



Lt. Col. Leven Powell

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LT. COL. LEVEN POWELL

Address of JAMES D. EVANS delivered June 12, 1937, at the unveiling of a mural tablet to the memory of Lt. Col. Leven Powell and Sarah Harrison Powell, his wife, in the Episcopal Church in Middleburg, Va., on the occasion of the celebration of the 200th anniversary of their births

When I find myself standing here in Middleburg, in Loudoun County, in Virginia, there comes poignantly to my mind that challenge of Sir Walter Scott:—

“Breathes there the man, with soul so dead,
Who never to himself hath said,
This is my own, my native land!”

and then the defiant answer of the highland chief:—

“My foot is on my native heath,
And my name is McGregor!”

Although I came from a “far countrie” I feel here that my foot is on my native heath, and I welcome the opportunity for greeting my kinsmen and kinswomen in this reunion of the Powell tribe.

In an ancient scrapbook kept by my uncle, Dr. Alfred Harrison Powell, late of Baltimore, are collected innumerable clippings and notices of the Powell family covering more than three-quarters of a century. In this I recently came upon an inscription which expresses very aptly the spirit of this occasion and the purpose for which we are assembled. It reads:—

“TO THE MEMORY OF COL. LEVEN POWELL”

“It is a duty and an honor for posterity to give such lives and such death, as remarkable for modesty as for manly worth, the full place which they ought to occupy in the memory of mankind.”

To observe that duty and to accord that honor this respectable assemblage of the posterity of that worthy sire are gathered here in this shrine, on the scene of the daily events of his life and those of his faithful wife.¹ Here, truly, we stand on ancestral ground. In the year 1741, eighteen years before Loudoun County was

¹ About seventy-five descendants of Col. Powell in attendance.

carved from Prince William, itself erected from old Stafford only ten years before, a tract of 557 acres was granted to William Powell, Jr. It was a part of the "White Plains," grazing land where from immemorial times the Indians had hunted buffalo and elk, and still claimed as hunting grounds by the slowly receding Iroquois nation.^{1a} William Powell was a young Marylander of good family and property who had but recently settled in the now forgotten metropolis of Dumfries on the Potomac, whence he had married in 1736, Eleanor, the only daughter of Valentine Peyton, born at "Stony Hill" on Acquia, in old Stafford, Burgess and Colonel of County Militia of old Prince William.

William Powell's tract was the farthest frontier of his day. Whether he set up his residence there is not known. It is, however, probable that he remained in Dumfries until later. Col. Francis Peyton, his wife's brother, had already taken up grants nearby in the neighborhood of the present village of Aldie as early as 1734. It is certain that soon after his marriage in 1763 to Sarah Harrison, Leven, William's eldest son, here settled and built his home, "The Shades," and his flour mill, the first in this section. Here this son became one of the most substantial citizens. He was among the first who raised the standard of protest, then revolt, against the tyrannies of the English King and later, with George Johnston, penned the "Loudoun Resolutions" of 1774 denouncing those tyrannies and pledging the lives and fortunes of himself and his neighbors to defend the "Liberties of America."² From this place, with a commission as Major in the Virginia Militia, he marshaled a battalion of "Minute men" to repel the assault of Lord Dunmore, the last Royal Governor, upon the rights of the people of Virginia and marched at their head to expel this oppressor from his office and drive him into exile. From this place, again, nominated by Washington and commissioned by

^{1a} This tract was held by William Powell, Jr., throughout his life when by his will, dated 24 Feb., 1787, (probated Pr. Wm. Co., Va., 8 Apl., 1788 and recorded in Will Bk. G, p. 392 ff.) he devised it to his granddaughter, Sally Powell, daughter of Leven Powell, who later Mar. William Chilton. By the same will William Powell devised other lands which he had inherited from his father, William P. Sr., located in Somerset County, Md.

