

PETER FRANCISCO

AN ADDRESS

BY

HON. B. F. DIXON

Delivered at the unveiling of a Tablet to his Memory
at Guilford Battle Ground, July 4th, 1910

PUBLISHED BY THE
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*Mr. President and Gentlemen of Guilford Battle Ground
Company, Ladies and Gentlemen:*

In the South from the time of the earliest settlements, tobacco raising was a profitable industry, and the question of labor a very important one. England undertook to supply this demand, and great numbers of people were sent over from the mother country. Convicted criminals were transported here, as later they were sent to Botany Bay. Others from the lower classes, who were unable to pay for their transportation, were also sent to this country. A protest from the Colonies against the criminal class was sent over to England, and their transportation gradually ceased. Boys and girls were kidnapped in the streets of London and shipped to America, to be indentured to farmers. The cry for *cheap* labor was still heard in the land, and they brought negroes from the jungles of Africa, until the South was filled with a people that has caused untold suffering and sorrow to this goodly land. And now the cry has been going up from the manufacturers, especially of the North, for *cheap* labor, and a class of undesirable citizens has been pouring in there, which will give this country trouble again unless something is done to check it.

About the year 1768 an English vessel landed at City Point on the James River, in Virginia, and among other things brought to that colony was a little boy 6 or 7 years old, with keen black eyes and dark complexion, with a shock of black hair covering his well shaped head. He was too small to be of service to any one and so this kidnapped waif was left upon the wharf when the ship sailed, and there he stayed for several days without a friend; his wistful eyes often

turned down the river in a vain search for some one. His cry might have been heard at midnight, as the wail of a child for a lost mother. The sailors fed him to keep him from starving. There, thousands of miles from those who might have cared for him, alone, friendless and penniless, was little PETER FRANCISCO. He who does not let a sparrow fall without his notice, however, did not forsake Peter, and finally a very kind-hearted, sympathetic, benevolent man (we have a goodly number of the same sort with us today,) took the little fellow to his home. Oh! no! he sent him to the poor house of Prince George County, where you may be sure he was clothed in fine linen and fared sumptuously every day—just as they do now, especially in those counties where the poor are put up to the lowest bidder—that is the man who will keep them the most scrimpingly. Peter remained in the poor house until he was large enough to be of service to man, and then he was bound out to Mr. Anthony Winston, of Buckingham County, Va. Mr. Winston lived in the country between the historic Appomattox and the magnificent James River, in a beautiful home known as Hunting Tower. Mr. Winston was an uncle of Patrick Henry, and young Peter was brought to his 16th year in a family full of patriotism and love of liberty, and in an old country home which is about as near to the mansions in the skies as any place on earth. This brave, intelligent boy imbibed the spirit of the times, and became enthusiastic for the American cause. He was noted at an early age for his physical strength. He was a born athlete. He could throw down, out run, or whip any boy in Buckingham County, and the wonderful feats performed by him won for him the respect and confidence of the whole community. The war spirit was strong in him and at the age of 16 years he obtained permission from Mr. Winston to join the American Army as a volunteer, and from that day to the surrender of Cornwallis at Yorktown his strong right arm and his undaunted courage were used in behalf of American independence.

PETER FRANCISCO was a modern Hercules, and his personal

appearance was most striking. He was the kind of a man that people turn to look at when he passes by. Over six feet high and weighing 260 pounds, without an ounce of superfluous flesh, an extremely handsome face, with black hair and piercing black eyes—no wonder people looked again at him. An ordinary sword was entirely too short and light for him to use effectually, and General Washington had one made for him in a blacksmith shop, six feet long, which he could wield as a feather. A veritable giant, with an eye like a hawk—the spirit of a king eagle, a breast like a lion, strong as a buffalo, and with the breath of a hound. He could keep pace with the King's horsemen in their fiery rides. He was a typical American soldier. Devoted passionately to the cause which he had made his own, there is no such picturesque figure in the whole continental army as PETER FRANCISCO.

He entered most heartily upon the duties of a soldier, and received his "baptism of fire" at the battle of Brandy Wine under the gallant LaFayette. In the following month he participated in the battle of Germantown, and although our army was defeated, the fault did not lie at the door of FRANCISCO, and the heroic bearing of men like him made Frederick of Prussia say that "when the American soldiers become disciplined they will be very formidable." It is but natural then that the soldiers themselves should soon have received encouragement, and that a vision of great possibilities should have lured them on to more daring deeds.

