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Old Days at Scott's Beach

"Scott's Ocean House," situated on Green Run Beach, this county, was a pleasure resort of more than local celebrity some twenty five or more years ago. The late James Scott was its proprietor and conducted the same successfully and satisfactorily, until the advent of Ocean City, situated some twenty miles to the northward. When Ocean City was laid out, and a corporation, known as the "Atlantic Hotel Company" erected the Atlantic Hotel, which is even now the leading hotel of the place, "Scott's Ocean House," dwindled in importance, and it has never regained the prestige it enjoyed in former years.

What is known as "Scott's Ocean House" was situated on a shallow cove, making up from Synepuxent Bay, on the eastern side of Green Run Beach, just opposite the farm on the mainland known and called "Watermelon Point." From the year 1865 up to the year 1876 the place was decidedly on the boom. From a small beginning, Captain Scott having at first taken only a few summer boarders, he conceived the plan of erecting a large building for the accommodation of the public. This he did, and it was not long before the fame of the place had so extended that patrons began to pour down upon him, and he was obliged to erect another large building as an annex. Still, this was not sufficient to accommodate his guests, who, in order to secure rooms had to engage them weeks in advance. It is wonderful the distance a number of his guests hailed from, some coming every season from points in Ohio, and many from Wheeling, West Virginia. The then Catholic Bishop of Wheeling, with a number of his clergy, were accustomed to come to "Scott's Beach" every season, no other resort, whether in the mountains or on the seashore suiting them so well, they said. They found here in Worcester County, just what they wanted, viz., delightful bathing, a quiet retreat, rustic scenes, and nature in her simplest garbs. Many, also, were its patrons from Baltimore, Philadelphia and other large cities. The only place of any importance that competed with it in this particular section was "Coffin's Beach," on the mainland to the south of Ocean City, just in sight of the latter place. The reputation of "Coffin's Beach," as well as of the guests who most frequented it, was distinctly of a local nature.

Before the days of "Scott's Ocean House" a most distressing and heart rendering accident occurred near Coffin's Beach." It seems that what was known as a "bay party" was given by some people of Berlin and Whaleyville, and a number of young men and ladies, full of life and youth, drove gaily down one warm summer day, bent upon having a happy time. They danced and had refreshments, and, before departing, it was suggested that they take a bath in the bay. They entered the water with zest and lightness of heart, none of the party knowing what the future had in store for them. In a short time, two of the young ladies of the party were drowned. One of them was a Miss Connoway, a sister of the late H. Clay Connoway, of Berlin; the other a Miss Mumford, a sister of the late Mrs. James A. Ennis, of Snow Hill. Both of the young ladies were very young and popular, and the sad event cast a gloom over the entire community.

Very providentially, it would seem, there never was a serious accident of any kind to chronicle in the whole history of Scott's Beach, the untimely death of the late Dr. Ralph Purnell, of this town, did not occur until many years after the place had been abandoned as a summer resort. The death of this

promising young man, just entering upon the threshold of life and his profession, was very much lamented.

It is very doubtful if there ever was more genuine, more real pleasure experienced anywhere, or by anybody, than by the patrons of "Scott's Beach." Since 1864 Snow Hill has had steamboat communications with Baltimore, and a few years afterwards the railroad was completed to Snow Hill, which was its terminus for many years. Down at "Public Landing[, Md.]" there was kept a public house, and the sloop "Fairfield," the late Captain Frederick Conner, commander, made regular trips from the pier at "Public Landing" to Scott's.

There was a regular line of hacks running from this town to "Public Landing," conveying passengers to and from Scott's. Our hotels did a good business, as did also the public house at the landing.

Those were happy days for the young people of that period, especially. If the old pier at Scott's could talk; if the old porticos, extending the full length of the house, had the faculty of memory and speech; if the sand on the ocean beach possessed the same gift, and chose to impart its knowledge, in the language of the late Horace Greeley, it would be "very interesting," and what tales of love between love sick swains and maidens would be unfolded! It was the custom in those days for the young people to go over in parties, chaperoned by some young married lady, and, whilst this was so, there was no selfishness or clannishness existing. All mingled with each other, each one endeavoring to make the other as happy as possible until the trip was at an end.

The young ladies were all sweet, pretty and attractive, as they are now; the young men were just as attentive and ardent in their wooings as they are now; the sun shone just as brightly as it does now; nature adorned herself then in just as pretty garbs as she does now, and everything went "as merry as a marriage bell."

The place was provided with a spacious hall for dancing purposes, with musicians, a ten pin alley, with a saloon adjoining, where something stronger than water could be obtained, although there was but little inebriety manifest and nothing done or said that could grate harshly on the most modest ears, or give offense to the most tender sensibilities. Perfect order prevailed, and was maintained throughout the history of the place. At sunrise the ox cart was brought around to convey the ladies with gentlemen escorts to the ocean for a bath. The merry party was obliged to traverse a road of a half mile or more before the ocean was reached. Bath houses were provided for both sexes. After a pleasant plunge in the surf, the return trip was made in time for breakfast, which consisted, for the most part, of trout, just caught and fried, together with all the delicacies of the season. It is doubtful if Ocean City, with all its magnificent hotels, its stores, shop, and all the surrounding country to draw from, could surpass Scott's, in the height of its glory, in all that constitutes good, substantial, solid living, and as a place for healthful and genuine recreation.