The tract of 500 acres upon which Leven Powell settled and built his home and later laid out in part as the town of Middleburg was acquired by him under deed from Joseph Chinn, son and heir of his father, Raleigh Chinn, in January, 1763. This was a part of a tract of 3,300 acres granted by Lord Fairfax to Raleigh Chinn on 7 December, 1731, lying along the eastern side of Goose Creek and contiguous to a much larger tract previously granted to Col. Charles Burgess. (See Legends of Loudoun—Harrison Williams, p. 80 ff., 1938.)

² W. & M. Quarterly (1), XII, 231.

Congress, as Lt. Col. of Grayson's 16th Va. Continentals, he enrolled, equipped and led a battalion, including many of his young kinsmen, to fight and suffer at Whitemarsh and Valley Forge for American independence.³

Retired from active duty by impairment in health from that rigorous service, he continued to serve his country as Fiscal Agent for supplying the army in the field with arms, clothing and provisions until the end of the war.

When the strife was ended and victory won and he had again taken up his pursuit as a planter in this quiet community, he was chosen as a member of the Virginia Convention, called in 1788, for the Ratification of the Federal Constitution—which he strongly supported. After the retirement of Washington from the Presidency in 1796, Leven Powell was sent as one of Virginia's representatives to the Federal Electoral College to select his successor to that great office. True to his principles as a staunch Federalist he cast his vote for Adams. Three years later, nominated by his party to represent the Londoun District in Congress he was the recipient of the warm support and vote of his friend, the patriarch of Mt. Vernon. Heyden, in his account of Col. Powell in "Virginia Genealogies" (p. 509) says:—

"It is recorded in the papers of the day that General Washington on the day of election mounted his old iron gray charger and rode 10 miles to the Court House to vote for his old fellow soldier, Lt. Col. Leven Powell, who is happily elected."

In Washington's Diary there appears the entry:—"Wednesday, July 17, 1799, Colonels Powell and Simms and Mr. Herbert and Judge Washington Capt. Blackburn and Mr. H. Turner dined here—the three first went away in the afternoon."

Col. & Mrs. Leven Powell are listed as having been in attendance at the last Birthright Ball tendered by the citizens of Alexandria to Gen. Washington.

At the close of one term in Congress Col. Powell voluntarily retired from public life and spent the remainder of his days in the quiet life of a Virginia planter.

Rewarded by his grateful State for the part he played in the revolutionary struggle with a grant of six thousand acres of land from the public domain along the waters of the Ohio, he added, by his industry, more than ten thousand acres to his original inheritance in this immediate vicinity, leaving to his children at his

³ Virginia Genealogies, Heyden, 507, *et seq.*; Biographical Sketch—Powell. See Note 4, below.

death in 1810 one of the most considerable private fortunes in this part of Virginia.

But more than that, he left them as a heritage the memory of a patriot who put the welfare of his country ahead of personal interest; a soldier who dared all in defense of his country's liberty and a statesman who valued the welfare of his people beyond the price of political preferment.

It is not my purpose to eulogize the subjects of our commemorative exercises, the main features of whose lives are well known to most of us through the venerable traditions filtered down to us from our fathers and mothers, who in turn had it from theirs. It is, however, appropriate to say that a better exemplification of the sturdy virtues upon which our race in Virginia and America is rooted and upon which our American institutions are founded could hardly be found than in the records of their long lives in this little community. They left us the heritage of a culture which, without pretense of grandeur, possessed that distinction of good taste, probity and worth which has marked the gentle people of our Mother State and the civilization which, brought with them from the motherland, they cherished through a hundred years of pioneering and colonial life, through revolution and empire building, and transmitted without blemish to us in this generation. It is of such timber that the structure of our institutions has been reared.

I think we all should know that the conception of the plan for erecting here this testimonial of our veneration for our ancestors was an inspiration born in the fertile brain of our kinswoman, Col. Leven Powell's great-great grand-daughter, Rosalie Noland (Mrs. James M. Ball, Jr.), our gracious chairman. This lady, it may be noted in passing, has proven her loyalty and affection for the Powell family. Not content with descent from Col. Leven Powell's second son Burr, through his eldest daughter, she chose to marry the descendant of another son, Leven, Jr. James M. Ball's mother was Ellen, the daughter of Col. Daniel Lee Powell, of Richmond. It is due to her indefatigable zeal and hard work that the plan for this reunion has been brought to such a successful climax with this happy and auspicious occasion. I am sure that we all owe her a debt of gratitude and appreciation.

