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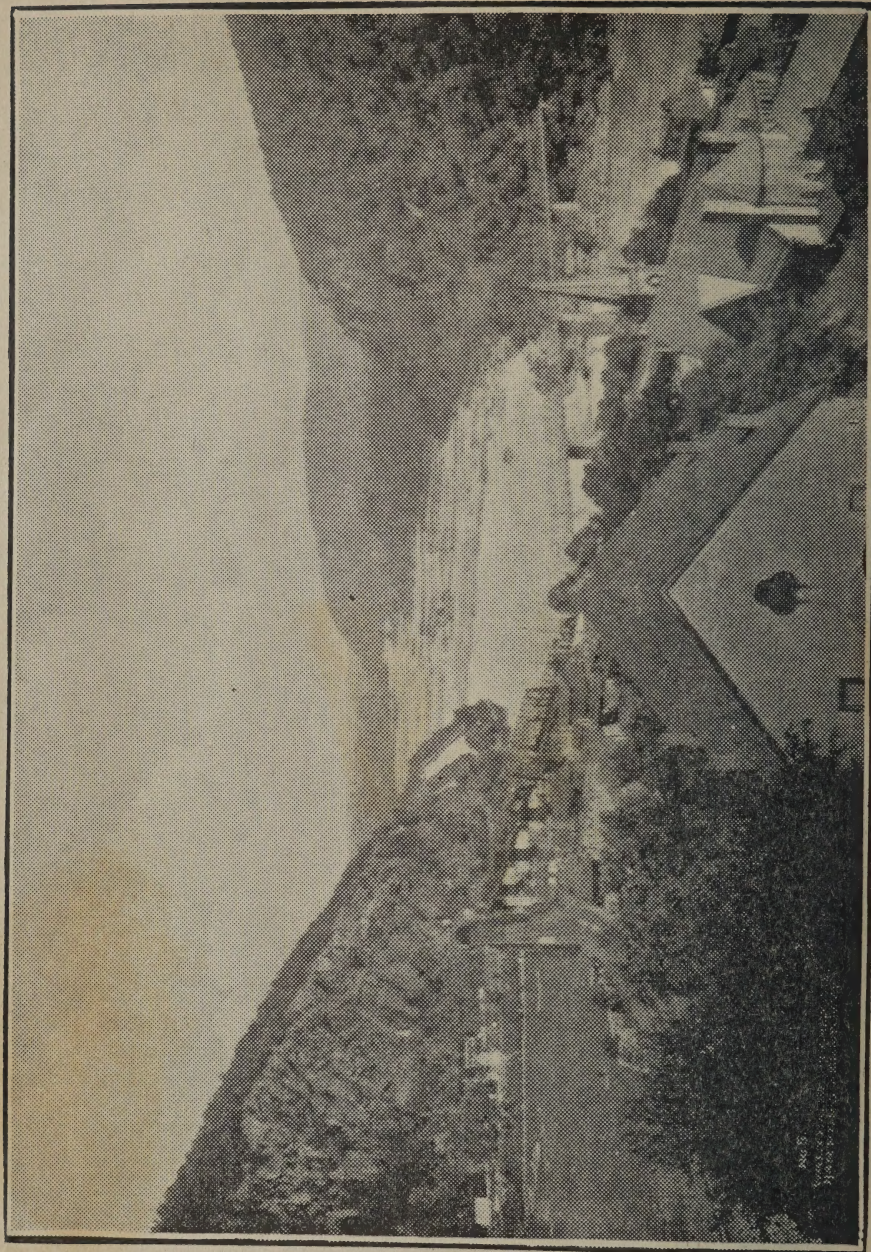


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A JOHN BROWN  
TRAIL







LOOKING THROUGH THE HOLE, DOWN THE POTOMAC, HARPERS FERRY, W. VA.

