email is surrathouse@pgparks.com.

A History of Rich Hill

by Dave Taylor

Reprinted from *The Surratt Courier*, January 2014



Photo courtesy of the Charles County Historical Society

During the wee morning hours of April 16, 1865, two men and their guide approached the door of a darkened Charles County, Maryland, home called *Rich Hill*. “Not having a bell,” one of its sleeping occupants later recalled, the door was, “surmounted with a brass ‘knocker’.” One of the three men on horseback, under the cover of darkness, reached out a hand and grasped the brass tool. He raised it upwards and, for the briefest period of time, the knocker was silently suspended in the air. In a fraction of a second, the handle would fall; striking the metal plate beneath it and “in the stillness of the night the sound from this” would resound, “with great distinctiveness.”¹ The silence of the night would be shattered and the lives of the family sleeping within the house’s walls would be changed forever. History was knocking at the door of *Rich Hill*, and its harbingers were John Wilkes Booth, the assassin of President Lincoln, and David E. Herold, his accomplice.

Long before these two infamous figures appeared in 1865, the property and house of *Rich Hill* had already experienced a long and notable history. *Rich Hill*’s beginnings started almost 200 years before Booth’s visit. In April of 1666, a recent immigrant from Wales called Hugh Thomas was assigned and patented “600 acres of land, called *Rich Hills*, on the west side of the Wicomico River, in Charles County, Maryland.”² Though the manner by which Thomas acquired this patent of land is unknown, it is likely he received the parcel as a reward for bringing other educated and skilled settlers to the Maryland colony. The man who brought Hugh Thomas from Wales to Maryland had received his own parcel of land as payment for such a service. Two years after acquiring “*Rich Hills*”, Hugh Thomas sold half of his acreage to an English immigrant, turned St.

Mary's County merchant, named Thomas Lomax. Lomax paid Thomas using the standard currency of the day—tobacco. For 3,500 lbs. of tobacco, Lomax acquired the northernmost 300 acres of the *Rich Hill* parcel, upon which the notable house would later be built.³ In 1676, Thomas Lomax gave his brother, Cleborne Lomax, 100 acres of the *Rich Hill* property. When Thomas Lomax died in the early 1680s, he was apparently unmarried and without any heirs and so the remainder of his *Rich Hill* property went to his brother as well. In 1710, the *Rich Hill* land was sold out of the Lomax family to an intriguing widow by the name of Mary Contee.⁴ A trifecta of circumstances had made Mary Contee nee Townley a very wealthy woman:

- 1) Mary Contee's late husband, John Contee, had previously married a wealthy widow by the name of Charity Courts in 1703. When Charity died the same year of their marriage, John Contee inherited her sizable estate. He and Mary were then married by June of 1704.
- 2) In the same year of her marriage, Mary Contee's cousin, Colonel John Seymour was appointed the 10th Royal Governor of Maryland. Mary is recounted as a “favored cousin” of the Governor and due to this her husband John was appointed to several lucrative governmental positions, such as a representative of Charles County in Maryland’s Lower House and a justice in Charles County among others.⁵
- 3) Thus far, it has only been shown that John Contee had become a wealthy man. While Mary assumedly enjoyed the fruit of his above mentioned “labors”, how did she herself become wealthy? That is where the real drama comes in. John Contee died on August 3, 1708. At the time of his death, he possessed 3,697 acres of land and his personal property was assessed at 2,252 pounds sterling and 13 slaves. According to his last will and testament, which was passed by an Act of Assembly in 1708, Mary became the sole executrix of her husband's vast estate. However, it was later discovered that this will was not as it seemed. In 1725, seventeen years after Mary Contee had inherited her husband's holdings, John Contee’s blood nephew, a man by the name of Alexander Contee, had depositions taken with regards to the will that had made Mary such a wealthy woman. Through these depositions, Alexander Contee learned that John Contee's will was a perjured fraud that was never agreed to by the deceased. Alexander discovered that his uncle’s supposed will had actually been written by a man named Philip Lynes. According to Alexander, Mr. Lynes was a man “very officious to oblige the said Mary” while John Contee was dying in the next room. Philip Lynes was married to Anne Seymour, the Governor's sister and therefore was also a cousin to Mary Contee. The will was apparently brought before John Contee, who was still of sound mind, and he refused to sign it as it was written. Though Contee lived for about a week more, the will was never rewritten in terms he agreed to. Due to these depositions, the Maryland Assembly passed another act in 1725 repealing the 1708 act that had granted Mary Contee the position of sole executrix. The new Act mentioned not only the malfeasance of those who gained financially by this false will, but also the fraudulent way a knowingly unsigned will passed the Houses in the first place. According to the new Act, the fake will passed due to “particular persons in power by whose Interest and Influence the said Act passed both Houses of Assembly... contrary to the Standing Rules of the Lower House.” Perhaps Governor Seymour, who was still in office in 1708, used his influence, once again, to intervene on the behalf of his “favorite cousin.”⁶