It is a fair assumption, I take it, that the last thing any of us could want would be to base any claim to distinction for Leven Powell upon any premise not founded in demonstrable fact. There is distinction enough in the record as we know it. The public records of early immigrants give little by way of revealing their identification with their English derivation. The name is un-

doubtedly Welsh, and of great antiquity. Many men of the name of Powell came to Virginia. Several were very early settlers. Some left records of great distinction. Whether and to what degree any of them were related is shadowy and uncertain ground lost in the shades of antiquity.

In the *Biographical Sketch of Lt. Col. Leven Powell*, published in 1877,⁴ Dr. Robert Conrad Powell, of Alexandria, the grandson of two of Col. Powell's sons, Burr and Cuthbert, says of his great-grandfather that he was descended from William Powell of Somerset County, Maryland, the son of Cuthbert Powell who lived in Lancaster County, Virginia, in 1660, and that this Cuthbert and his brother Thomas were sons of Captain William Powell, the Gunner and Burgess of Jamestown, member of the "2nd Supply," who came with Somers in 1611 to Virginia. It is now known that Captain William Powell had no sons. A Thomas we have found in Lancaster in 1656, but no Cuthbert; and Thomas appeared there many years after the man who was undoubtedly the father of William Powell, of Somerset, is known to have arrived in the Colony. The name Cuthbert undoubtedly came into the family through the Harrison connection.

Years after Dr. Powell's death, I came to know his widow, "Cousin Molly," for whom I formed a great admiration and very genuine attachment. She, like Ruth, by adoption, was one of the most ardent members of our Powell clan. I remember well the last time I saw her when, in 1928, many of us gathered at nearby "Llangollen" for a Powell reunion. She had, by 1903, when I first visited her in her home in Alexandria, already discovered the discrepancy in the "Cuthbert legend." Through search in the public records of Somerset County she had learned beyond peradventure that the father of the first William, grandfather of our Col. Leven, was Walter Powell and that of him there had been left a very complete record, although his derivation was not clear.

Who Walter Powell was or from whence he came in England the records do not reveal. The Virginia land grants, briefed in Nugent's "Pioneers and Cavaliers," record the fact that he came to Virginia in 1643 in a company of "four score" settlers brought in by Col. Samuel Mathewes, sometime Member of Council and twice Governor of Virginia, who thereby secured a land grant of 4,000 acres—one of the first on that peninsula later known as the Northern Neck from which were carved Northumberland and Lancaster, Westmoreland and Stafford, Prince William, Loudoun and,

⁴ A biographical sketch of Col. Leven Powell including his correspondence during the Revolutionary War, edited by Robert C. Powell, M. D.—Ramsey, Alexandria, Va., 1877.

in all, twenty-two Virginia counties.⁵ Walter Powell's name appears in Grier's *Early Va. Immigrants* as being in Virginia as of that year.⁶ This was the year before the second great Indian massacre, when the total population of Virginia was less than fifteen thousand souls. Gov. Mathewes' seat, Denbigh, just above Newport News, was one of the most notable of all the Virginia plantations of that early day. He was a great landowner and planter. It is most likely that he settled his followers in this part of the colony. In this general vicinity and across the James in Nansemond there sprang up some few years later, under the influence of the Cromwellian era, numerous colonies of Puritans, Quakers and other non-conformist sects, to one of which Walter Powell probably belonged.

No further record is found in Virginia of Walter Powell after his entry. We know, however, that he was a Quaker and that before he abandoned his home in Virginia, probably because of his religious faith, he prospered and was married.

About the middle of the seventeenth century, Governor Berkeley, a militant Royalist and Churchman, moved with savage vigor to stamp out all forms of non-conformity among the Virginia plantations,⁷ and many of the most substantial settlers fled from his wrath to the more hospitable shores thrown open to them by the liberal Catholic, Lord Baltimore, in his Province of Maryland. Here were invited the hard-pressed dissenters and here flocked many from Virginia to become the progenitors of some of the first families of Maryland of after years.

