

MYSTERIOUS "BLACK JIM" MADISON

By M. G. WEAVER

FOR thirty years, from about 1832 to 1862, James Madison, better known and remembered as "Black Jim," was an eccentric and interesting character in Blue Ball, East Earl township, Lancaster county, Pa. His story that he was born a slave and subsequently liberated by his master, when he was twenty years old, was never doubted. "I came from Salisbury, across the mountains far away; I had a good master; he gave me freedom when I was twenty," was all the information he ever gave about himself.

This led to the assumption that the Salisbury to which he referred, was Salisbury township, Lancaster county, Pa.; but the place was never positively identified, and his master remained unknown.

A mysterious feature about his early life was, that when he made his advent to the vicinity of what was to be his Blue Ball home, besides using good English, with the pronunciation peculiar to the southern plantation, he also spoke the Pennsylvania German dialect fluently, but with a different accent, having names and terms of expression differing from local usage. These peculiarities could never be satisfactorily reconciled with the statement by him that he was reared on a Salisbury township slave owner's plantation, even though he might have been born while slavery was legal in Pennsylvania.

Although he had no education, he often displayed a keen knowledge of human nature; and by his natural adaptability to his surroundings, he managed to keep himself in the kindly graces of the best people in the community, where in spite of his weakness for strong drink, he eked out an existence in his humble habitation to which he often referred as a comfortable living.

One cold wintry day, he made his first appearance in the neighborhood of Blue Ball at the Wallace store, a little east of the present village, and asked for work. The proprietor told him if he would go out on the pike in front of the store and rub two stones together

until they were warm, he would give him work. Jim, being a trained quarry-man, was not daunted by this seemingly singular demand; he soon brought the rubbed stones, with the desired result, to the storekeeper, who was as good as his promise. He gave him employment and secured for him what proved to be the life work of the ex-slave—a permanent position in the limestone quarries of George Rutt, on his farm at the place where the two pikes crossed each other, opposite the Blue Ball hotel. It was then kept by Amos S. Kinzer, grandfather of Hon. J. Roland Kinzer, the present representative from Lancaster county in the Congress of the United States. The turnpike companies being freely patronized by the trains of Conestoga wagons, used all the product of the stones quarried at this place. The limekiln belonging to the quarries had long been out of use, and by permission of Mr. Rutt, the colored man made a roof over it and constructed several apartments above each other, turning the old limekiln into fairly comfortable living quarters. This improvised place of abode was on the same site chosen subsequently by E. Henry Yundt, Esq., whose boyhood days were spent at Blue Ball, for the palatial home which he erected there in 1883.

Besides his work in quarrying stones and breaking them for the turnpike companies, the colored man worked among the farmers, and soon had a large number of sympathizing friends who often befriended and assisted him to improve his home on "Madison Hill," as his place was called from the time he began to occupy the old limekiln. This name clung to the hill for nearly a century.

About 1840, Rev. Tobias Wanner, a minister of the Weaverland Mennonite congregation, made preparations to build a larger summer house on his farm near Blue Ball. Jim conceived the idea that this abandoned home would be an ideal house for him. Accordingly, he purchased the old building and with the consent of Mr. Rutt, the owner of the quarries, he began to make preparations for his new home on the edge of the quarries. Here his ingenuity was brought into full play; having selected the place for his house, he dug or quarried a hole into the solid rock, leaving sides for his house to rest upon, he and his farmer friends placed the cabin or summer house upon the foundations, using the excavation for his cellar. Later, he broke the stones taken from his cellar,

and sold them to the turnpike company, claiming that the proceeds belonged to him as the stones were taken from under his house and could never have been used by Mr. Rutt, who generously permitted Jim to have his way about it.

These new humble quarters,—with two small rooms, a door and one window facing the Hinkletown pike,—was his home for about twenty years, when in the spring of 1862, several tramps came to the little home, having with them a jug of whiskey. They consumed the contents of the jug, and becoming fighting drunk they upset the stove in their quarrel, with the result that the humble home, with all its contents, was destroyed by fire, and the hapless owner of the place was severely beaten. The tramps were arrested and brought before the court; they were given the privilege of going to jail or enlisting in the Union army, and to let their victim have the proceeds of the bounty realized from the enlistment of the recruits; but the unfortunate Jim, having no home, spent his last days in the Lancaster county almshouse, where he died in 1865.

James Madison, as he gave his name when he first came, is still well-remembered by several old inhabitants who are now past the age of eighty years, as a hard-working man, having had the reputation of being one of the best quarry-men along the pikes, and of having, it was said, broken more stones for the companies than any other man along the lines of road.

By the permission of Mr. Rutt, Black Jim planted the available places around the quarries with fruit trees—peaches being his hobby. He was credited with having more than ordinary knowledge of fruit culture. He also had a vegetable garden, but no one seems to remember much about his success in that direction. He was known to be very fond of flowers. His occupation on cold or rainy days was knitting woolen stockings and mittens, but no one now recalls having seen any of the finished products, they having, doubtless, been made for his own use.

