

Diary of John Samuel Apperson of Locust Grove, Virginia

To the Reader

This booklet contains a portion of the journal which John Apperson wrote when he first left home as a young man to find his way in the world. I have not been able to have a look at the original document, but I hope to track it down someday and read the other journal entries made during and after the Civil War.

This short excerpt offers a sketch not only of the storyteller, but also of the individuals he meets. How interesting to find out about the railroad under construction, the games and music people played, the opportunities for employment available to a young man, and the cost of lodging and transportation – all in a world immediately preceding the outburst of a devastating war.

There were a number of words and phrases which Nancy Liady (distant cousin) could not decipher when she typed these pages in 1963. I have chosen*** to mark such places or, in some situations, I have used brackets to enclose my best guess at the omitted words.

Many thanks to Mable Apperson for allowing me to borrow some of the pictures and papers left to her by her husband, A. Hull Apperson. I realize that my Uncle Hull must have been very interested in his grandfather's journals, especially since both men shared a love for Nelson County and the beautiful mountains there. My journey into our family history has just begun, and I am ever so grateful to have a document of so much style and detail. I hope it will be the foundation for much enjoyable research and exploration, for me and others. Ellen Apperson Brown (January 3, 1994)

Mrs. Fred Liady
8 Canterbury Road, Bellair
Charlottesville, Virginia

March 7, 1963

Dear Cousin Hull,

I am enclosing the few pages which I copied of your grandfather's remarkable and interesting diary. The next portion, which I read but did not copy, described his arrival in Lynchburg, where he searched for work. He had to spend some of his scanty funds putting up at an inn. There he met a man from Marion

who suggested that he go to Seven Mile Ford, beyond Marion, and try to get a job on the railroad. When he tried to purchase a train ticket for Marion, he found that he had not enough money, so he bought a ticket for some intermediate point. He went to sleep on the train, however, and upon awakening found that the train had arrived at Marion, so he had a free ride part of the way. He repaired to a hotel, dined and went to bed without informing his landlord that he had but twenty-seven (or thereabouts) cents. When he woke in the morning a colored man was building his fire, pouring his hot water and cleaning his shoes. He pretended to be asleep, as he couldn't even tip him well. He thought briefly of climbing out of the window and stealing away, but reasoned he had not been brought up for any such infamy, so after breakfasting with the landlord, he informed that worth of his insolvency. The landlord was most generous, and told him he could pay later. He then walked to Seven Mile Ford, I believe, but got a job helping on the farm of Dr. Harvey Black, later helping him with his medical practice. He attended secessionist and State's Rights meetings, and when the war broke out enlisted as a medical corpsman in the Stonewall Jackson brigade. The rest of the diary, which was kept regularly, described his experiences in the war.

Your grandfather was about twenty years of age when he started his trek to the South. He seems to have been much attracted to Nelson County, but part of the diary describing his feeling about it was illegible.

My grandfather, James Apperson, may have been the relative he mentions at the beginning. They were close to the same age. My grandfather preserved a letter from your grandfather, written in the 1870s, reminding him of the wonderful Christmas party in Locust Grove, Culpeper County in 1858(?). He told of his war experiences, his medical practice, and his marriage. He described his family, and stated that his wife, Victoria, was in poor health.

I am proud to be related, even distantly, to a man who could write such a sensitive and charming work. I do hope that it may eventually be printed so all the family may have a copy of it.

It was a great pleasure to meet you, and visit with you. We all hope you will return our visit soon, as we haven't even begun to talk everything out.

Sincerely,

Nancy Liady

Diary of John Samuel Apperson
Of Locust Grove, Virginia

February 2, 1859

This morning was one of uncommon interest to me. I arose early and prepared myself to leave, for where, I hardly know.

I packed up my bundle, and about half past 8 o'clock A.M. I bid my father's family adieu. My bundle was composed of a bag containing my clothes, being all I possessed in the world in the way of property. In my pocket I had twelve dollars and fifty cents in money, and twenty-four cents in postage stamps. I cannot express my feeling as I walked along the road that was leading me from the place I had called home. My former days seemed to hang around me – my memory seemed to haunt me, and caused me to stop and look back, and to believe I were dreaming or building air castles, but I soon again *** myself and found that I was not dreaming and went on musing in my mind where I should be ere another month should pass away. I felt almost ashamed to meet anyone with whom I was acquainted. I went to a house where a friend and relative was working and told my determination.