The clue to Walter Powell's departure from Virginia and appearance in Maryland can undoubtedly be found in these circumstances. He appeared there in the year 1668, or earlier, for in the records of Somerset County occurs the entry, dated January 16, 1669, of the birth, at his plantation on the Pocomoke River, Maryland, of his second daughter Mary.

In her "*Sidelights on Maryland History*" (Vol. II—403-418) Hester Dorsey Richardson, a historian of wide repute says:—

"Walter Powell became a citizen of Somerset County, Maryland, prior to the year 1671. He was a gentleman of substance and social position, and was affiliated in religion with the peaceful people called Quakers. His reason for leaving Virginia and seeking a home in the 'land of Sanctuary' being not hard to find, for the conditions of life at that

⁵ Nugent's *Cavaliers and Pioneers*, p. 144.

⁶ Grier's *Early Virginia Immigrants*, p. 265 (1912).

⁷ *Virginia Magazine* II, 110-112.

period were not pleasant for even the mildest brand of Puritans, and were especially rigorous for his co-religionists in the Colony of Virginia. In the year 1671 he disposed of his immigration landrights, received for bringing himself and family into Maryland, as follows :

“Know all men by these presents that I, Walter Powell, of Somerset County, in the Province of Maryland, planter, for a valuable consideration do assign and set over into Jeffry Minshall” . . . “all my rights, title, interest,” . . . “to one hundred and fifty acres of land due to me for transporting myself, Margaret, my wife, and Elizabeth Powell, my child, out of Virginia into this Province.” . . . “July 12, 1671. WALTER POWELL.” (Annapolis Land Record, Liber. 16, p. 304).⁸

“Walter Powell’s home plantation was on the Pocomoke River. Here six of his children were born, viz: Mary, William, John, Margaret, Catherine and Sarah, their births being registered in Liber I K L of the Land Records of Somerset County. On Page 210 of the same record the death of Margaret, the faithful wife of Walter Powell, is recorded as follows:—‘Margaret Powell (Alias Beere) (should be Berry) the wife of Walter Powell, died and was buried at his plantation in Pocomoke, November 26, 1679.’”

The Land Records at Annapolis show that Walter Powell was granted in aggregate 1,683 acres along the waters of the Pocomoke River—the dividing line between Virginia and Maryland—which he left to his children as appears by his will, dated November 20, 1695, proved February 4, 1695/6; recorded in Liber K, No. 7, p. 151 (1695-1698) Annapolis Wills.

The concluding clause of this will is of particular interest:—

“I ordain and appoint my 3 sons William Powell, John Powell and Henry Schoolfield my sole executors of this my last will and testament and, whenever it pleases God to take me out of this world, I give my soul unto Him and my body unto my friends called Quakers; my body to be buried according to their manner.”

“As may be seen by the . . . land records,” continues Mrs. Richardson, “Walter Powell’s daughters married in fine

⁸ NOTE: The records of Accomac County, Virginia, show that Jeffery Minshall was an active speculator in Eastern Shore Virginia and Maryland lands about this time.—J. D. E.

old Somerset families. Elizabeth, who was born before her father came to Maryland, married Hugh Tingle; Mary Powell married Walter Evans, and Margaret Powell married Henry Schoolfield."

The registry of births of Walter and Margaret Powell's children in Somerset records shows:—

"William Powell, son of Walter Powell, was born of Margaret, his wife, at Pocomoke, y Twelfth day of June, Anno Domini, One Thousand Six Hundred Seventy and Three."

