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Jack Jouett of Albemarle

The Paul Revere of Virginia

"Whoever has journeyed from Eastern Virginia into the County of Albemarle must remember the rugged beauty of that region, and especially must he remember his first glimpse of Charlottesville. It nestles in a cup-like enclosure between the mountains, and is the centre of an impressive scene that gradually unfolds itself to the view of the traveller, as he passes the porter's lodge of Monticello and begins the descent into the valley below. Away to the westward, the cerulean peaks of the Blue Ridge run along the horizon; nearer are those uneven spurs of the former ridge, the Ragged Mountains mauve colored and sombre, silhouetted against the azure of the larger range with a singular distinctness; and nearer yet at the feet of these, as they encircle the quaint old town with their straggling hills, is the white dome of Jefferson's Pantheon—the Rotunda of the University of Virginia—through this heavy rolling country and to this little town Captain Jack Jouett made his wonderful ride."

Here Jack Jouett, the Paul Revere of Virginia, was born and here he died, and except for local tradition, references to him in some antiquated histories and the musty old records of the County, nothing remains to keep afresh the memory of this patriotic Virginian of Revolutionary days.

In June, 1910, a bronze tablet, placed on the front wall of the Red Land Club, bearing the following inscription, was unveiled—

"Site of Old Swan Tavern
Where lived and died Jack Jouett,
whose heroic ride saved
Mr. Jefferson, the Governor,
and the Virginia Assembly
from capture by Tarleton
June, 1781.
Erected by the Monticello Branch
of the Association for
the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities,
1910."

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Jack Jouett's ancestors were Huguenots, and his father and he were leading citizens of Charlottesville, though there are none of the name in the town at the present time, the family having moved to Kentucky. The records that were saved from Tarleton show that John Jouett, Senior, owned much land in and around Charlottesville. There he erected the Old Swan Tavern, on the site where the Red Land Club now stands. It was an old wooden building, two storied, with double porches, dormer windows and large sign before the door, which bore the picture of a swan— John Jouett, Senior, married Mourning Harris, a member of a prominent family of Brown's Cove, Albemarle County. The Revolution soon began and John Jouett was among the first to advocate the doctrine of the Declaration of Independence, written by his neighbor and friend, Mr. Jefferson.

He was a Captain in the Virginia State Militia. Four of his gallant sons were Captains in that war, an unusual record for a single family—five captians for the same army. He was also a signer of the Albemarle Declaration of Independence. John Jouett, Junior, the subject of this sketch, was a Captain in the same Militia and a signer too of the Albemarle Declaration of Independence.

For more than any other event of his life, Jack Jouett will be remembered for his daring ride from Cuckoo Tavern in Louisa County to Charlottesville, in the last year but one of the War for Independence.

Early in the year 1781, the unfortunate Arnold was joined at Portsmouth, Virginia, by General Phillips with two thousand men who were sent there by Sir Henry Clinton, and soon they were at Manchester, across the James River from Richmond. General Phillips died and Arnold took command. Lord Cornwallis then invaded Virginia, and the forces united at Petersburg, without taking Richmond. These united forces encamped in Hanover County, on the North Anna River. Devastation of home and field followed in their wake. The Legislature fled from Williamsburg, the Capital, to Richmond and from there to Charlottesville, which became for a brief period the Capital of the State. There is reasonable proof that the very building is still standing in which the Assembly was sitting at the time of Jack Jouett.

Lord Cornwallis now sent a detachment under Lieutenant-Colonel Tarleton to Charlottesville to seize the person of Governor Jefferson and to disperse the Legislature.

Among those legislators were *three* signers of the Declaration of Independence—Richard Henry Lee, Thomas Nelson, Junior, and Benjamin Harrison, the ancestor of two Presidents—Patrick Henry, who some years previous had made old St. John's Richmond, echo with his speech, and the phrase "Give me liberty or give me death" was also among the legislators; and on the hill above the town was Governor Jefferson, who as the most learned was the most hated of the advocates of the triumphing new Democracy. All of these the British were eager to lay hands upon.