It appears, therefore, that Mary Contee purchased the *Rich Hill* property with fraudulently acquired capital. She did not own it for very long, however. By 1714, she had remarried a man by the name of Philemon Hemsley, who facilitated the selling of the *Rich Hill* land for 21,000 lbs. of tobacco. The new buyer was Gustavus Brown.⁷ Brown was a native of Dalkeith, Scotland, and a surgeon by profession. His immigration to Maryland was an accidental one:

“When a youth of 19, he became a surgeon's mate, or surgeon, on one of the royal or King's ships that came to the Colony in the Chesapeake Bay, 1708. While his ship lay at anchor he went on shore, but before he could return a severe storm arose, which made it necessary for the ship to weigh anchor and put out to sea. The young man was left with nothing but the clothes on his back. He quickly made himself known and informed the planters of his willingness to serve them, if he could be provided with instruments and medicine, leaving them to judge if he was worthy of their confidence.”⁸

Brown started his medical practice in Nanjemoy area of Charles County and quickly made a favorable reputation for himself. In 1710, he married a woman by the name of Frances Fowke and the newlyweds lived temporarily with her father in Nanjemoy.

Dr. and Mrs. Brown's 1714 purchase of the *Rich Hill* property ushered in a new age for the estate. Instead of solely using the land for planting and harvesting tobacco, Dr. Brown sought to create a home on the land. It is this house that we see and know as *Rich Hill* today.

The exact date of construction of *Rich Hill* has not been determined. According to its listing in the National Register of Historic Places, the house was “built probably in the early to mid 18th century.”⁹ Looking at the genealogical records for Dr. Brown's children, this author has determined that the house was built by 1720, as his daughter born that year was cited to have been born at “*Rich Hills*.”¹⁰

As it is today, *Rich Hill* was built as a 1½ story structure that appears as a full two-story building from the exterior. The original house had a hip roof and was built on top of cut stone piers. While the front door was on the southwest side of the house, as it is now, it was formerly on the center of this exterior wall. As you walk into Dr. Brown's *Rich Hill*, the first floor consisted of four similar sized rooms with a small stair hall in back flanked by a rear door. The original building had two exterior chimneys, which stood on the southeast and northwest sides of the house.¹¹

The majority, if not all, of the Brown children were born at *Rich Hill*. Dr. Brown and Frances had a total of 12 children as his practice prospered. He had made a name for himself on both sides of the Potomac, treating residents of Maryland and Virginia. One humorous story regarding Dr. Brown's experiences as a physician is recounted below:

“On one occasion Dr. Brown was sent for in haste to pay a professional visit to the family of a Mr. H., a wealthy citizen of King George County, Virginia, who was usually very slow in paying his physician for his valuable services, and who was also very ostentatious displaying his wealth. In leaving the chamber of his patient, it was necessary for Dr. Brown to pass through the dining room, where Mr. H. was entertaining some guests at dinner. As Dr. Brown entered the room a servant bearing a silver salver, on which stood two silver goblets filled with the gold pieces, stepped up to him and said, ‘Dr. Brown, master wishes you to take out your fee.’ It was winter, and Dr. Brown wore his overcoat. Taking one of the goblets, he quietly emptied it into one pocket, and the second goblet into another, and saying to the servant, ‘Tell your master I highly appreciate his liberality,’ he mounted his horse and returned home.”¹²

While his business grew, Gustavus Brown did suffer some of his own tragedies at home. Out of his twelve children from Frances, three died in infancy. In an odd twist, all of the children

who died were boys—who were named after their father. Dr. Brown himself was actually the second Gustavus Brown as his father in Scotland bore the same name. Dr. Brown named his first two boys, “Gustavus”, only to watch both die before they were a year old. When his third son was born, Dr. Brown gave him the name Richard, and his son survived and prospered. Perhaps thinking his curse of losing his namesake male children was at an end, Dr. Brown named his fourth son Gustavus Richard Brown, only to witness him perish ten days after his birth. While not documented, it is extremely likely that the three infant Gustavus Browns were buried somewhere on the *Rich Hill* property.

Frances Fowke Brown died in 1744 and was buried at the estate of her daughter and son-in-law in Stafford County, Virginia. Dr. Brown remarried a widow named Margaret Boyd in 1746. With Margaret, Dr. Brown had two more children at *Rich Hill*, a boy and a girl. Though tempting fate, Dr. Brown named the youngest son after himself. This Gustavus Richard Brown, born on October 17, 1747, would survive infancy, follow in his father's footsteps into the medical profession, and enter the history books as one of George Washington's friends and caretakers at the Father of Our Country's final hour. Dr. Brown's other child with Margaret was named after her mother and would later marry Thomas Stone, a signer of the Declaration of Independence from Maryland. Their shared home, Habre de Venture, in Port Tobacco, Maryland, is a National Historic Site run by the National Park Service.¹³

In April of 1762, the senior Dr. Brown died at *Rich Hill*. His death was from “apoplexy”, which was a general term that meant death happened suddenly after a loss of consciousness (i.e. severe heart attack or stroke).¹⁴ Dr. Brown was buried at *Rich Hill*, though the exact spot of his grave is lost today.¹⁵ *Rich Hill* and its 300 acres passed to his wife Margaret and then to his eldest son Rev. Richard Brown and his wife Helen.