Then went to my grandfather's and remained there until about four o'clock P.M. when my friend came and accompanied him home from where I intended to leave tomorrow morning for Orange Court House. He gave me a carpet bag to put my clothes in. I left a few articles there I could not well carry.

February 3, 1859

This morning I arose very early to start on my way south. My aunt prepared breakfast for me, and before day break I was ready to continue my journey. It was very cloudy. My aunt and friend wished me to remain with them till the weather became fair, but I was compelled to go soon in order to arrive at Orange Court House by the time the cars came.

I bade them adieu, though not without a tearful eye, my Aunt seemed very much affected at my sudden leave. When day broke I was some eight miles on the road

and arrived at the Court House about half past seven o'clock, after purchasing some necessary articles. I repaired to the depot to await the arrival of the cars. There were two very pretty young ladies also waiting to take the cars, but seemed not to feel as I felt, as they were laughing and singing, skipping and jumping about until the arrival of the cars. After taking my seat for the first time in my life in the cars, I again thought myself in a pitiful position. I could see those merry girls in the next car still laughing, which seemed to make me feel more lonely than ever, and their glee seemed to make my****. One of them had the **** to stroke her little delicate hand at me in which she held an apple as rosy as her own blooming cheek. I suppose she thought I might have waited on them, as they had no escort save the agent at the Court House, and the Conductor of the cars, who was a very gentlemanly and kind looking man. The cars travelled at a very rapid rate until I arrived at Gordonsville where I had to change cars for Charlottesville to where I intended going. When the cars halted I got off not expecting to see anyone I knew for a long time to come, and in fact felt that I would rather be among strangers than acquaintances, but as I stepped down from out of the4 cars I was surprised to hear a well known voice call me by name. I turned around and found myself face to face with J.S.R., a well known gentleman, and one that I looked upon as a friend and superior. He asked me where I was going, I was at first loath to reply, and in fact I knew not what to say. I told him I had started to Mississippi, or Georgia, one or the other, I knew not which. He asked me was I going to Richmond? I told him no; I was ashamed to own my intentions of walking. I left my friend, went to the ticket office, purchased my ticket to Charlottesville, and endeavored to get into as retired a place as possible until the cars should arrive, but I soon heard my name pronounced. I looked and saw him. He asked me had I decided where I was going. I told him, "No," and my conscience forced me to own up. I told him the state of my affairs and my own intentions, he looked me in the face and told me he thought I was doing bad business to go among strangers without friends to take me through, and said, "I had better to have stayed where I was known till I could do better." Such words from such a man made me feel the worst feelings I ever felt in my life. I felt as if the whole human race was against me. I felt as if I had not a friend in the world, and that all was lost to me – all my future anticipations were blasted. I cared little where I went, or what I did. Soon the cars came, I entered them. I looked around in the car that I was in and

