

The Guardian, Charlottetown, Fri., Jan. 10, 1969

ACROSS THE ISLAND

Old Virginia Store Has Some Odd Items

BY NEIL A. MATHESON

“Corset covers plain, 10 cents; trimmed 15 cents.”

The items and the prices were some of the many interesting things contained in a nineteenth century village general store I found in Fredericksburg, Virginia with more than 13,000 items on display.

The above items were advertised on the outside of the old store which has been preserved so that present and future generations can see what the store of another century looked like.

Eggs were seven cents a dozen, the notice said. Calico was four cents a yard. The store advertised such widely assorted items as button hooks, curling irons, tobacco, cigars and snuff.

There was sweet snuff, whatever that was. And if you think this generation produces some oddities in styles and preferences, how about these items:

There was silk for crazy work, bear traps were also advertised.

“Mustache curlers and dye for whiskers.”

I'd like to describe the inside of the old store for you – they call it “Towner's Museum” – but I didn't get inside for the old store was closed when I visited the place that claims boldly to be “America's most historic city”.

No sales are made in the old store but guides are present when the historic place is open, to answer questions and point to items of particular interest.

Ladies 'Unspeakables'

A PAMPHLET on the store says the dry goods department has calicos and laces, ladies lovely fans, pocket books, parasols, hat pins “and such unspeakables as stockings, corsets and red flannels”.

Somehow in the earlier days there was in some way a knowledge that women did wear such things, but they really were referred to as “unmentionables” in many instances.

Household articles on display include churns, sausage grinders and stuffers, butler workers and butter molds, yarn winders, coffee mills, apple peelers, cherry pitters, brass and copper kettles and many others.

Fredericksburg and vicinity certainly gets all possible mileage out of the Washington name.

Washington Name Used

DRIVING ALONG the highway you'll see signs calling attention to the home of Mary Washington, the home of Betty Washington, the grave of Mary Washington and the lodge where George Washington was made a Mason. And of course there's the bohood home of the man the Americans call the father of their country.

I found the Washington name used for such things as Inns and various types of public accommodations. Someone suggested to me that if George Washington slept in all of the places that claim he did so, he would not have had much time to devote to his country.

Of course I visited the Arlington National Cemetery where John F. Kennedy and many thousands of other Americans are buried. There are many thousands of modest headstones which mark the graves of Americans who served their country. For the U.S. presidents and other of the great, or near-great rank there are monuments, some of them really impressive.

I visited the old battle field of Bull Run, as it is famed in story – they call it the battle of Manassas now, and this is because the city, or town of Manassas is several miles away. Incidentally this is the South and I saw a huge picture poster of Governor Wallace still boldly looking out of a Manassas store window, though the election has long since passed.

'Be Careful How You Talk'

THE FIRST battle of Manassas (Bull Run) was fought on July 21, 1861 incidentally. When I visited the site – the battle field is still preserved, at least part of it – I dropped in at the museum.

When I told the curator I was from Canada, she told me “You want to be careful how you talk down here, the people are still touchy about that war and its outcome.”

After I had looked around and saw little but Southern military personalities glorified it was easy to believe that we were in the South.

Old sores have not entirely healed, even though the sores were caused more than one hundred years ago.

I wanted to visit the site of the “Resurrection City” which was built for the Negroes “Poor people’s march” on Washington. As you leave Arlington Cemetery and cross Memorial Bridge you see on your right the site, which lies between the Potomac River and the bridge route. Lincoln’s memorial and the Washington monument – the tallest by far I saw in the United States capital – are much in evidence.

You remember news stories which said the tented city was a sea of mud, caused by heavy rains and the large number of people trampling the area. Signs of these scars are still visible on the ground, though great efforts must have been made to erase them.

Not far away I saw scars from last summer’s riots. Several buildings were flame-scarred ruins and broken windows were still visible in one or two others.

Stands For Inaugural

THE STANDS that are built every four years for the inaugural ceremonies in front of the White House were well underway. And I wondered why the nation persists in holding this important ceremony outdoors, when the weather could well be so punishing as to make life all but unbearable.

Richard Nixon’s inaugural will be held in these stands a week from next Monday.

These are just a few of my impressions of the historic part of my trip. I came away impressed by the way the United States preserves its history. I only wish that we had even a part of that respect for our history, and preserved it for future generations.

I felt that in places the Yanks may possibly overdo the historic bit. I felt that, for example, when I was confronted by sign board after sign board in the Fredericksburg area telling you about all the Washingtons; and with signs telling you of commercial establishments based on one of the Washingtons, or some other historic figure.

Yet I came away with a deep sense of appreciation for the way those people do regard their historic events, and keep the stories available for later generations to see, read and appreciate.

I GOT the relationships mixed up last week in my stories from Dr. Chester Stewart who is Dean of the Dalhousie Medical School, Halifax. Rev. Mr. Dunbar was his great grandfather, a mutual friend informs me. I think the rest of the stories concerning Mr. Dunbar are correct.