During his tenure in the house, Rev. Brown, through marriage and purchase, managed to acquire a large portion of the 600-acre *Rich Hill* parcel that was split back in 1668. A tax assessment for *Rich Hill* in 1783 shows Rev. Richard Brown owning 566 acres of *Rich Hill*. He also made some unknown “improvements” to the property, which probably entails some work on the house.¹⁶

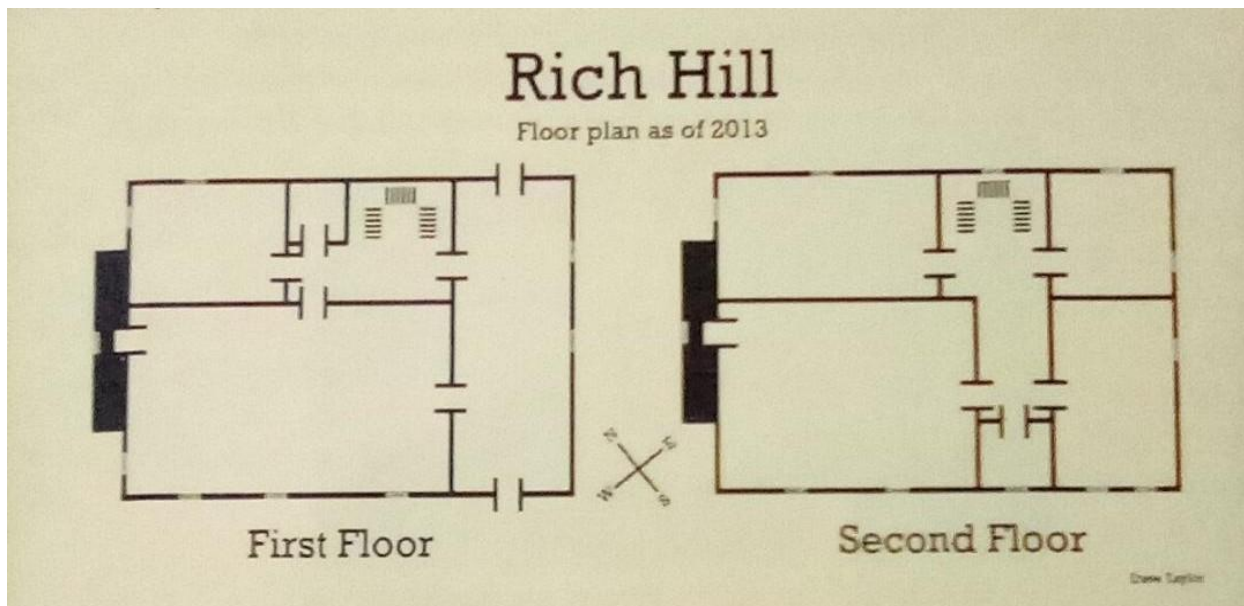
When Rev. Brown died in 1789, *Rich Hill* and its acreage swapped hands a few times between his descendants, with the loss of some of the land the Reverend had managed to regain. The Brown family-owned *Rich Hill* continuously for 93 years. At least four generations of the Browns had made that house their home. It raised the men and women who befriended and married America's founding fathers. When it was sold out of the Brown family in 1807 to a man named Samuel Cox, a new chapter for *Rich Hill* began. The new owner and his descendants would own *Rich Hill* for the next 164 years and would witness the night history came knocking on their door.

Samuel Cox, the new owner of *Rich Hill*, is not the same man to whom John Wilkes Booth appeared in 1865. Rather, this Samuel Cox was the latter's maternal grandfather. From Samuel Cox, *Rich Hill* descended to his daughter Margaret who married a man by the name of Hugh Cox. What relation, if any, exists between Margaret Cox and Hugh Cox has yet to be determined. Hugh and Margaret had five children born at *Rich Hill*, including their son Samuel, who was named after his grandfather. Samuel Cox was born on November 22, 1819. When Samuel's mother, Margaret, died, his father Hugh found himself a new wife, Mary Ann T. T. Cox. Hugh had three more children by Mary Ann.¹⁷

When Samuel Cox was 15 years of age, he was sent to the Charlotte Hall Military Academy. He returned home three years later and followed in his father's footsteps as a member of the wealthy planter class. On December 6, 1842, Samuel Cox married his Washington, D.C.,

cousin, Walter Ann Cox. Walter Ann was named for her father, who died a couple months before she was born. By the late 1840s, Hugh Cox and his wife Mary Ann were residing away from *Rich Hill* on another property they owned near La Plata, Maryland, called *Salem*.¹⁸ In 1849, Hugh and Mary Ann officially gave *Rich Hill* to their son Samuel as a gift. Hugh Cox would die in December of that same year at the age of 70.¹⁹ *Rich Hill* was now in the hands of the man who would give aid to the assassin of the President.

