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Southern History Museum

Senior

Artifact: "Brick from Pine Slash"

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# Brick from Pine Slash:

## Forgotten Foundations of Liberty

## Brick from Pine Slash: Forgotten Foundations of Liberty

On June 6<sup>th</sup>, 1799, Patrick Henry downed a vial of liquid mercury prescribed by Dr. Cabell. His health had rapidly declined leading him “to send his dying blessing to his old friend, the President” (Tyler 421). Dr. Cabell “went out upon the lawn, and in his grief threw himself down upon the earth under one of the trees, weeping bitterly” (422). Within a few minutes, Patrick Henry, one of the great leaders of the American Revolution, took his last breath. In the Southern History Museum, there is a brick on display that comes from Patrick Henry’s home: Pine Slash. This brick, while easy to miss, represents an integral part of American history and mirrors the intimate struggles Patrick Henry faced throughout his life. It shows how liberty was forged through faithful men by the grace of God in the midst of great tribulation.

Patrick Henry was born on the 29<sup>th</sup> of May 1736 to John and Sarah Henry (Wirt 1). For the first ten years of his life, he was educated in a local school. During this time, he learned “reading, writing, and arithmetic” (Tyler 6). After this, he was taught by his father at home. However, “As to the youthful Patrick, he and education never took kindly to each other” (5). Though provided with an education, something that many individuals during this time did not have access to, he did not enjoy learning. Moses Coit Tyler goes on to write, “From nearly all quarters the testimony is to this effect, —that he was an indolent, dreamy, frolicsome creature, with a mortal enmity to books, supplemented by a passionate regard for fishing-rods and shot-guns” (5). In fact, William Wirt describes Patrick Henry as being solitary, preferring to hunt by himself instead of with others (Wirt 5). Throughout his early life, Patrick Henry had little passion for academia or for social gatherings.

In 1745, at the age of nineteen, Patrick Henry married Sarah Shelton and was given Pine Slash as a dowry gift. “Pine Slash,” the name of the given property, held two houses. The brick

on display comes from Honeymoon Cottage, made from a combination of wooden planks and bricks (“Pine Slash”). In the colonial era, bricks, such as the one on display, were typically formed from a mixture of clay and sand placed into wooden molds and then positioned in the sun. Once they were fully dried, they would be transported into a kiln (Crews). The brick from Honeymoon Cottage is an extremely important part of architectural history. It is one of two surviving houses belonging to Patrick Henry and “is the earliest and best vertical plank-walled construction building in the region” (“Pine Slash”). This brick is a rare architectural relic.

Shortly after Patrick Henry and his wife moved into their first home at Pine Slash, a fire erupted causing them to evacuate into the second house on Pine Slash: Honeymoon Cottage. Honeymoon Cottage sat upon close to three-hundred acres of land. The land was largely infertile from over cultivation and droughts which led Patrick Henry to toil in the fields (“Pine Slash”). His first main profession was that of a farmer. However, “This experiment, the success of which depended on exactly those qualities which Patrick did not then possess,—industry, order, sharp calculation, persistence,—turned out as might have been predicted” (Tyler 7). As a result of his failure, he tried his hand at merchandise, “but without success” (Henry 78). In response to this, Patrick Henry went into law and sold the property in 1764 (“Pine Slash”).

As opposed to his previous occupations, Patrick Henry found great success in law. Tyler explains, “while the young lawyer did not attain anything more than local professional reputation until his speech against the parsons, he did acquire a very considerable practice almost immediately after his admission to the bar” (Tyler 28). This immediate success allowed him to sustain his struggling family. In his notorious case in defense of the Parson’s cause, he challenged British authority and won the case at Hanover Court House (Kukla).

His famous speech, “Give Me Liberty or Give Me Death,” was delivered only three weeks after his wife passed away. The only reason he was able to maintain strong “was the willingness of Patrick Henry’s daughter, sisters, and mother to step away from their own homes to care for his” (Llewellyn and Hurst-Wender). His speech urging others to fight against the British forces and stand for independence was filled with biblical references. He went as far as to compare the British to Judas: “Suffer not yourselves to be betrayed with a kiss” (Tyler 141). His speech shocked the audience and left them in suspense. His words were so influential that “the resolutions, as offered by Patrick Henry, were carried” (151). He spoke passionately without the use of a script and motivated the other leaders in attendance to stand against the British forces (Cohen 704). Thomas Jefferson, in his correspondence with William Wirt, wrote: “I think he was the best humored man in society I almost ever knew, and the greatest orator that ever lived” (Jefferson and Wirt 387).

Patrick Henry’s contributions led to one of the most important documents in the United States government, the Bill of Rights. He argued: “If you give up these powers, without a bill of rights, you will exhibit the most absurd thing to mankind that ever the world saw” (Tyler 326). He led a charge in Virginia which influenced the adoption of the first ten amendments to the Constitution (355-6). Henry was a devout antifederalist and fought to ensure the rights of the people were protected.

In Patrick Henry’s life, “God was preeminent, personal and the provider of salvation through His Son, Jesus Christ” (Boggs). William Wirt writes, “He was a pure man, a devoted patriot, and a devout Christian. Though classed amongst the great orators of the world, George Mason pronounced his eloquence the smallest part of his merit” (Henry 80). His strength is mirrored in the biblical story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. These men were cast into a

blazing furnace but were not scorched by the flames. As they were in the fire, Christ appeared to them and shielded them from death (ESV, Dan. 3.8-30). Patrick Henry, in similar light, was able to persevere because he relied upon God for his sustenance.

As he drank the liquid mercury, he called his family close and spoke “words of love and peace” (Tyler 422). He had lived for sixty-three years, and while his life slipped away, “he told them that he was thankful for that goodness of God, which, having blessed him through all his life, was then permitting him to die without any pain” (422). Patrick Henry, the great orator and founding father of America, passed away professing the goodness of God throughout his life. His foundation was built upon Christian faith. This brick from the Southern History Museum is more than just a mixture of hardened clay. It represents the trials and tribulations of a man struggling with death, war, and failure throughout his life, but finding victory because of his religious foundation. It represents the struggles of a new nation that found triumph in the bedrock of truth through the grace of God. It leaves us with a question: what happens when this foundation is stripped away? What happens when we forget the brick from Pine Slash?

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