Immediately after the battle of Germantown we find our hero, under Col. Smith, taking part in the defence of Fort Mifflin, which was situated on an island in the Delaware River. Day after day the besieged withstood the bombardment of the enemy with persistent energy and bravery, until the block houses were beaten down, the palisades demolished, and the guns dismounted. Many of the brave defenders were killed or wounded, and when the few still left were unable to longer defend the fort they set fire to whatever was combustible, and crossed the river at night by the light of the flames. Young FRANCISCO during this terrible siege stood

side by side with the bravest of the defenders and was the peer of the best. He was with his command during that awful winter at Valley Forge, and at Monmouth the following summer when he was severely wounded. He appears again at Stony Point under "Mad Anthony Wayne". The first man to enter the fort was Major Gibbon and next to him was the dauntless dark eyed FRANCISCO, who killed the color bearer, and received a bayonet wound in his own body. This exploit gave him great renown, and he became the hero of his command. Later we find him under General Morgan, taking part in many skirmishes, around New York and Philadelphia. There was a marked resemblance between Morgan and FRANCISCO in person and character. Morgan was of gigantic stature and strength, and of unsurpassed courage and fortitude. Like FRANCISCO, he was faithful in every fibre and Morgan was a figure to stir the imagination and ambition of a young giant like FRANCISCO. Coming South with Morgan he was at the battle of Camden, where he witnessed the defeat which caused the "Laurels of Saratoga to change to Southern willows". In this battle FRANCISCO saved the life of Col. Mayo, by killing the man who had his gun leveled at the gallant Colonel. At the close of the battle he was charged upon by one of Tarleton's troopers, but that proved to be his last charge, for FRANCISCO ran his sword through the trooper's body, and mounting his horse made his escape. Later he again came upon Col. Mayo, whose life he had saved but an hour before, and finding him exhausted from fatigue, he dismounted from the dead trooper's horse, and insisted upon the Colonel's mounting him in his stead, and upon this horse Col. Mayo was enabled to reach Hillsboro, North Carolina. Out of gratitude for this act of unselfish devotion, and for the greater act of saving his life, Col. Mayo afterwards presented FRANCISCO with a thousand acres of fertile land in the State of Kentucky.

After the defeat of Gates at Camden, Gen. Nathanael Greene was placed in command in the South, and this General, aided by the intrepid Morgan, soon changed affairs and new

hope again came to our army. The battle of Cowpens was a decided victory. Morgan and FRANCISCO were there. Camden was redeemed. Then came the *Battle of Guilford Court House*, and on this spot FRANCISCO did some of his most wonderful fighting. That long sword, made in a blacksmith's shop, was very bloody. The carnage was dreadful and Lt. Holcomb, of Washington's light horse, says that the strong arm of FRANCISCO slew three men in one charge, and eleven before the battle was over. One of the enemy made a fearful thrust with his bayonet at FRANCISCO and pinned his leg to his saddle. FRANCISCO quietly assisted his foe to extricate his bayonet, forbearing to strike an enemy while practically unarmed, but as soon as the man was in a position to defend himself, FRANCISCO made a furious blow with his sword, which cleft the fellow's head down to his shoulders.

FRANCISCO received the commendation of Col. Washington for his matchless bravery on this battlefield. After the excitement of the battle was over FRANCISCO found himself unable to move on account of that bayonet thrust which had entered above the knee, piercing the whole length of the leg to the hip socket. FRANCISCO was left upon the battle field among the dead. In this lone and bleeding condition he was discovered by some good man who took him to his home and cared for him until he could once more mount his faithful horse. I wish I knew the name of that good Samaritan. I would be glad to call it in this presence today.

