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A Buried Treasure

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There is romance in the thought of buried treasure which at once commands the attention of the reader. We learn of the wealth of old Panama, carefully hidden when Sir Henry Morgan swooped down in his piratical raids; of Aztec gold of Mexico, hastily buried when the Spanish conquerers appeared; and even the treasures of William Kidd, who in his ship the "Adventure Galley", sailed our shores, where he buried his gold, and finally met his doom on the gallows, with lips sealed forever as to the whereabouts of his ill-gotten gains.

These tales however, are as hazy summer dreams—interesting, yes, intensely interesting, but as we turn the pages of our past, are soon forgotten, as we count the distant miles from our every-day lives.

Yet, suppose I were to tell you that within twenty miles of the county seats of both Fairfax and Prince William Counties, Virginia, is a buried treasure, (if we believe the records); not a great treasure as measured in present-day standards, but sufficiently large to be interesting, and this all in gold.

Let us turn to the 8th and 9th of April, in the year 1755, when Major General Edward Braddock of the British Army, set out from Alexandria, Virginia, on his ill-fated expedition to Fort Duquesne. On these dates, a division consisting of Virginia Riflemen and six companies of the 44th. British Regiment, including artillery and baggage wagons, started for Winchester. A second division was sent on the 18th, through Maryland to Frederick, but we are not concerned with this latter.

There was no road to Winchester, and the first division had to practically hew a path through the forests to make a way for the cannon and wagons. No doubt the Spring rains contributed towards keeping the ground soft, and much labor was expended by the troops in keeping the heavily loaded wagons from bogging down in the hastily built road, and levers had to be provided to loosen a cannon wheel which had become hopelessly blocked by the stump of a tree.

Finally, at a point near the present town of Centreville (originally known as Newgate), a tract of genuine Virginia jack clay was encountered, and when this happened, we are told that the "General swore mightily". Straining and tugging, the unfortunate horses hauling the cannon and wagons, could make little progress, even with the aid of brawny Virginia riflemen pulling on ropes attached to the

* Mr. Gilliss is a lifelong resident of Prince William County. Legends such as this are a most delightful part of our history and we are indeed indebted to our neighbor for this contribution.

vehicles, or pushing on the wheels. The time was getting short, for Braddock had promised the Duke of Newcastle that he would be beyond the Allegheny Mountains by the end of April. It was therefore decided to lighten the loads of the wagons and leave behind every thing of weight which could be spared. Two of the small brass cannon were also to be left behind, as well as a store of gold coin, variously estimated to be from \$25,000 to \$30,000, for payment of the troops.

The two cannon in question were dismounted and filled with the gold, and a wooden plug driven into the muzzle of each. They were then buried with the muzzles pointing upward, and two feet beneath the soil, "fifty paces East of a spring, where the road runs North and South." Of course the idea was that the gold would be recovered on the return of the expedition, which event, it was confidently expected, would be within a comparatively short time.

Apparently the hiding of the treasure was known to but few persons, and these (including Braddock), must have all been killed, for no one returned to dig for the guns, so far as is known. Braddock's reports and papers of course had been sent to England, and were no doubt duly filed away in neat packages—possibly unread, as reports are dry reading at most. And so it was, that not until many years after, when interest began to revive in this ill-fated expedition, led by Braddock, whom Horace Walpole describes as "desperate in his fortune, brutal in his behavior, and obstinate in his sentiments," but admits that he was still "intrepid and capable," that an archivist, in going over the papers, discovered by accident the secret of this buried treasure. A Committee was sent from England to Centreville to search for the spring, which was to give the clue, but though they spent some time in the locality, no spring could be found which gave promise of the exact spot.

It is now believed that the cutting of the forest trees has caused the spring to dry up, and that the plow has leveled and obliterated all traces of it.

Nevertheless, there are those living near Centreville, who have their own ideas as to the location of the treasure. At one of these places the road turns suddenly north from a westerly course, and there is yet a strong flowing spring.

Of one fact we are sure however, and that is that the treasure has never been recovered, and that the British Government, which has never given up its claim, has offered one half of the gold to any one who finds it.