On the Pokomoke River, Walter Powell became the neighbor of another newly arrived Virginia refugee, George Lane, who came about the same time from Northampton County, down the East Shore, where in old Hungar's Parish Church the baptism of his son, George, Jr., is registered as of 1647. Lane settled on Fisher's Island at the mouth of the Monokin River, Somerset County. A little further up Monokin, Nicholas Fontaine, a French Huguenot, who first came to Virginia about 1660, settled in 1683 giving to two of his plantations the names "Normandy" and "Nouveau Francia." The daughter of this Frenchman, Denise, married George Lane, Jr., as appears from her father's will (Baldwin M^d Wills No. 12,336). Their daughter Elizabeth married, William Powell, Walter Powell's first son. (Baldwin M^d Wills No. 11, 353.)

The will of this William Powell, dated 15 April, 1715, and proved June 22, the same year, (Lib. W-B—No. 6, p. 254—Annapolis, Md.) shows that he, too, was a member of the Society of Friends, for he provides that his body "be buried under the orders and directions of my friends, called Quakers." This will mentions sons John, William, Levin, and daughter Margaret—to whom are devised the lands inherited from his father Walter.

A deed, recorded in Somerset County in 1714 ((D. Bk. 1 K. H., p. 88) from William Powell, Sr., of Somerset County, Maryland, to his brother John, of Northampton County, Virginia, recites, *inter alia*:—"That whereas, my father named Walter Powell, late of said places died on the twenty-seventh day of June, Ana. Dom., One Thousand Six Hundred Ninety and five, did on the said day declare and pronounce his last Will and Testament"—etc., and conveys to said John interests in certain lands formerly held by said Walter.

Walter's second son, John, removed to Northampton County, Virginia, when he married Sarah, one of the three daughters of

Col. Argall Yeardley, the most notable figure of his time on the Eastern Shore, long a member of the Governor's Council, son of Sir George Yeardley, the Governor of Virginia who convened, in 1619, the first House of Burgesses—the earliest legislative assembly ever held in the new world. He was Justice of the Peace and Sheriff of Northampton County in 1702, owned large landed estates of which he disposed in his will in 1718 to his three daughters. He had no sons.

It will have been noted that one of William Powell, Sr.'s sons was named Levin. This is a very common christian name in the Eastern Shore. It was naturally supposed to have been derived from a family of that name but it is not certain that such was the case. The christian name "Levin" is said to be as common on the Eastern Shore of Maryland as "John." The old Deed Records and Will Records of Somerset and other counties show that Levin as a christian name was prevalent long before the Revolutionary War. The spelling of the name in the Virginia branch of the family has usually followed the form which Col. Powell always employed in his own letters, either by intention or through neglect to dot his i's—"Leven."

When William Powell, Jr., left Somerset County for Virginia is not known. As said before, he was married in the year 1736 to Eleanor, daughter of Col. Valentine Peyton, J. P., and Burgess of Stafford County. It is likely that he had for some time lived in Dumfries, the thriving little Scotch trading center on the mighty Potomac, but a few miles distant from "Stony Hill," the Peyton seat on Acquia Creek. I have a notation in my uncle's handwriting which gives Dumfries as the place of Col. Leven Powell's birth in 1737. To have formed a marriage alliance with one of the most notable families of that part of Virginia, William Powell, Jr., must have been a young gentleman of very respectable reputation and fortune. Apparently he forsook the faith of his fathers after his removal to Virginia and marriage into the staunch Episcopal Peyton-Harrison connection—for these two families, separated by only a few miles, (which has never meant much to Virginians) were closely allied by blood and marriage. His first son, our Leven of Loudoun, was born, 1737, the same year that his bride-to-be, Sarah, daughter of Burr Harrison, of Chappawamsic, first saw the light. They were second cousins and probably grew up in the intimacy which existed between close neighbors and relations.

In his delightful "Landmarks of Old Prince William" by Mr. Fairfax Harrison (ch. 19) in which, by the way, is a great deal of interesting material about our Peyton and Harrison kin of old

Stafford and Prince William, the story of the first settlement of this part of Loudoun County is given in some detail. Says Harrison:—

“The seatings of the highlands of old Prince William began in the sandstone, chestnut clad valley between the northwestern slope of the Pignut ridge and the neighbouring watershed common to the Occoquan, the Rappahannock and Goose Creek. From 1725, when the first comers identified as ‘the White Plains’ the grass lands the Iroquois had here prepared for the buffalo, the land grants reveal the development of a community which soon assumed, and has since maintained, a character somewhat like that of Brent Town, in that its population has always been dominated by a tide-water tradition.