all the persons that were in there – some I thought showed a sorrowful and others a light-hearted countenance. ...Arrived at Charlottesville about 2 o'clock. I got off the cars and stood upon the platform musing on my condition and thinking what I should do when I was aroused from my reveries by a servant asking me if I wished to go to the Tavern. I turned round and looked at him for some moments without answering, thinking to myself "I go to the Hotel?" "No," said I, shaking my head and speaking to myself. I would to God I were able to go there. I turned around, left the depot, took the first road I got to that led from the town. I went two miles – one and a half miles from the town and sat down beside a large creek, changes a portion of my clothing, procured a stout stick *** got my carpet bag out and took up my journey on foot along a very muddy road. I had traveled about one and a half miles farther when I met with a man and I asked him if that was the right road to Lovingson, he surprised me by telling me, "No," and that I was going on the road to Richmond. I found I should have to go back to Charlottesville to get to the right road. I went, more disheartened than ever. I resolved to get work if I could. I inquired of several for work, and for the road leading to Lovingson. I was told that a railroad track was at that time***would take me to Lynchburg. So I concluded to take that. By this time night drew nigh. I began to think of lodging when I was overtaken by a man somewhat intoxicated. He seemed very talkative. I entered into conversation, told him my name and learned his, which was John Dudley, living about eight miles from Charlottesville on Dudley Mountain. I asked him, "what was the prospect to get lodging for the night?" when he asked me to accompany him home, which I agreed to do. I mounted behind him on his horse. We travelled some distance when we arrived at a grocery, kept by a relative of his – here he dismounted and wanted something to drink. I thought as he was kind enough to offer me accommodations for the night, I called for something to drink and asked him to take some which he did. He then tried to get the man of the Grocery to give me employment, but he said he had hands enough at that time, but finally offered me \$8.00 per month for the following month if I chose to take it. I did not feel much disposed to live there for there were too many sorts of men whose ways as well as their countenance showed dissipation. Finally, Mr. John Dudley, the man whose house I was going, got his fill of liquor, and we both mounted the same horse and again took the mud. After traveling some two miles we arrived at the foot of a mountain, it then being

about eight o'clock in the night and very dark we *** our way up the mountain until the beast was nearly broken down when I gently slid down behind and left my inebriate guide to take care of himself the remainder of our mountainous and rocky journey. But, however, we soon arrived at his house which was situated at the foot of an enormous hill. His son came out and I introduced myself to him. He seemed very cordial and agreeably social. I then went into the house where the old lady and four other children were.

The old man came pretty tight and called for supper which was soon prepared and I was asked to walk into the cellar and partake, which I did without a second invitation, and with an appetite sharpened by the lack of my dinner.

After supper the old man's son brought out a violin, which is the glory of the mountaineer. The old man requested me to play for him, as no one else could play. Having owned a violin once myself I could touch upon "Old Dan Tucker," and one or two other old obsolete and worn-out tunes. I took the violin and with the air of an experienced player I tuned the worthy instrument and performed as best I could. The old man got up and commenced a drunken dance. And I disguised my awkward performance, commenced singing and making as much noise as I could, which seemed to please both the old and the young ones very much. The old man and his son invited me to stay with them until Saturday night when they intended to have a dance. I told them I would not promise them until morning. After the old man got very drowsy, he retired to bed, thus ending one of the most eventful days I ever passed.

Friday, Feb. 4th, 1859

This morning I arose about sunrise, went down among my new acquaintances, and found them all very agreeable and social. When I looked out I was surprised [to see a] "city of hills." No one unless they can witness the scene can appreciate the beauty and grandeur that I had the pleasure there to view. The sun just showing itself above the horizon, and reflected most beautiful and sublime [on] one, the last of the mountains that lies west of the railroad leading from Charlottesville to Lynchburg, which is now fast approaching its completion. Soon the quiet and hospitable people citizens will be startled with the sound of [a] car whistle. I stood for some moments receiving in

deep reverie the richness and magnificence which spread out before me. The plain constructed yet neat cottages of those independent mountaineers were everywhere among the mountains to be seen with the smoke curling above the chimneys and burning itself among the rugged woods and hills. I was soon called to partake of the homely yet wholesome fare of my host. He again renewed his invitation to me to stay and spend the remainder of the week with him, which I agreed to do.

I went out with him to do his work, and amused myself with assisting him and viewing the country. The land I found to be very rich, though rather stony to my notion, yet those men seemed contented and happy notwithstanding the rocks and hills which surrounded them on every side. Finally noon came, and with it dinner. I accompanied the gentleman back to his house and had the pleasure to become acquainted with his two daughters which had been visiting the evening before. They, like the rest of the family, seemed agreeable and full of their mountain sport. I soon became apparently intimate with those two “mountain beauties.” I then declined going with the old man into the field, as I preferred the company of his two daughters who were very talkative in giving a description of their mountain life, and their manners of spending the holidays – having parties. Then near the close of the evening I went upon one of the highest hills I could see and witness[ed] one of the most picturesque and lovely scenes I ever saw, from the summit of that ***I could see for miles around – on my left stood the beautiful village of Charlottesville – on my right stood Scottsville. They’re hidden behind the mountains and beyond Scottsville to the S.E. lay the magnificent *** River like a long sheet spread out and before me to the east lay one of the most beautiful valleys.