It is a tradition that he had a clever means of gathering provisions from neighboring farmers; and also that he detested to be called a beggar. He had a way of finding out about approaching weddings, barn raisings, funerals, and similar gatherings, where preparations were made to feed a large number of people, and invariably on the evenings of such occasions, or, more frequently, on

the following mornings, he would come with a large basket, inquiring whether any crumbs might have fallen from the table for the poor. Butchering days among the farmers were also closely watched by him, and with his basket he was usually present, with profit to himself. His larder was generally well filled, but his inability to save his money or to use his provisions prudently, often brought him to poverty and scanty living.

The brighter sides of his simple life were many; he was often seen among the worshippers at the Cedar Grove Presbyterian church, where he had a pew to himself, and was attentive to the services. He was strictly honest, and was never known to tell an untruth; he was often entrusted with errands of importance, and in the sale of cattle and other farm commodities, he always brought the right amounts to those who employed him; but his eccentricities, and his love for strong drink, often brought him into trouble and subjected him to the pranks of mischievous boys.

One of his peculiarities was that he would never associate with members of his own race; no colored people were ever allowed to come to his home, although he often entertained his white neighbors there.

The arrival of the early morning mail or stage coach from New Holland, was announced by the driver of the stage by blowing a horn. This greatly annoyed Jim, and he requested Mr. Kinzer, the postmaster, to have this custom discontinued; but his protests were not heeded; accordingly, he procured a similar horn and occasionally, on cold mornings, Jim would run down the pike, blowing his horn half an hour before stage time, thus fooling the postmaster and the neighbors to their great annoyance, but to the utmost satisfaction of the lone inhabitant of Madison Hill.

He did not know the date of his birth, but being desirous of celebrating a birthday like his white neighbors, he selected September 20th as his natal day, and regularly he refused to do manual labor for any one on that day, but he would drill a number of holes in the rocky breast of the quarry, fill them with rock powder, and set them all off at once, in this way announcing to the community that it was his great day.

With the waning of the traffic by the horse teams, the old pikes did not need the stones, so the quarries fell into disuse; the spot

which once was alive with activity became an unsightly waste, overgrown with weeds and filled with rubbish, until about 1882 when Mr. Yundt, desirous of returning to live in his old home neighborhood, and realizing that this was an ideal place for a residence, purchased the entire belongings of Madison Hill, and by the end of 1883, his new home, with all the conveniences of that day, occupied the summit of the hill where, twenty years before, he had often seen Jim enjoying an evening smoke in the doorway of his humble dwelling.

Mr. Yundt, on learning of the existence of a small photograph of Jim, conceived the idea of perpetuating the memory of this former singular resident of the place. The picture was in the possession of Samuel M. Weaver, a neighboring farmer, who, with several friends, while on a visit to Jim in his Lancaster home during the last years of his life, persuaded the old colored man to sit for a picture—the only one, presumably, ever taken of him. Securing the photograph Mr. Yundt had it enlarged and framed, and it hung above his office desk during the remainder of his life. He never tired of telling visitors of his respect for his eccentric colored friend, who had often eaten at his mother's table, and who he had many times seen excited when the older boys played jokes on him while living on the spot which was now occupied by Mr. Yundt's own comfortable home; his memory was well filled with reminiscences of this mysterious character of his boyhood days at Blue Ball.

The framed picture was preserved by his brother, Horace A. Yundt, Esq., of Reading, who became the owner of the home after the death of E. Henry Yundt; and likewise by their sisters, who occupied the mansion after the decease of their distinguished brothers.

It was only when death had removed the entire family, and the home was sold last summer, that the picture was removed from the walls by the nearest relatives, with the request that it might be preserved by The Lancaster County Historical Society as a gift from the Yundt family, together with some historical data of its subject and reason why its former owners prized it so highly. Its story connects the present beautiful village of Blue Ball with family

names of the past which are fast disappearing from the community—Wallace, Yundt, Kinzer and Rutt.

A POSSIBLE EXPLANATION

In recent years, descendants of German settlers of Lancaster county, Pa., and of Rowan and other counties, of North Carolina, have exchanged notes containing the statement that numerous Pennsylvanians moved from this section of the State to North Carolina, and to the valleys of Virginia; that they long retained their habits, customs and language, and that in some localities they still speak the same dialect as their fathers.

Salisbury, being the seat of Rowan county, North Carolina, it may be that the statement of the honest colored man was even more true than the early dwellers on Blue Ball run realized, when he said: "I came from Salisbury, across the mountains, far away." He may have been an inmate of one of these migratory families from Lancaster to the South and have learned of our county and absorbed much of its peculiarities of speech, through his association with his boyhood's companions and others, and thus have cultivated a longing to come to this vicinity to live. It is quite possible that Salisbury, North Carolina, "across the mountains, far away," was the early home of this mysterious stranger. Let those who are inclined to "dream dreams," work out their own solution of the problem, "Where did Black Jim pass his slave days?"

MUSTER ROLLS OF SOLDIERS FROM LANCASTER COUNTY IN THE WAR OF 1812

By MRS. J. V. R. HUNTER AND MRS. MARY OWEN STEINMETZ

The following names of soldiers from Lancaster county, Pa., who served in the War of 1812, were copied from a military docket in the prothonotary's office in the court house at Reading, Pa., and are a continuation of similar important information to be found in Vol. XXXVI, pp. 161-165, of the Proceedings of The Lancaster County Historical Society. Our grateful thanks are extended to Mrs. Hunter and Mrs. Steinmetz for their fine service in copying these names, which is highly appreciated.