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# A JOHN BROWN TRAIL

## Harpers Ferry After Fifty Years

BY ERNEST BROWN

Fifty years ago Thursday, on Dec. 2, 1859, John Brown's soul left its body to begin its long march through eternity. Inside of six years the impossible fantasy which led to his death became a reality with the freeing of the slaves at the cost of Civil war. But whatever the influence that John Brown had on the result of the war his action brought into prominence Harper's Ferry, Va., (now West Virginia), a prominence which it did not lose throughout the war.

The quiet village is reached from Washington by the Baltimore and Ohio railroad. The distance is a little fraction under sixty miles and the fare for the round trip is \$2.25. The distance from Baltimore is a little greater, the two branches coming together at a place called Washington Junction. Leaving Washington one passes through the undulating fields of Virginia for some distance, then crosses the Potomac and passes along the valley of the river, the Chesapeake and Ohio canal running between.

Just before reaching Harper's Ferry the train plunges into a tunnel and emerges once more upon a bridge across the Potomac on the farther side of which stands the station. The immediate vicinity of the depot is historic ground, although much changed in the fifty years since John Brown came across this same river to take possession of the United States arsenal in the mad project he had for freeing the slaves. The bed of the railroad has been raised a number of feet. The arsenal buildings are all gone save the commandant's residence, a brick, ivy covered building, a little way up Shenandoah street which parallels the river of the same name which here weds the Potomac.

Connors, a typical country hotel, is just across from the depot where was the armory proper. The first thing that strikes the eye on getting off the train is a white stone monument in the graded yard of the railroad with the simple inscription, "John Brown's Fort." This marks the site of the fire engine house to which John Brown and his followers retreated when the citizens armed to repel the raiders. Four bronze tablets near at hand tell the story of the battle between Stonewall Jackson and the Federal forces in which General Miles was killed, dying from a wound after he had surrendered, Sept. 15, 1862.

The physical surroundings of Harper's Ferry must be understood before the im-

portance it had during the war is realized. The Blue Ridge is broken here to allow the passage of the Potomac. The mountain crags on the north rises bold and rough. These are the far-famed Maryland Heights. South of the Potomac, and on the east of the Shenandoah the steep cliffs of Loudoun Heights in Virginia rise. Between the two rivers rises a plateau at the foot of which, along its sides and on its top straggles the village of Harper's Ferry. Before the war the village had grown to a population of about 3000 but now it has about 230 whites and blacks.

The writer arrived in the night and put up at the hotel, with a call left for an early hour. When he waked with the morning and pushed up the curtain one of the prettiest views possible was seen. The window faced the valley through which the Potomac bursts. The confluence of the two rivers was in the foreground while the Maryland and Loudoun Heights flanked the scene on either side, and the sun a little way up the sky sent its rays out from behind the mountains on the Virginia side. At breakfast there was the inevitable colored waiter who stolidly waited on his guests and pocketed with nonchalance the silver piece dropped beside the plate.

The purpose of the visit of the Wayfarer was to see Harper's Ferry and the information was given at the office that a team could be procured at one of the stables nearby. Strolling out with camera in hand the writer first went to the John Brown Fort monument, a picture was taken, and while the Wayfarer was in contemplation of the bronze tablets a stable keeper got on his tracks, through the freemasonry which exists between gentle Bonifaces and the Jehus wherever the Philistine appears to be spoiled. A bargain was soon struck, reasonable enough in its terms, and with a youthful driver the trip began. Around the corner of Shenandoah street into High street we went and began the sloping ascent to the upper levels of the village.

Near the lower end of the street the Harper house built in 1780 is pointed out, while almost opposite, carved from the solid ledge, is a long flight of steps over which looms the Roman Catholic church. A little way up the street stands a canon, which my guide solemnly declared to be the identical one from which Stonewall Jackson fired the first shot in the battle. It may be. But I was also 'old