There was at one time, under Napoleon Bonaparte, a private soldier who, like FRANCISCO, refused to be promoted, but preferred to remain in the ranks, and who was so brave and devoted and daring that he, like FRANCISCO, became the hero of his command, and when he was killed Napoleon ordered that his heart should be taken out, and intrusted to the keeping of his regiment, and when his name was called the next to him should answer, "dead upon the field of honor". Had FRANCISCO died on this spot, well might the same thing have been done for him. No braver or heroic man ever marched up to the loaded cannon's mouth than

PETER FRANCISCO. AS soon as FRANCISCO could travel he set out for Virginia, and shortly after his return he had a most thrilling experience. While alone one day he fell in with nine of Tarleton's Cavalry, and one of them demanded his knee-buckles. "Take them off yourself", replied FRANCISCO. The cavalryman stooped to unbuckle them, when as swift and as silent as an Indian FRANCISCO seized the fellow's sword, split his head open and turning killed two others, one of whom sat upon a horse, snapping a musket in his face. The others fled, and Franciseo, mounting one of the enemy's horses, made his escape in the face of Tarleton's troops consisting of 400 men who were riding rapidly to the rescue of their fellows.

At Yorktown the military career of our hero closes. He witnessed the surrender of Cornwallis and the Revolutionary War was over—the independence of the Colonies assured.

The following story is told of FRANCISCO by no less a personage than Henry Clay:

Henry Clay paid him a visit about 1826, when examining his large, muscular arms, Mr. Clay asked him if he had ever met his equal. FRANCISCO replied that when he kept a tavern at the New Store a Mr. Pamphlet rode up one day, and made a full stop; he advanced to meet him, supposing him a guest, when Mr. Pamphlet, sitting on his horse, addressed him thus: "Are you, sir, PETER FRANCISCO?" "Yes, sir." "Well, I have rode all the way from Kentueky to whip you for nothing." "Sir?" "Yes, sir." FRANCISCO called to a servant, telling him to go to the meadow and bring him a bunch of willow switches. When they had been brought, FRANCISCO handed them to Mr. Pamphlet, requesting him to use them over his shoulders, and to go back and say that he had accomplished his purpose. Mr. Pamphlet seeing his proposal turned into ridicule, dismounted, and entering a flowergarden in which FRANCISCO stood, asked if he might be allowed to feel of FRANCISCO's *weight*. With ease he lifted the giant several times, saying, though, that he was quite heavy. "Now, Mr. Pamphlet, let me feel of yours," said FRANCISCO, who lifting

the sportive gentleman twice into the air, the third time pitched him over a railing fence four feet high into the public road. The would-be bully wailed from his dusty resting place, that if FRANCISCO would put his horse over also he would go home satisfied. The story goes, vouched for by many reliable people, that FRANCISCO led the horse to the railing, and, with his left arm under the horse's breast and the right one behind him, put him over as requested, after which performance the discomfited Mr. Pamphlet took his way back to Kentucky. Mr. Clay, it is said, laughed heartily over this story, exclaiming that he was indeed glad to know one of the mischievous *Pamphlet* family had at least been conquered. At that time many malicious pamphlets concerning him were in circulation.

The native worth of FRANCISCO introduced him into good society, and his matrimonial connections were highly creditable. His first wife was Mary Anderson; second, Catherine Fauntleroy Brooke; and third, Mary B. West, a widow whose maiden name was Grymes; each of whom belonged to representative Virginia families. A portrait of FRANCISCO hangs in the State Library at Richmond, Virginia.

In 1819 FRANCISCO applied to Congress for a pension, but owing to the spirit of parsimony which then existed, the pension was refused, and this heroic old soldier died without any recognition of his services by the government, the independence of which he had fought for so bravely and well. Congress, after his death, however, did pension his widow.

FRANCISCO was for several terms sergeant-at-arms of the House of Delegates of Virginia, and was serving in that capacity when he died. The Richmond Enquirer, of January 17th, 1831, gives the following obituary notice:

Died.—On Sunday, in this city, after a lingering indisposition, PETER FRANCISCO, Esq., the Sergeant-at-arms of H. of Delegates, and a Revolutionary Soldier, celebrated for his extraordinary strength, his undaunted courage, and his brilliant feats. The House of Delegates have determined to pay him the honors of a Public Funeral, and to bury him

with the honors of war. The House have accordingly adjourned until tomorrow. The Resolutions passed on this occasion, and the Encomiums that were paid to the old Soldier's memory, are detailed in our account of the Proceedings of the House.

Proceedings in the House of Delegates, January 17, 1831

DEATH OF PETER FRANCISCO

Mr. Yancey said, that he had the painful duty to perform of announcing to the House, the death of PETER FRANCISCO, late Sergeant-at-arms of this body. He had yesterday received a message from him, expressing, as his last dying request, a wish to be buried with military honors. Mr. Yancey had prepared two or three resolutions for the occasion, which he would now submit:

Resolved unanimously, As a testimony of regret, for the death, and a token of respect for the memory of PETER FRANCISCO, Sergeant-at-arms to this House, that the members of this House will form a procession and attend the place of his interment.