Sometime in the first half of the 1800s a significant amount of remodeling was done to *Rich Hill*. Whether the work was commissioned by Hugh or Samuel Cox is unknown. Regardless, both the exterior and interior of the house were drastically changed from Dr. Brown's initial layout. The hip roof was replaced with the gable roof. The two chimneys on either end of the house were replaced with a large, double chimney on the northwest side of the house. On the southeast side, where one of the chimneys had been, the Coxes built a one-story frame addition. This new addition contained a dining room and a bedroom in which Samuel Cox and his wife slept. The front door was moved from the center of the southwest wall to its current location right near the intersection between the southwest and southeast walls. The interior layout of the house has changed too. Originally containing four similar sized rooms with a rear stair hall, the new layout was an end hall plan with a large front room and two small rooms to the rear. Much of the layout of *Rich Hill* today still follows the renovations done by the Cox family in the early 1800s.²⁰



Samuel Cox was a prosperous and well-respected member of Charles County society. With the Civil War looming, southern supporting citizens of Charles County (of which the majority of the citizens were) formed a volunteer militia in November of 1859. They met weekly to participate in drills and to study calvary tactics. This local militia chose Cox as their Captain. When the Civil War finally broke out and Maryland's choice of loyalty was made for her, Cox's militia disbanded with many of its soldiers travelling to Virginia to enlist in the Confederacy. Cox did not enlist, but his strong pro-Confederate views were well known. A month after his militia disbanded, Federal troops marched to *Rich Hill* and demanded the arms from Cox's volunteer militia. They searched through hay bales and confiscated the weapons they found hidden inside them. Cox and

his militia never marched into battle, but he held the honorary title of Colonel and Captain for the rest of his life for his brief service. It was Cox's strong reputation as a southern sympathizer that led John Wilkes Booth to his door, even though the two had never met.

Samuel Cox was also a successful farmer in addition to his military service. Through the exertions of Samuel and his father before him, the *Rich Hill* farm prospered to 845 acres, even larger than its initial 600 acres in 1666.²¹ Despite his success in farming, Samuel Cox had difficulty producing an heir just like another previously discussed owner of *Rich Hill*. None of his children with Walter Ann survived infancy. Instead, Samuel Cox ended up adopting his late sister's son, Samuel Robinson. Though this younger Samuel had spent much of his life on his uncle's farm and property, he was officially adopted and had his name changed to Samuel Cox, Jr., three days after his 17th birthday in 1864.²²

Samuel Cox, Jr., was present at *Rich Hill* when John Wilkes Booth and David E. Herold arrived in the morning hours of April 16th. Years later, he would write about the night he was awakened so early by the sound of that brass knocker on the door.

"There was at the time in the house, Col Saml Cox, his wife, his wife's mother Mrs. Lucy B. Walker, Ella M. Magruder, now my wife, two servant girls Mary and Martha, and myself. Pa's bedroom was on the first floor—and to the extreme eastern end of the house, and to approach the front door, which opens into the hall, Pa had to pass through the dining room, where Mary and Martha slept. The stairway to the second floor is approached through a door midway the hall and at the head of this stairway Mrs. Walker slept. My room is on the second floor and directly over the hall and two windows in this room are immediately over the front door looking out upon the yard and lawn in full view of the road which approached the house. When I was aroused by the knock, I jumped out of bed and went down in the hall and as I approached the front door where I found Pa standing with the door partly open with Mary standing just behind him in the doorway of the dining room only some six feet away..."²³

Samuel Cox, his adopted son, and their servant Mary Swann, would claim to investigators that Booth and Herold were never allowed entry into the house and were, instead, turned away almost immediately. Cox, Jr., would hold on to this story to his dying day, telling assassination author Osborn Oldroyd in 1901 that his father found the fugitives attempting to sleep in a gully close to the house the next morning. It was only then, according to Cox, Jr., that his father instructed his farm overseer, Franklin Robey, to guide them into a nearby pine thicket while he sent Cox, Jr., to retrieve Thomas Jones. It was Jones who would care for the men during their stay in the nearby pine thicket.²⁴ Other sources, however, including Oswell Swann, the ignorant guide of the assassin and his accomplice, would state that Booth and Herald spent a few hours inside of *Rich Hill* before they departed. Some later secondhand accounts also speak of Booth and Harold entering *Rich Hill* during that early morning for food and drink. Regardless of whether or not the men entered the house, the knocking on the door of *Rich Hill* by David Herold secured the home's roll in the history of the 12-day escape of the assassin of President Lincoln.

