

THE DAILY LEDGER, TACOMA, WASHINGTON, SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 15, 1903.

HOW A COLORED WOMAN AIDED JOHN BROWN

WHEN in 1858 John Brown made his unsuccessful but picturesque stand at Harper's Ferry, Va., there was found on his person a letter. A significant paragraph which attracted the attention of the detectives read as follows: "The ax is laid at the root of the tree, and after the first blow is struck there will be plenty more money coming."

"W. E. P." There was considerable speculation as to the author of this letter, and all sorts of wild stories were afloat. The horses, arms and ammunition Brown had with him at various times must have cost considerable money. This capital came from his many sympathizers. It was thought that the author of the letter was one of his bravest backers, but, though a very rigid search was instituted, all efforts to find W. E. P. were unavailing.

Now after nearly half a century has elapsed, the identity of the writer of the letter was revealed to me in a most unexpected way.

On October 20, 1901, I received the following telegram from San Francisco: "Mrs. Pleasant very ill and would like to have you come down. Doctor Kearney."

A few weeks prior to this time I had called on Mrs. Pleasant, an aged colored woman in San Francisco, whom I had known for many years. She told me that being 87 years of age she felt that her end could not be far off, and asked me if I would come to her in case she felt that death was near, as she had something of considerable importance to tell me.

When I reached her bedside next morning she had rallied considerably, but her physician told her that if she had anything special to tell me that she should do so at once. I took down her story and reproduced it here as nearly as possible as it came from her lips.

"I have never made this statement in full to anyone, but before I pass away wish to clear the identity of the party who furnished John Brown with most of his money to start the fight at Harper's Ferry, and who signed the letter found on him when he was arrested."

"I furnished the money and wrote the letter. My initials are M. E. P. for Mary E. Pleasant, but as signing my name I have always made the M so that it looks like a W, and I suppose that little mistake was all that saved me from being captured and hanged alongside of John Brown, and sometimes I wished that I had gone up on the scaffold with him, for I would not have been in a good case and in good company."

"I was born in Philadelphia at No. 9 Barbly street. My father was a Kanak and my mother a Louisiana negress. His name was Alexander Williams and he was a possessor of silks and dress goods. When about 7 years of age I was sent to some people in Nantucket. The name was Halsey, and they kept a bookshop. My father, as I afterwards learned, sent money every year for my education, and as I was an unusually smart girl and quick at everything, they kept me at work in the store."

"I finally went to Boston to better my condition and learned bookbinding and rest-making from a man named Jackson, on Merriam street. Here I met my first husband, James W. Smith. He was a wealthy Cuban."

"I sang in the church choir at St. Mary's church on Endicott street. Father Malloy was the priest and Father Trainer the assistant."

"I was white at that but few knew that I had any colored blood. I sang with a white choir one evening after the service Mr. Smith, who was introduced by the priest, saw me home. We were married inside a month. My husband was a close friend of Wendell Phillips and William Lloyd Garrison, also of Captain Briggs, whose mother was the daughter of the president of Jamaica."

"Mr. Smith became very much interested in the abolition system and was always in close touch with the leaders of the movement."

"Sometimes Garrison and Phillips would come to our home, also George W. Green and Louis Hayden. Mr. Smith frequently demonstrated his feeling for the colored race by buying slaves and giving them their liberty. On his deathbed, in 1844, he made me promise that I would devote a portion of the money he left to the cause of freeing the slaves. I promised with full heart and before I die I want to let the world know how I tried to keep that promise."

"After my husband's death, Captain Edward Gardner, who had known me in Nantucket, took charge of my affairs and settled up my husband's estate. Most of the money which I received came from the sale of bonds which he had owned. They brought a little over \$45,000."

"I married my second husband, John J. Pleasant, in 1848. He was the foreman and manager of my first husband. We were married in the Gate Catholic church in Charleston."

"We went to California soon after that and invested our money during the good times of '49. I lent money at ten per cent, a month interest and invested in real estate and kept a boarding-house on Washington street. It was the leading boarding-house in San Francisco and set the best table. Many of the best families of the city lived with me. Governor Booth was elected to office while he lived there. We were always great friends and I consider his the finest intellect that California ever produced."

"In 1858 I went back to New York to help John Brown. I had no well defined idea of just how I was to help him, and I concluded to see what could be done after I reached the East."

boy. He subsequently became mayor of San Francisco and president of the bank of California. After that I received a nice letter from William Lloyd Garrison. He was then editing 'The Liberator' and lived at No. 12 Pine street in Boston."

"Captain Gardner came of our country and met us at the dock when we reached New York. We went at once to a colored boarding house, kept by Mrs. Bell. That afternoon I went out to attend to business, and having letters to the right people I got my money on the draft of A. A. Lee, through Cortright Harrison. It was changed into a Canadian draft. I left for Canada that night, for I felt impatient to be moving in the matter at once. I crossed the river at Detroit and went to Chatham, the second stopping place then from Windsor."

"I was asked the several parties and told them that I wanted to have a talk with John Brown in Chatham."

"I got up at a boarding house for colored people, kept by a Mr. Barber on King street. Here I was joined by John Brown and his son. They had come direct from Harper's Ferry. We had several conferences in this house. I had received the money on the draft from Mr. Moore, who was in some way connected with the bank here. I turned the whole amount over to John Brown and his son one night, in my room."

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army, fighting for the same undying principle for which his father was hanged. When I stated my mission he received me very cordially."

"Yes," he said in response to my questions. "It is true my father went to Chatham in '58 and met a colored woman who advanced him considerable money. I don't know her name."

I found Susan Brown, a daughter of John Brown, living near Los Gatos, not far from her brother James. I explained my presence and asked for such information as she might give. She said that her father had met a colored woman in Chatham, Canada, and received considerable money from her to further a cause of emancipation, but he never disclosed her name."

I addressed a letter to the town auditor of Chatham regarding the presence of Mrs. Pleasant in Chatham in '58 and in reply received a letter from Mr. J. Fleming, auditor, saying that old settler remember Mrs. Pleasant."

I next wrote to the law firm of Lewis and Richards, Chatham, and asked them to make a search of the records. They discovered a deed, dated September 7, '58, in which Rev. Archibald Campbell conveyed four lots on Park street, between Campbell street and Block D, in the townships of Harwich, Clinton, to John J. Pleasant, and registered on the 10th of September. The deed was witnessed by Thomas F. Carey and William H. Day."

Next was a deed bearing date of May 1859, and registered October 20, 1859, in which John J. Pleasant and Mary E. Pleasant, wife, conveyed the same property to James Halsey of San Francisco. The deed was acknowledged before Tibbault, a notary public in San Francisco."

"Not only the documentary evidence relative to the case, or at least all that I have been able to discover—Sam P. Davis in Comfort."

ADDITIONAL SOCIETY

The social hop given by the Nika Yillom Quom Quom last Wednesday night was most delightful affair. The football game between Seattle and the Kenton school eleven last night was a decisive victory for the Seattle team."

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