Resolved also, That in consideration of the distinguished military services rendered by the said PETER FRANCISCO, during the Revolutionary War, that the Governor of this Commonwealth cause the remains of the said PETER FRANCISCO to be interred with military honors, and at the public expense.

Resolved, That a committee be appointed, to consist of five members, to superintend the funeral, arrange the order of procession, and interment of PETER FRANCISCO, deceased, and that the committee invite the attendance of the Governor and Council, the Speaker and members of the Senate and their officers.

Mr. Barbour rose to second the resolutions presented to the House. The loss of any citizen, who was an officer of the House, could not but be deeply regretted. But FRANCISCO was no common man and he was happy that some record was to be left to his merits and his memory. In ancient times

monuments were erected to men who had performed worthy services; but in modern times their worth was inscribed on our records and by the aid of the press were sent far and wide. He had said FRANCISCO was no common man. By nature he had been endowed with extraordinary strength, the most determined intrepidity, and the warmest patriotism. It was not his lot to be advanced in rank during our Revolutionary struggle. But as a private soldier he gave a striking example of bravery, and performed exploits that have scarcely ever been excelled. Not only in the North, but the South, he displayed his heroism. And the achievements which he performed in Virginia, overcoming three or four of the enemy, and causing them to fly, leaving their property in his possession, has seldom been equalled. Let us, then, perform due honors to the memory of FRANCISCO. Such opportunities of honoring the brave would not occur very often, for the ranks of the Revolutionary heroes were fast decaying. By the arms of such men the liberty of our country was achieved, an achievement of vast moment to the whole world, for it had not been confined to this country. It had gone across the waters, to the shores of Europe, where nations were following the example of America. To such men, then, honor was due; and he joined most heartily in the respect proposed to be paid to the remains of PETER FRANCISCO.

Col. Edward Pescud, of Petersburg, Va., married Susan Brooke Francisco, the daughter of PETER FRANCISCO by his second wife, Catherine Fautleroy Brooke, of Essex County, Virginia. Col. Pescud was the editor of the Republican, a paper published at Petersburg, served in the war of 1812, and was a very prominent citizen. Peter Francisco Pescud, the oldest son of Col. Pescud, married Mary Wilson, and their eldest son, John S. Pescud, married Isabella Hinton, and their descendants are living, most of them, in North Carolina. Jane Pescud married Prof. W. A. Withers, now of the A. & M. College at Raleigh; Mary Wilson Pescud married Percy Lynch, of New Orleans; Annie Lawrence Pescud married H. J. Lovick, of New Berne, and Miss Isabella Pescud

and John Shaw live with their father, John Shaw Pescud, in Raleigh, N. C.

A large number of other descendants are now living in Virginia, Louisiana and elsewhere. These have all had a glorious heritage left to them by their splendid ancestor of blood and bravery. How very fitting that a tablet to the memory of PETER FRANCISCO should be unveiled today upon this battlefield, where he did some of his most heroic deeds, and where he poured out his blood so freely for American Independence. How seldom do we find tablets unveiled or monuments erected to the man behind the guns, but officers of an army could make no renown if they had no brave men to do the fighting. I take my hat off to the private soldier, to the man who never wavered in battle or on the march, whose brawny arm and trusty broadsword thinned the ranks of the enemy wherever he went, the man whose memory we honor today by yonder tablet, the typical American soldier, PETER FRANCISCO.

[In the erection of monuments upon its grounds the Guilford Battle Ground Company achieved the most gratifying success of its history July 4, 1909. Handsome memorials to Clio, the muse of history, and to Dr. David Caldwell, were completed and dedicated, and also a fine octagon shaft to Colonel William Washington, to whose command Peter Francisco belonged, was also completed, except tablets to same.

In the spring of 1910, through the patriotic liberality of Mr. Peter F. Pescud, a native of Raleigh, N. C., now a citizen of Louisiana, a large and handsome bronze tablet to his ancestor, Peter Francisco, was presented the Company, attached to this shaft and unveiled July 4, 1910.

JOS. M. MOREHEAD,
President Guilford Battle Ground Company.]

