

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, September 11, 2017

Bayard Taylor (1825-1878): Taylor was born in Kennett Square, Pennsylvania (4 miles from Auburn Heights), the eldest surviving son in a large family spanning the years. His youngest brother Frank, a lieutenant in the Union Army, was killed in the Battle of Gettysburg at the age of 21. Bayard was a poet, novelist, travel writer, and American diplomat. He traveled the world, visiting most countries in Europe and many in Asia, the headwaters of the Nile, and had accompanied Admiral Matthew Perry on his historic 1853 visit to Japan, that opened that country to the outside world. If the top 10 American poets of the mid-19th century were listed, Taylor might not be among them, but he was definitely in the top 20.

Before he was 21, he had hitchhiked all over Europe and sent back well written accounts of his travels, which were published by various newspapers, including Horace Greeley's *New York Herald*. His first full-length novel, *Hannah Thurston*, was published in 1864, followed by his locally-popular *Story of Kennett* in 1866. The latter was a story laid in 1796 of Kennett area Quakers who were robbed by "Sandy Flash," an actual notorious highwayman. Taylor took wide-ranging poetic license with this story, keeping intact some real-life family names, while changing others (including that of his own father), mixing up generations, and inventing a fictitious hero, Gilbert Potter. Sandy Flash (James Fitzpatrick) was hanged at Chester for aiding the British in 1778, eighteen years before the story took place. Nevertheless, the book was highly successful, and several editions followed the first.

Taylor continued to write and travel throughout his life. In 1857 he married a Danish-German, Maria Hansen, and she often traveled with him during the 21 years of their marriage. They lived in Germany for some of the time. After a trip to Iceland just before his 50th birthday, he returned home to Kennett Square and to his elaborate new home north of the borough called "Cedarcroft." During this time he was honored at the Mount Cuba Picnic Grove of the Wilmington & Western Railroad on October 22, 1874. Soon thereafter, the Taylors returned to Germany, and in 1877 President Hayes appointed him as U.S. Minister to Prussia. He died in Berlin in December 1878. Several weeks later he was buried from Cedarcroft. Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr. asked Henry Wadsworth Longfellow to write a poem for the occasion, which he did. The story goes that the first carriages in the funeral procession arrived at Longwood Cemetery before the last had left Cedarcroft (a distance of about 3 miles). Kennett had lost its most famous citizen of the 19th century. Baseball great Herb Pennock of the Yankees would fill that role in the 20th.

Except for technical books, engineering drawings, newspapers of the day, and Sears catalogs, my father was not a great reader, but he always liked the *Story of Kennett*. With his new Stanley in 1915, he went to many local scenes around Kennett Square to photograph sites mentioned in the book. Many of the buildings were still standing, and a few still are. These included (in 1915) the Anvil Tavern (at the entrance to Longwood Gardens), Old Kennett Friends Meeting House, the Barton Barn on Walnut Street, the Hammer and Trowel Tavern in Toughkenamon, the Fairthorne house (actually Taylor) on the south side of Kennett, the Gilbert Potter house at Clifton Mills, and New Garden Crossroads with its Quaker Meeting House. It has always puzzled me how Gilbert Potter could have a house when he was a fictional character, but the house is still there.

In June 1933, the American Legion Post in Kennett Square presented the *Story of Kennett* as a pageant at Longwood's Open Air Theatre. (They did it again in 1940 and 1955.) Prominent local citizens took the featured parts. I remember some of them, as it made an impression on this 9-year-old. Mary D. "Miss Mame" Lang was Betsy Lavender, Muriel Swift was Deb Smith, Scott McMurtrie was Sandy Flash, Alice Lang was Mary Potter (Gilbert's mother), and Knowles "Bus" Bowen was Gilbert Potter. My father photographed many of the scenes and had them tinted on glass plate slides for his Magic Lantern. These, together with his 1915 pictures, provided the illustrations for his several lectures on the *Story of Kennett*. The last time he did this presentation was at his and my mother's 70th birthday party on the lawn of Auburn Heights in August 1955.