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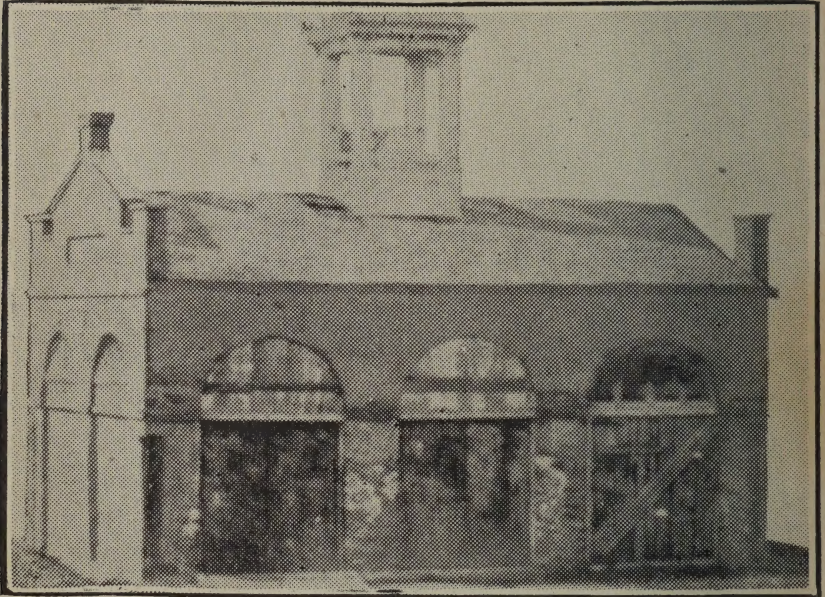
another story in regard to it, so will let this pass for what it is worth.

A steady climb brought us to the Hill Top house which sits perched on the brow of the cliff overlooking the Potomac. The furrowed rocks of the bed of the river were hardly covered, and the scuffs in the rocks gave it a checkered appearance. Across on the Maryland shore could be seen the ruins of a federal fort. The view from the piazza of this hotel was magnificent.

Resuming the drive, a little way along, we met a group of pickaninies, swinging their lunch baskets and pails on their way to school. Just beyond was Storer

was visiting when the battle of Winchester started, "and Sheridan twenty miles away," although by actual measurement it is considerably less.

On the other side of the road in the midst of a field stands "John Brown's Fort." The historic building has undergone vicissitudes indeed. It stood undisturbed until 1892, when it was torn down, carried to Chicago and rebuilt in the heart of the city for exhibition purposes. It proved a failure and was later, through the efforts of Kate Field, the well known woman journalist, taken back to Harper's Ferry and reerected on a farm which she had leased for the purpose two or



JOHN BROWN'S FORT, HARPERS FERRY

college for negroes, the buildings of which include those used by Stonewall Jackson as headquarters at one time. Across a little depression rises the rolling slope of Bolliver Heights, where the armies camped. To reach them we passed the old Lutheran church built in the early 50's and in the battle of Bolliver Heights, used as a hospital. In the southwest corner of its walls is plainly seen the outline of where the hole, made by a shell in that battle, has been patched up.

Perhaps a couple of miles up from the hotel the road ran along the side of the gentle slope on the summit of which stands a mansion, which my guide pointed out as the one where General Sheridan

three miles from its original site. Miss Field endeavored to have a national association formed to perpetuate it but soon after went to Hawaii where she died at Honolulu. The lease passed into the hands of a man named Murphy, who uses the structure for storage purposes.

Turning about, a road was taken which led down into the deep gorge of the Shenandoah. The scenery was picturesque and rugged. When we arrived at the bottom we drove along beneath high cliffs on one side and a level strip of land on the other. Where Hall's Rifle works were fifty years ago there is a mill pond and at its outlet a pulp mill grinding the forest wood into material for paper. These rifle works were part of the government

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property of which Brown took possession.

Passing down Shenandoah street the first glimpse is obtained of what is considered by many of the natives as one of the chief attractions. This is Jefferson's rock, perched up on four legs because the strata between the top and the bottom had succumbed to the weather. It must be two or three hundred feet up to where it rests, and this almost perpendicular cliff runs along for a considerable distance. The guide pointed out, as we entered the village, the Masonic hall which, he said, was the first one in West Virginia. Going back to secure a picture of it a little later I concluded that it was the first one in West Virginia to anyone travelling westward from Virginia, as the date was 1845, plainly displayed on a tablet set in the wall.