Lieutenant-Colonel Tarleton was delighted when this order came from Cornwallis, and no doubt was pleased, on his road to Charlottesville, to think what a fine thing it would be to bring back, tied, the author of the Declaration of Independence, and to have him transported to Great Britain and tried for high treason. Colonel Tarleton came near succeeding. In his troop were one hundred and eighty of his own trusted dragoons, and seventy mounted infantry. They were all splendidly mounted on the best horses procured from the Virginia plantations on the way.

So Tarleton came swiftly with his legion and reached Cuckoo Tavern in Louisa County, about fifty miles from Charlottesville one June day.

There happened to be at Cuckoo Tavern that June day, Jack Jouett, a citizen of Charlottesville, a jolly innkeeper fond of fine horses. It is thought that Jack Jouett had gone to attend to property he owned in Louisa County, as the record books show he had property there. One thing *is* known however, and that is, he had captured a British dragoon and stripped him of his uniform. Concealing himself Jack heard Tarleton and his troopers, and divining their purpose, he leaped upon his horse, "said to have been the best bred and fleetest of foot of any nag in seven counties," he began a race that makes the midnight ride of Paul Revere seem trifling.

On his ride that night to Charlottesville, Colonel Tarleton secured several prisoners of importance; some at "Castle Hill," Doctor Walker's comfortable estate in Albemarle, where he decided to take breakfast. He ordered it accordingly, but by the quick wit of Mrs. Walker, who it is thought, and believed, was warned by Jack Jouett that Tarleton was on his way to Charlottesville, the Colonel did not breakfast as promptly as he had hoped. His troopers were

encouraged to raid the kitchen. The first breakfast was devoured by them, then the second, and when Colonel Tarleton complained he was told that his men had already taken two breakfasts and that if he wanted one for himself the kitchen would have to be placed under guard. This was done but he had been fatally detained. Of course this was a happy delay for Captain Jouett, who was on his way to Charlottesville and Monticello.

Knowing the road that Tarleton had taken, Jack Jouett knew that for himself he would have to take a different way, if he made his mission certain. As he was familiar with every section of Albemarle and Louisa Counties, he had but little trouble in coming through, over byways and foot paths. He rode most all of the night, having left Cuckoo Tavern before midnight. We must remember those forty five or fifty miles were over an unused road that wound in and out among the hills and was obstructed by rocks and trees and interlacing vines.

At dawn, the next morning, the fourth of June, he rode through Milton, the little village at the ford, just below Monticello, where Mr. Jefferson in after years received the marble capitals, from Italy, for his University, that were brought by boat up the James to the Rivanna River. He spread the alarm at Milton, as he had done all along the way. He hastened up the hill to Monticello and gave the warning, without stopping for refreshments, except a glass of Mr. Jefferson's Maderia, and in his old age he used to laugh and say he would "do it again for another glass of Mr. Jefferson's Maderia." Then he rode on down to Charlottesville to warn the Assembly, which did not "stand on the order of going" but fled to Staunton. In the meantime Tarleton was doubtless picturing to himself how he would sweep into town unannounced.

Lieutenant Hudson gave Mr. Jefferson a second alarm. Mr. Jefferson then sent his wife and children to Blenheim, the home of Col. Edward Carter, about six miles to the South. Mr. Jefferson then followed on horseback, and had not left the house more than ten minutes before the British entered, riding horseback from front door to back door, through Mr. Jefferson's home, Monticello.

Jack Jouett had saved Mr. Jefferson, Virginia's Governor, from capture!

The ride was the greatest act of Jack Jouett's life. Seldom has it been equalled in the history of the world, and never we believe has there been more at stake than there was on that momentous fourth of June. Mr. Jefferson would have been taken in fetters to England and doubtless have died an arch traitor to the King. Perhaps there would have been no United States; and certainly there would have been no University of Virginia. Bravely he rode and bravely he lived. His ride was more hazardous, more trying, and beset by graver difficulties than were those fifteen miles of Paul Revere. Through a region of markedly broken topography, through wood and river, hill and valley, through pit-fall and quagmire, through a region infested of the enemy, he rode. But with it all no Longfellow has come to sing of him. However the tribe of poets has not died with Longfellow. There was one on the staff of the Charlottesville Daily Progress on October 26, 1909, at the time of the unveiling of the tablet to the memory of Jack Jouett. Unfortunately the name of the poet is unknown.