The arrival and departure of the sloop, "Fairfield," was a great event with the guests; some of whom went down to witness the departure, others the arrival, of friends, also to hear the latest news from home; for, be it remembered, there were no mails to and from the place, there being no post office or anything of the kind at Scott's. Rural Free Delivery was not conceived of in those days, and all correspondence was received at the post office in Snow Hill, to be delivered to the driver of the hack, who in turn delivered it to Capt. Conner. From Capt. Conner, the mail was handed over to Capt. Scott for distribution among his guests.

In addition to the patronage extended the place by our own county, the prominent families of Somerset, Wicomico and Dorchester counties were frequent habitues of the place, coming over in large parties and making extended stays thereto. The young people and others of our town and county were always, and "very much" in evidence at Scott's. The season usually opened about the 20th of June, and closed in the month of September. Many of the young men of those days have become prominent in the political, professional and business life of our county and state, whilst others have crossed the River and gone to the great Beyond, unlike unfathomed and unfathomable to mortal ken.

A great change has taken place at old Scott's, and the section adjacent thereto. In those days there were a great many inhabitants of Green Run Beach. The place was provided with a public school, which was well attended, and with a competent teacher. The advent of Ocean City completely knocked "Scott's Ocean House" out of business. There is now no one living there, or in the neighborhood, save the crew of the Life Saving Station. The windows of the old house have fallen out, and the place that was once the scene of so much fashion, dancing and gayety, has become the abode of bats, crickets and fleas. We have been much impressed recently with the silent gloom of the place. The very echo of the human voice, or footstep is sad, silent and mournful, and the last time we saw Scott's it made us feel like not wishing to see it again, until, at least, a complete rehabilitation should take place and restore it into something like its original self.

The whole section extending from Fenwick's Island Light House, in the state of Delaware, to the extreme end of Chincoteague Island at Chincoteague Inlet, together with the inhabitants thereon, was one of extreme simplicity and primitive customs. It is hard to realize the changes that have taken place in the last thirty years. We are informed by a very reliable gentleman that just prior to the late Civil War, he was offered the site of what is now the City of Chincoteague for an insignificant figure. He was at first inclined to go into speculation, and had all his arrangements made for that purpose, when at the eleventh hour, a friend, who had promised to join him in the enterprise, grew timid, and asked his permission to withdraw from the venture.

This suggests to us the following lines from Shakespeare, the immortal bard of Avon, the truth of which a great many of us can vouch for, to wit: "Our doubts are traitors, and make us lose what we oft might win, by fearing to attempt."

Upon what slender threads do the destinies of many men hang!

Had the two gentlemen referred to gone into the speculation above named, and had they had the nerve and patience to wait for the progress and evolution of events, how immensely wealthy it would have made both of them! However, such is life, and, as Whittier has so aptly expressed it, "Of all sad words of tongue or pen, the saddest are these, 'It might have been!'" It certainly had a practical application in their case.

One of the interesting features of Green Run and Chincoteague when "Scott's Ocean House" was at its "high water mark;" was the annual pony pennings which took place there annually, usually some day in the month of August being selected. This occasion drew immense crowds from the adjacent mainland, the large cities, and distant parts of the country. To one who had never seen anything of the sort, it was the greatest curiosity and revelation. It will be remembered that the beach ponies are allowed to roam the marshes throughout the year, and rear their young. The object of the pony pennings was to catch the young colts, and brand them with the names of their respective owners, so

as to enable them to identify their property in the same, and also to make sales of the ponies to the many wealthy people there in attendance. In past years this was a considerable part towards a livelihood for these primitive people; and, although many of them were uncultured, and not up to the ways of the world in many respects, they knew how to make a good deal, and it was a sharp stranger, indeed, who could get the least bit of advantage of them in a business transaction. The stranger may have thought so at the time, but, ten to one, upon a closer investigation, the stranger, though a thorough man of the world, would find himself worsted in any deal he made with the sharp witted man from Chincoteague.

When the railroad was extended to Franklin City, a steamer connected the latter place with Chincoteague, opening it to civilization and the outside world. This gave the place a great impetus. A large and modern hotel was erected, attracting guests from a great distance; large storehouses, containing immense stocks of goods, were built; and bright, business and professional men were attracted there. The place has a large coasting trade, and the Chincoteague oyster, like the Synepuxent oyster, is known and appreciated over the entire country. In some parts of the island, real estate commands city prices. The private bank of our fellow countian, L. L. Dirickson, Jr., of Berlin, does an immense business, and the place is now supplied with everything that goes to make up a thriving and progressive community, including modern abodes, telephones, and other like adjuncts. Imagine the commercial and other possibilities for our county and even our country, were those bodies of water, locally known as "Assawoman Bay," "Isle of Wight Bay," "Synepuxent Bay," and "Chincoteague Bay," extending from the line of Delaware to the Chincoteague Inlet connected with Delaware Bay at Lewes, through the medium of the Covington Inter Water Way, an enterprise, which, we very much regret to say, has fallen into a state of "innocuous desuetude."

Many thousands of dollars would be saved every year in the safety afforded shipping in coming through this safe and land-locked body of water, free from the many dangers incident to sailing the Atlantic Ocean during the stormy periods of the year. Think of what it would do for our county as affecting its local interest. The water way in question being substantially opened, the effect would be to salt the water and to deepen it throughout. Oysters would naturally grow through its entire length, many villages would doubtless spring up on the banks of these bays and adjacent wrecks, a great many new enterprises would, of course, be started, thus adding additional employment of many kinds to our people, and very much swelling our taxable basis. Its benefits would, indeed, be manifold.

May the future have all these things in store for us at a not too distant day!