“To the period 1739-47 belong the appearance of such Potomac River names as John Peyton (1691-1760).⁹

“In the midst of this mapmaking,” says Harrison at p. 259, “William Powell found, in 1741, the limit of the White Plains community at the future site of Middleburg, where cornerstones were already set against a further advance down Little River.”

Here was seated in the neighborhood of what is now the little village of Aldie, Col. Francis Peyton, J. P., Burgess and Sheriff of old Prince William, distinguished soldier of the Revolution, brother of Eleanor Powell and uncle of young Leven. Dr. Bob Powell says that young Leven grew up in the family of another distinguished uncle, Col. Henry Peyton, and that his first public service was to ride circuit as deputy for him when he occupied the office of sheriff of Prince William. At any rate, here are the scenes of Leven's early life and here he lived all his days in one of the loveliest parts of the Old Dominion. It is evident that from his earliest years he became a leader upon whom his neighbors placed their trusting reliance.

A firm churchman, he appears as a vestryman of Shelburne Parish, Loudoun, from 1771. But with truly liberal religious ideals he desired that everyone of his neighbors should enjoy the freedom of worship so boldly claimed by his own forebears, for in dedicating the land for the erection of the first church in Middleburg, he stipulated that it should be used as a place of worship not only by the Episcopalians but on alternate Sundays by other

⁹ He was the eldest son of Col. Valentine and brother of Col. Henry, Col. Francis and Eleanor Powell.

denominations. After his death when the Episcopal services were discontinued for want of a regular Rector, the Baptists gradually, by common usage and consent, acquired the sole use of its sacred walls. This edifice where we are now assembled, marking the revival of the Episcopal community, is not (it may be regretted) the one which he inspired, yet, since it carries on the life of the parish which he was chiefly instrumental in erecting, it is the fitting place for this memorial commemorating his own life and that of his worthy spouse.

The record of Col. Powell's character is written in his letters to his wife and his close friends and associates published in the biographical sketch of his life, and in the services which he rendered so persistently throughout his life to his neighbors and his country. The final testimonial was given in the sermon delivered at the time of his funeral at Bedford Springs, Penna., where he died on the twenty-third day of August, 1810, and was buried.

The original Ms. sermon, yellow with age but still preserved, is in the possession of Mrs. Louis (Mary Powell) Scott, of Alexandria, Va. Endorsed on the back of the original eight pages, sewn together with thread, are the words: "For Mr. Burr Powell"—and under them, in pencil, "Address at the funeral of Col. Leven Powell."

"SUBSTANCE OF THE ADDRESS DELIVERED BY THE REV^D ALEX^R
BOYD OF BEDFORD AT THE FUNERAL OF COL. POWELL"

"My Brethern—We have been this day called upon to attend the funeral of one with whom most of us have never had the honor or happiness of a personal acquaintance.

"The deceased, Col. L. Powell, was a native of Virginia. He resided at a small village founded by himself called Middleburgh in Loudoun County.

"Anxious to recover his health at least to such a degree as to spend the remaining few days which he might live in tolerable comfort, he at the advanced age of 73 paid a visit to our Springs. Here he was directed by Providence—and here his mortal part must lie till the general resurrection.

"From the most respectable testimony it may be stated that he was amongst the earliest, most zealous and able supporters of American liberty both in the field and in the Cabinet. He filled some of the most important offices both in the state and general government with the highest approbation. From the commencement of our Revolution until the death of General Washington,

Col. Powell enjoyed his confidence and his friendship in a high degree.

“In his private life (we assert it from the highest authority) he was conspicuous for those amiable and social virtues which endear *man to man*. In his character, he united the *soldier*, the *statesman* and the *Christian*.

“We have, my friends, the unanimous testimony of those who waited upon him during his last illness and saw him breathe his last for declaring that no man ever evinced greater patience and fortitude or more resignation to the will of his creator.”