"Hearken good people; awhile abide
And hear the stout Jack Jouett's ride;
How he rushed his steed, nor stopped nor stayed
'Till he warned the people of Tarleton's Raid."

The moment his warning note was rehearsed
The State Assembly was quickly dispersed.

In their haste to escape they did not stop
Until they had crossed the mountain top.
And upon the other side come down
To resume their sessions in Staunton town.

His panting steed he spurred,
In haste to carry the warning word
To that greatest statesman of any age,
The immortal Monticello Sage.

Here goes to thee, Jack Jouett!
Lord keep thy memory green;
You made the greatest ride, sir
That ever yet was seen."

See Poem by L. Lee

From Mr. Jefferson's "Miscellaneous Papers," is the following:

"Learning that the Legislature was in session in Charlottesville, they detached Colonel Tarleton with his legion of horse to surprise them. As he was passing through Louisa on the evening of the 3rd of June, he was observed by Mr. Jouett who suspecting the object, set out immediately for Charlottesville, and knowing the by-ways of the neighborhood, passed the enemy's encampment, rode all night, and before sunrise on the 4th called at Monticello with notice of what he had seen and passed on to Charlottesville to notify the members of the Legislature."

In Mr. Jefferson's own words Jack Jouett's Ride is verified.

The following resolution was passed by the Virginia Assembly on the 12th of June for the gallant service of Capt. Jack Jouett:

"Resolved: That the Executive be desired to present to Capt. John Jouett an elegant sword and pair of pistols, as a memorial of the sense which the General Assembly entertain of his activity and enterprise in watching the motions of the enemy's cavalry on their late incursion to Charlottesville, and conveying to the Assembly timely information of their approach, whereby the designs of the enemy were frustrated, and many valuable stores preserved."

Whether citizen or soldier he deserved well of his country-men and much of his Country.

At Charlottesville Colonel Tarleton was hardly more fortunate than at Monticello. He caught seven tardy members of the Assembly, but found the most important stores were hidden away.

General Stevens, one of the Delegates, had the narrowest escape of all. He had been ill at the Old Swan Tavern, and but for the invincible Jouett would have been taken also. The two started out the road to Staunton, whence the Legislature had fled and were soon spied by the raiders. Captain Jouett had on an officer's cap with a showy plume; General Stevens shabbily dressed, rode along leisurely and unconcernedly, and the dragoons again lost their game by mistaking the old gentleman for a farmer, who got away through the woods. Captain Jouett whom they thought was an officer of great importance, fled precipitously and proved himself again too swift for taking.



When the War ended Captain Jouett laid aside his "elegant sword," his cap and plume and braided coat forever. He continued the old Tavern, and around its big fireplace on wintry evenings, and on its large front porch on summer afternoons, there gathered the remnants of his former townsmen, and between the filling and emptying of pipes came story after story. Captain Jouett knew his from personal experience.

Jack Jouett died in 1802 and was buried in the back yard of the Swan Tavern. As late as 1824 the grave could be pointed out; and in the Central Gazette, a paper published in the town, there appeared on October the 18, 1824, an earnest appeal to the citizens of Charlottesville to erect a stone over the grave; but the appeal was unheeded, and the exact spot where he was buried is not now known and never will be. At the time of his death (1802) there was no public place of burial in Charlottesville, or the immediate vicinity and according to the custom of that day he was buried in the yard in the rear of the house.

And yet the "Ride of Paul Revere" has been for a hundred years commemorated in Boston as one of the most notable incidents of the Revolutionary struggle, while the far more important and memorable "ride" of Jack Jouett is, at this late day, knocking for recognition at the doors, the homes, the hearts of the people of the United States, but in particular of the people of Virginia.

Reference for the above facts:—See a volume entitled "John Jouett, Junior," in the Library of the University of Virginia—access to which was obtained through the courtesy of Mrs. Ella Watson Johnson.

*Leemie Thornley Grayson -
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D. A. R.*

Written for
Jack Jouett Chapter
Daughters of the American Revolution.

Charlottesville, Va.



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