Samuel Cox, Mary Swann, and Sam Cox, Jr., were all arrested in the aftermath of Booth's visit to their house. They were informed on by Oswell Swann, who brought the troops to *Rich Hill* at about midnight on April 23rd. The three residents were transported to nearby Bryantown. After getting Mary Swann's statement of events, Samuel Cox, Jr., and Mary were released, only to be rearrested a couple days later.²⁵ Samuel Cox, the elder, was transported up to Washington and was imprisoned in the Old Capitol Prison. Though the authorities strongly suspected that Cox had aided the fugitives, with Mary Swann contradicting the account of Oswell Swann, there was nothing to prove their beliefs. While imprisoned at the Old Capitol Prison, Samuel wrote a letter

to his wife on May 21st. Addressed to Mrs. W. A. Cox, Port Tobacco, MD", Cox recounts, in part, the degree of his imprisonment, "... I know my dear wife it will give you as much pleasure to inform you, as it was for me to receive, permission just as your letter was received, to walk in the yard for exercise, which I have been deprived of until today, having been confined to my room now for nearly four weeks."²⁶ Cox was eventually released from the Old Capitol Prison on June 3rd, and returned home to *Rich Hill* to his waiting family.

The extent of Booth's visit to *Rich Hill* remained quiet for a number of years. During the interim, Samuel Cox died on January 7, 1880. In his will, he left *Rich Hill* to his wife until her passing, after which the house and property would go to his only heir, Samuel Cox, Jr. In 1884, newspaper correspondent George Alfred Townsend (GATH) met with Thomas Jones. After years of silence, Jones shared with GATH his involvement in helping Booth and Herold during their "missing days" of the escape. Jones did nothing to shield the Coxes from their involvement, divulging how he was brought to *Rich Hill* by Cox, Jr., and how his father insisted Jones help get the men across the river. In his article, entitled, *How Wilkes Booth crossed the Potomac*, GATH described *Rich Hill*:

"The prosperous foster brother [Cox] lived in a large two-story house, with handsome piazzas front and rear, and a tall, windowless roof with double chimneys at both ends; and to the right of the house, which faced west, was a long one-story extension, used by Cox for his bedroom. The house is on a slight elevation, and has both an outer and inner yard, to both of which are gates. With its trellis work and vines, fruit and shade trees, green shutters and dark red roofs, Cox's property, called *Rich Hill*, made an agreeable contrast to the somber short pines which, at no great distance, seemed to cover the plain almost as thickly as wheat straws in the grain field."²⁷

Samuel Cox, Jr., was the man of the house, he officially became the sole owner of *Rich Hill* upon the death of his adoptive mother in 1894. By that time, Cox, Jr., had already married and had three children by his wife, Ella Magruder. These young Cox children, Lucy, Edith, and Walter, grew up and were raised at *Rich Hill*. Ella died in 1890 and Cox subsequently remarried a cousin of his named Ann Robinson.

Like his father before him, Cox, Jr., became a prominent member of Charles County society. He had a sizable plantation with *Rich Hill*, and he also owned *Cox's Station*, a stop of the Baltimore and Philadelphia Railroad line that ran from Pope's Creek on the Potomac up to Bowie in Prince George's County, where it connected to other lines. The modern town of Bel Alton (where *Rich Hill* is located) previously bore the name *Cox's Station*. When Cox sold a sizeable parcel of land to the Southern Maryland Development Company in 1891, they renamed it. Cox, Jr., was also involved in local politics, running for and winning a seat in the Maryland General Assembly in 1877. Doctor Samuel Mudd, another familiar name in the Lincoln assassination story, ran alongside Cox, but was not elected.²⁸

Samuel Cox, Jr., died on May 5, 1906, at the age of 59. The ownership of the property passed to Cox's son, Walter, who sold his share of it to his married sister, Lucy B. Neale. Lucy and her family did not live at *Rich Hill*. The last member of the Cox family to reside at *Rich Hill* was Samuel Cox, Jr.'s, second wife, Ann Robinson Cox. Her death on March 4, 1930, marked the end of the Cox family's habitation of *Rich Hill*.

Between the years of 1930 and 1969, Samuel Cox, Jr.'s, grandchildren operated *Rich Hill* property as a tobacco farm for sharecroppers. The land shrunk back down to 320 acres by 1971. That year, *Rich Hill* and its 320 acres were sold to Joseph F. Valerio, a member of the Maryland House of Delegates.²⁹ In celebration for the bicentennial of the United States in 1976, Delegate Valerio restored *Rich Hill* to its appearance during Dr. Brown's day. This involved removing the

front and back piazzas along with the one story addition that had been added by the Cox family in the 19th century.³⁰ Though this did make *Rich Hill* look less like the house that Booth and Herold saw on April 16, 1865, the restoration worked to preserve *Rich Hill* and kept it from falling down. *Rich Hill* served as a beautiful rental property for many years after.