When I returned I was introduced to another of my mountain friend’s sons, who was a youth about eighteen years old, but well grown, who had just returned from school. Time passed merrily on until bed time when we retired, after I had written another letter to my uncle in Miss.

February 5th

This morning I arose with the intention if I did not get into business with a brother of the man I was staying with, to leave. I concluded to take the low wages of \$7.00 per month till I could hear from my friends. I went to his house and found that he

did not wish to hire. I then went back where my carpet bag was p told them if my intention to leave, but the girls and old lady pressed their invitation for me to remain. I then concluded to content myself anyhow until next morning. I enjoyed myself very much with the girls [while] the sons were preparing wood for the night. I found the girls were not bashful as they were where I was raised. They were constantly playing on me, which I at first felt a little bashful to return, as it was something I did not expect from strangers. They would frequently slap my face with their hands, which treatment I was determined not to stand. I seized a rope which lay in one corner of the house, and with the assistance of one of the girls fastened the other one firmly to the bed post, but after a while I let her loose, and she continued her pranks as merrily as ever. Soon night drew nigh, and with it came many merry looking persons of both sexes. The mountain seemed to disgorge them... from where they came I could not see. Presently supper being over, the violin was tuned and several had tried their skill in performing on it. (I say several, for I believe all the mountain boys were fiddlers.) One of the best [of the fiddlers] commenced in good earnest. Soon they were preparing for a real. One of the "Mountain Beauties" came to me and said I must dance. I told her I did not know how. She persisted and said I would soon learn. I knew that she wanted me to dance with her, so I offered her my arm, which she readily accepted, and I was forced to accompany her through two sets. Things passed on in a similar way till midnight when the dancing and violin playing was stopped. They then played "Please or displease," Thimble and several other similar plays till old Morpheus seemed to settle down on a good many – especially the old folks. There not being room for all the company to lie down, they all concluded to sit up until day, which was not far off at this time. For my part I cared not. I rested my head down in the lap of one of the fair sex and had a good doze.

Sunday – Feb. 6th

I felt this morning as if I had rather sleep and rest than to travel, and the old man said he thought he had got me a place, and that I had better go and see the man. After breakfast *myself and him* went to see the gentleman, but he declined to hire on the excuse that he thought I was not handy enough, and that my hands did not look like I had ever done any work. This vexed me a little to think that a person could not keep his hands in a respectable condition while at work. I determined to try my luck the next

morning on the road toward Lynchburg for the purpose of trying to get such business there as I liked. We returned to the house of my hospitable friends. My mind was overwhelmed with a thousand thoughts, and it seemed to me as if no where would suit me then as on the road to Lynchburg. I even wished it were tomorrow morning, when to mend the matter it commenced snowing very hard and the clouds showed every indication of a heavy snow storm. No one is able to judge my feelings. ...I among strangers in a mountainous country, and with little money and a heavy storm brewing. I was not afraid of suffering but hated to impose on the hospitality of those kind people. I found something would have to be done. I asked the old man if there came such a hard storm that I could not travel would he board me for my services, which he readily agreed to do. But soon the clouds began to break, and my feelings were much revived on seeing the sun go down behind the western hills clear and beautiful. I was soon in bed.

February 7th – Monday

This morning I arose before daybreak, I was rejoiced to find the sky clear and the air cool and refreshing. After breakfast I prepared to take my leave of my kind and hospitable new acquaintances. I felt some delicacy [as] I tendered some compensation to my worthy host for his kindness, yet I knew it was my duty to do so, as I expected he refused anything for my stay, which I was not sorry, as I had not more money than I could conveniently make use of. I took my leave after cordially shaking hands with all from the largest to the smallest. The old lady's eyes began to water when I parted from her. I travelled very briskly along without any occurrence worthy of note for some miles. My mind seemed to wander back to my former youthful day[s] and wondered what another year, month, day or even another hour might bring forth. I was then passing through one of the most beautiful countries I ever saw. There were beautiful cottages, some splendid mansions, rich and productive looking farms all lying between two great looking mountains. I must acknowledge that I almost [stayed] in that beautiful country. As I took the railroad which was building I passed by many gigantic looking pillars in which were to be built bridges for the railroad. About ten o'clock A.M. I came near where there were a company of hands working on the road. In a deep cut through a hill I saw some men with a piece of fire in their hands. I couldn't imagine