Climbing the steps in the cliff, first taking a photograph, the way led past the Roman Catholic church already noted, then by an old weather beaten Presbyterian church built of the native rock, up to the Jefferson's rock. This is so-called because Thomas Jefferson, according to cherished local tradition, here composed his "Notes on Virginia." He is reported to have said the view from its summit was worth a trip across the ocean to see. I am willing to back up the judgment of the author of the Declaration of Independence. To the south stretches the beautiful Shenandoah through whose valley the tide of war surged back and forth till Sheridan swept it and purged it as by fire. There is no suggestion of war—only grandeur here and across the river on the Virginia side. Looking through the Gap to the northeast one does not wonder it was first described as The Hole to Robert Harper, one time architect, who settled here about 1747 and established a ferry, hence Harper's Ferry. Its strategic position appealed to Washington later so that in 1794 during his administration as President it was selected as the site for an arsenal. Here were developed some of the best firearms of the ante-bellum days.

It was no wonder that John Brown, imbued with the idea that the slaves could be induced to rise, should select this point as the one from which to make the attempt. Here were arms, and it was the natural gateway from the Southland into Maryland and the north. Into the hills to the north he came with his little band of followers, under assumed names, and began to ingratiate himself into the hearts of the southerners. Then on Sunday evening, Oct. 16, 1859, he descended with his little army, captured the arsenal, and the rifle works and took hostages of the citizens. I asked a storekeeper how Brown was regarded here, where he gained his immortality. He told how Brown under his assumed name had been accepted as a friend by Colonel Washington, a relative of the first President, and through this had gained entrance to the house, later using the knowledge thus

obtained to take Colonel Washington from his plantation the three or four miles into Harper's Ferry and imprison him in the fort, endangering his life. This he said, the hospitable southerners regarded as a betrayal of hospitality. Brown had come among them in disguise and had killed and wounded citizens, and for this reason was nothing more than a murderer. But this feeling is not universal in the place and is not repeated with bitterness. There are many of northern blood living here now who regard Brown as a strange hero, misguided perhaps, but looming large in God's providence. My guide who drove me about, reflected, I suspect, another attitude toward the militant reformer, for whenever I sought to turn the conversation to the Raid—of course it takes a capital R—he exhibited a noticeable reticence and answered in monosyllables. It would not be long, however, before the conversation would be guided towards the battles in which Stonewall Jackson, the hero soldier, Rebel though he was, figured. I had no quarrel with him for this; the war was over before either he or I came on the stage.

Stepping into a store on Shenandoah ("The Daughter of the Stars") street to obtain some information, I found the proprietor to be the son of an Ohio man who after the war came to Harper's Ferry and purchased property. He entered trade and established the business which his son, a man now a little past middle life, was carrying on. The son was enthusiastic for the possibilities which lay before Harper's Ferry, and gave me much information about the place, referring me to a book by Joseph Barry, an old resident of the place. When he found I was from New Hampshire, he told me he was a Dartmouth man, G. H. Child, of the class of 1877 (he said '77). He called to mind several classmates who lived in Manchester, and after a pleasant chat I bade him good-by.

Going into a drug store I inquired for Barry's book and the proprietor searched beneath the counter and drew out a book which from its curious legends and quaint style is in keeping with the sleeping village.

But my adventures were not over, for when I reached the station to take the train, I found there Mr. and Mrs. Fred Oldfield and Mr. and Mrs. A. O. Benfield of Portsmouth, a surprise and a pleasant one.

Such is a visit to Harper's Ferry, fifty years after the event which makes it immortal. The arsenal is gone, its machinery taken south at the outbreak of the war and the government property sold in 1869. The fields of the Shenandoah show little trace of the terrible scourging it received. But I could imagine the beauty of that Oct. 16, 1859, to be repeated in that of Oct. 22, 1909, a half century later.

THE WAYFARER.

Manchester (N. H.) Union, Dec. 2, 1909.





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