By 2014 [when this article was written], *Rich Hill* was suffering heavily from neglect. There were large, gaping holes in the exterior walls that exposed the structure to the elements. The once beautiful rooms that housed generation of Browns and Coxes were crumbling and filled with trash. To be frank, *Rich Hill* needed help and action if it was going to survive.

Fortunately, the Charles County Historical Society has taken up the call to try and preserve *Rich Hill* before it, and all its history, are lost forever.

While *Rich Hill*'s involvement in the story of Lincoln's assassination is the house's most discussed historical aspect, it is far more than the "stop on the trail of the John Wilkes Booth" sign that stands some distance from it. As has been shown through this article, *Rich Hill* has had a notable and lengthy lifespan. It not only holds an important place in the history of Charles County, Maryland, but it also affected the history of the nation through the men and women who were raised under its roof. If *Rich Hill* had been left in its current neglected state, it would have crumbled and collapsed. If this had happened, future generations would be the victims. As a restored museum run by the Charles County Historical Society, *Rich Hill* will continue to influence and affect the history of our nation.

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The Story of Richard Smith Cox: From a Union Soldier to a Confederate Soldier

by Michael J. Mazzeo
Reprinted from *The Surratt Courier*, February 2018

Many of our readers are likely familiar with the name “Cox” and its relationship to one of John Wilkes Booth’s stops in Southern Maryland while on his escape following the assassination of President Lincoln. At that time, part of the Cox family was residing on an estate known as *Rich Hill* in Charles County, Maryland, and its owner, Samuel Cox, assisted Booth and fellow fugitive David Herold in hiding in a nearby pine thicket for a number of days before the pair could make it across the Potomac River into the Northern Neck of Virginia. *Rich Hill*, however, pre-dates the Civil War by over a century and was once the home of Doctor Gustavus Brown, a physician to George Washington. The Richard Smith Cox, who is the subject of this short piece of Civil War history, was the great-great-grandson of Doctor Brown. The author of this article, Michael J. Mazzeo, is a leading force in the ongoing effort to restore *Rich Hill* and is sharing some of the history that he uncovered in the process.

Robert Smith Cox (1825-1889) was the son of Mayor John Cox, the grandson of Mayor John Threlkeld, the great-grandson of Henry Threlkeld, and great-great-grandson of Dr. Gustavus Brown.

About 1847, Richard S. Cox became a clerk in the Paymaster General's Office of the Treasury Department. In 1849, he married Elizabeth Williams, who died after about a year. In 1851, he married Mary Lewis Berkeley, daughter of a wealthy Loudon County farmer. [Aurelia M. Jewell, *Loudon County, Virginia, Marriage Records 1881, 1975*].

When John Cox died in 1849, his son Richard inherited 55 acres north of New Cut Road, of which approximately 45 acres lay in Washington County [a part of Washington City], and about 10 acres in Georgetown. There, Cox built a two-story brick house [possibly the third house to bear the name *Burleith*], which stood about where the Washington International School is today. The 1860 census of Washington lists Richard Cox as a clerk, with \$40,000 in real property and \$25,000 in personal property. Cox kept a cow and hogs and may also have had a vineyard.

In early 1861, Richard Cox was commissioned a Colonel of the District of Columbia Militia and sworn to defend the Constitution of the United States. “Mr. Cox held also the commission of Colonel of the 8th Regiment of the District of Columbia Militia, having been placed there by Secretary Floyd, just before the inauguration of President Lincoln, in the place of Colonel Cruikshank, a man of undoubted loyalty and respectability.” [DC Liber JAS207, f.217/214, January 15, 1861; *Annual Report of the National Association for the Relief of Destitute Colored Women and Children*, 1865]

On March 4, 1861, the Georgetown Volunteer Battalion, under the command of Colonel Richard S. Cox of the 8th Regiment of D.C. Militia, escorted the carriage carrying President Buchanan and President-elect Lincoln, which was flanked by the Georgetown Mounted Guard and the President's Mounted Guard, effectively blocking the view of spectators. [“Inauguration of Abraham Lincoln—The Order of Procession,” *The Washington Star*, March 4, 1961]

President Lincoln called on the Militia of the District of Columbia for the defense of Washington, and 34 companies were sworn into service for three months in the spring of 1861. The Potomac Light Infantry, although mostly pro-Union, broke up to avoid dissension. [Records of the Columbia Historical Society, 1860-62, p. 125]