what they were doing standing near a large stone. I was walking about 60 or 70 feet above them when I heard them cry out, "Fire! Fire!" I stepped near the bank and looked over I saw them all running. I then knew there was a blast going off. I ran a few steps when I heard a tremendous explosion followed by the whizzing of stones above my head. I got in company today with an Irishman, and travelled some four miles with him. He seemed well acquainted with the country and gave me a good deal of information concerning the railroad, and of who lived in different houses. I found him intelligent and well informed. The road seemed short, the hours passed swiftly by, and I was sorry to part with him when he arrived at his journey's end.

I traveled until I felt somewhat tired and hungry when I sat down on the top of a high hill overlooking a mill and a good many other houses. And after eating three of the biscuits which I had brought from home, and writing some, I felt rested and pursued my journey till near night. I crossed the Rockfish River on the ford piece prepared by the workmen who were building the bridge which like the others was a great sight for me. Their great post with a long beam attached for the purpose of raising monstrous rocks upon those pillars varying from 40 to 100 feet high. Some of the bridges were arched most beautifully showing the ingenuity of man. Night coming on I began to look for night quarters among the many houses. I saw some, but to go to a private house and ask for lodging required me to summon all my resolution to do so, several times did I stop and think whether I should go or not to certain houses, and several houses did I pass until night forced me to stop. I went about a half mile from the road to a neat little farm house in Nelson County just at the foot of one of the highest mountains I could see. I met the landowner at the barn. I asked him politely if I *** or he would allow me the privilege to stay with him tonight. He looked at me from head to foot and said, "Yes." He accompanied me to the house, made a fire in the parlor. I was highly pleased at the attention he paid me. He was a tall slim thin man rather delicate of appearance. His name was Purviss. He had an agreeable conversation. After supper he commenced picking cotton and the old saying of "when one's in Rome he must do as Rome does" came to my mind. I joined him and picked several hands-full. He spoke of hiring a farmhand, and the beauty and quietude of his house almost tempted me to give up my trip to Lynchburg, and offer him my services, but he did not want to hire unless it was for a year. I retired about 9 o'clock very much fatigued.

Tuesday, Feb. 8, 1859

This morning I arose about sunrise – my feet were exceedingly sore. There were large blisters on my right heel and middle of my foot. When I went into the parlor I could not avoid limping. My host soon came in and seemed the good-natured and easy hearted man that I took him to be the evening before. He invited me to spend the day with him, and take a good look at the mountains which rose majestically toward the heavens west of his house. He gave me a minute description of a mountain north, or northwest of his house known as the “Sugar Loaf,” said by him to be the highest mountain in Nelson County. I was obliged, declined to accept his kind invitation, though I must confess I felt somewhat at a loss for courage to refuse. He told me my feet would get better, and I could travel much faster to make up for lost time, but I was bent on my journey to Lynchburg, where I hope to get business or a home, whether make anything or no. He kindly advised me not to attempt to walk more than 25 miles today, as it might make my feet so sore I would be unable to travel. After breakfast which was savory and palatable and nicely served, I took my purse to compensate him for his trouble, but he refused any pay whatever. I took my leave but not without a feeling of admiration and gratitude toward this gentleman. As I walked along today my mind was more than usually absorbed in reflecting on the past and looking toward the future. I felt as if my present condition was merely a dream or a fit of fancy: but yet it was no dream nor fairy-tale, true, too true. Last year this time where was I? Thought I to myself among friends and acquaintances. Following an occupation that I loved more than ought else. Then the stream of life seemed to run smooth and through many a shady valley bearing along with it many high aspirations. Now what has “Old Time” done? What a change he has wrought in the short period of twelve months. But yet I have aspirations of as exalted nature as I ever had. I hope soon to be in the same course of life.