Richard S. Cox was among those who did not report for duty. Newspapers also carried the announcement of his resignation from the U.S. Treasury Department: “Appointments--Lorenzo Thomas, jun., Va., second class clerk, Paymaster General's Office, in the place of Richard S. Cox, resigned.” [*The Washington Star*, April 24, 1861; *National Republican*, April 25, 1861, p. 3]

In Richmond, June 10, 1861, Governor Letcher commissioned Richard S. Cox as “Paymaster with the rank of Major in the Active Volunteer Forces of the State.” On October 7, 1862, his appointment was confirmed as Brigade Quartermaster. [*Journal of the Congress of the Confederate States of America*, 1861-1865, Vol. 2, p. 438]

Richard S. Cox's wife was Mary Lewis Berkeley, a Virginian whose four brothers (Norborne Berkeley, Edmund Berkeley, Willam Noland Berkeley, and Charles Fenton Berkeley) had all become Confederate officers. Cox's brother did not make the same choice. Thomas Campbell Cox (1829-1882) secured a position in Lincoln's State Department. During the war, Secretary Seward sent him to France, where Seward's aim was to prevent French assistance to the Confederacy. [Thomas C. Cox, Clerk of the Third Class, Department of State, *Register of the Officers and Agents, Civil, Military, Naval, in the Service of the United States, on the Thirtieth September, 1861...* Washington, Government Printing Office, 1862; *Boyd's Directory* 1862; *Biographical Cyclopedia of Representative Men of Maryland and the District of Columbia*, 1879, p. 99; “Death of Water Register Cox”, *The Washington Post*, May 27, 1882, p. 4; Grace Dunlap Ecker, *A Portrait of Old George Town*, 1933, 1951, p. 298; Oak Hill Cemetery]

Thomas Cox did what he could to protect his absent brother's interests. When some of Richard Cox's property was sold for taxes, Thomas bought it in an attempt to prevent its loss. But, as his brother had left a loyal district to bear arms against the Union, Thomas could not prevent the U.S. Secretary of War, Edwin Stanton, from seizing his brother's property and putting it at the

disposal of an organization of Northern women that cared for some of the fugitive slaves who were crossing into the District from Virginia every day.

After the end of the Civil War, Richard Cox renewed his allegiance to the U.S. Constitution on June 30, 1865, at Fairfax Court House. In June 1866, the President of the United States granted a pardon to Richard S. Cox, (*Report of the Joint Select Committee to Investigate Charities and Reformatory Institutions in the District of Columbia*, 1878; Winfield S. Montgomery, *Fifty Years, National Association for the Relief of Destitute Colored Women and Children*, 1914).

The Cox Family did not return to *Burleith*, but continued to live at *Stoke Farm* in Aldie, Virginia, which Cox had bought in 1868 from his brother-in-law Charles Berkeley, with \$30,000 borrowed [with *Burleith* as collateral] from Walter Smith Cox, Thomas C. Cox, and Sallie Cox Smith, relatives who had not gone to Richmond in the war.

Between 1876 and 1882, Cox, unable to satisfy his creditors, lost both *Stoke Farm* and *Burleith*—with the latter ultimately passing to Sally Smith Cox, his half-sister. [DC Liber NCT58 (1865) f.453; DC Liber ECE29 (1868) f.119/93; DC Liber 841 (1877) ff.437-439]

In 1884, Richard S. Cox returned to the District of Columbia. He died October 12, 1889, in the 65th year of his age and was buried with his ancestors in Rock Creek Cemetery.

Children of Richard and Mary (Berkeley) Cox

1. Bessie Cox (1854-1924) ["Died", *The Washington Post*, August 19, 1924, p. 5]
2. Lewis Berkeley Cox (1856-1901) Practiced law in Portland, Oregon.
3. John Lawrence Cox (1857-1904) Had a ranch near Pendleton, Oregon. [Paralyzed after being thrown from his wagon. He was brought to Washington and died twenty months later. *Morning Oregonian*, February 10, 1904, p. 9]
4. Frances Callendar Cox, (1859-1926) ["One Dead, Ten Hurt in Accidents upon Slippery Streets—Inquest to Be Held in Death of Woman Struck by Car." *The Washington Post*, December 27, 1926, p.1]
5. Richard Threlkeld Cox (1862-1939) Was in business in Portland, Oregon. ["R.T. Cox Rites to Be Held Today." *The Washington Post*, March 15, 1939, p. 34]
6. Custis Lee Cox (1864-1934) Was a gold miner in Oregon. [*Mining and Engineering World*, Volume XLI, 1914, p. 1110]
7. Thomas Campbell Cox (1867-1969) Died in an accidental fire. [*Georgetown Courier*, July 24, 1869]
8. Mary Berkeley Cox (1869-1958) ["Mary B. Cox" *The Washington Post*, April 6, 1958, p. A18]
9. Eva Percy Cox (1871-1964) ["Deaths" *The Washington Post*, May 6, 1964, p. C14]

**Excerpts from a letter from Mary Lewis Berkeley Cox
to the sons of Lewis Berkeley Cox of Portland, Oregon, 1897**

In the last years of her life, Richard Cox's widow, Mary Lewis Berkeley Cox (1830-1897), wrote a letter to her grandsons in Oregon about the fateful decision made in 1861, and about the war years.

As there are so many miles between us and time goes on without our meeting, I think I must try to make your acquaintance this way and tell you things that perhaps your Papa will forget about our happy home where he was born. I know he will tell you about the war and make you understand why we had to leave our dear old Burleith and "take our stand on Dixie land" with all true Southerners. Our home on Georgetown heights was pretty and comfortable with long grounds for Aunt Bessie, your Papa, Uncle John to play in and Aunt Fanny to enjoy yourself in her baby carriage.

I mentioned our five good servants who did so much to make us all enjoy life. First came Aunt Violet, one of the best of old Va. Cooks, then Harriet the most faithful of nurses. "Mam Mary", called so because in addition to her housework she dearly loved to help in nursing, and her little girl Ellen the nursery maid and playmate. Mason who often came after his day's work to the nursery to give your Papa a ride on his back, tho he may have driven us out behind our good horse, Charlie Mason.

When we left to come South our carriage, a coupe for one horse would not hold us all, so your Grandfather hired a double carriage and after we crossed the Potomac and caught sight of the first Confederate flag Aunt Fanny said Hurrah and we all thought that "terrible smart" of her—Your Grandpa left us at Stoke, which then belonged to Uncle C. and went back home to bring away our carriage which he drove while Mason drove our farm wagon loaded up with baggage and the house was shut up and left in charge of a white man we hired some years. That closed the happiest chapter of our lives.

My brother Wm. was living at our house at Aldie two miles from Stoke, and he begged me to move so as to be with his wife and yr. Uncle N's wife said she would come too so we were all together that summer, while you're G father went to R. to offer his services to the Con. Government, and was made a paymaster to Va. Troops, and my brothers were at once enrolled in the Army, and after the battle of Balls Bluff near Leesburg, were at Manassas and of course engaged in both battles, but neither of them wounded.

The first of March it was decided our Army must fall back from Manassas, and as we did not wish to be left outside of our lines, we had to go further South too.

Yr. G.F. having been in the Paymaster Gen[era]l's Office in Wash., was told his experience would enable him to render more valuable service to the South in organizing that Dept. and thus it was

he was stationed in Richmond and unable to leave his post at that time, and yr. Uncle Charlie obtained a short leave and escorted us to [Danville].

I forgot to tell you in its proper place that when Lincoln was inaugurated yr. G.F.'s [regiment of D.C. militia] was detailed as his escort, and when Charlie Mason was led up for him to mount, he did not like his appearance in uniform, and cut up so Mason had to blindfold him before yr. G.F. could mount—Charlie was a Va. Horse and I said he showed he was a rebel.

One great event of the winter [1865?] was the marriage of the children's faithful nurse. Yr. G.F. told Mason he could go to the wedding and gave him \$100 Confed, to help him with the wedding supper. He tried to get a turkey, but none...had paid \$25 for a goose, and with eggs at \$25.00 a dozen, butter 25 a pound tho I had the sugar the wedding cake was rather costly. However, we had the ceremony performed in the house, with all of us in full dress and the bride wore the children's present, a pair of hoop earrings set with aquamarines.

Then came the end. Yr. G.F. seeing it approaching had made arrangements for Mr. H.` to take me to Evergreen at your Uncle E's suggestion and had come to say good bye and bring me some money. We were startled by a loud explosion—it was the magazine they had blown up in R. Yr. G.F. knew it was something amiss and hastened to the R.R. to try to go to R. but no trains ran that day, and he and yr. Uncle N. who was home on furlough started off on foot, and did not return to us for many days to confirm what we had already heard—that R. was evacuated and our army forced to surrender.

Note that this letter includes information about the five slaves the Cox family took south with them: Violet (cook); Mason (driver); Mary (housework and nursing), Mary's daughter Ellen's (nursery maid and playmate), who died during the war; and Harriet (nurse) who got married in the winter of 1865.

For more information or to make a contribution for the restoration of Rich Hill, please visit <https://richhillfriends.org/>.

Of Note...

This was posted in the March 2018 issue of *The Surratt Courier*.

Surratt Society Member Jill Mitchell of West Virginia did further research after reading the article by Michael Mazzeo on Richard Smith Cox in the February [2018] issue of *The Surratt Courier*. It led her to <http://groverparkhistory.com> website. It contains not only the history of the *Burleith* estate mentioned in this article, but also the Glover Park area of Washington D.C. It also contains Civil War history and information on persons of note.
