

THE GRAVE OF PETER MONTAGUE 1603-1659

In the year 1849 William Henry Montague of Boston, one of the founders of the N. E. Historical Genealogical Society of Boston, being much interested in Montague family history, held a lengthy correspondence with two representative Virginia Montague gentlemen namely, the late Judge Robert L. Montague of Middlesex and the late Col. E. T. Montague, then of the Treasury Dept. at Washington.

Judge R. L. Montague was at that time residing in Lancaster Co. on the road that leads from Monaskon wharf to Lancaster C. H. and in one of his letters to Wm. H. Montague, he stated that he had visited the grave of Peter Montague which was situated on the north bank of the river Rappahannock in Lancaster, that the tombstone was standing, though much defaced by the hand of time. And he added that other tombstones there indicated the marriage of the Montagues with the Balls and it was possible that Washington may have been of Montague descent as such a tradition existed in his family.

Miss Mary Montague of Granby, Mass., was at that time compiling a history of the Montague family and Wm. H. Montague of Boston sent to her copies of his correspondence with these Southern Montague gentlemen. She died in 1880 leaving her work unfinished and her manuscript was sent to the compiler of the present work by her executor. He thus obtained the knowledge of Peter Montague's grave.

His subsequent searches into the Va. Montague records of the past, assured him that only one marriage had taken place between the Montagues and Balls, and he felt confident that if a tombstone could be found indicating such marriage, the grave of Peter Montague would also be found near by, on the testimony of Judge Montague who said it was near a stone that indicated a Montague and Ball marriage. Therefore on his visit to Lancaster in June, 1893, he made an effort to find such a spot.

After inquiry, the compiler of this work learned that there was but one spot known to anyone now living in the Co. where there were Montague graves. In company with Mr. Walter Gresham, the postmaster of Lancaster, he went to that spot, situated in what appeared to be a primeval forest. On arrival he first saw the well defined outline of the foundation ruins of an old colonial dwelling house. This foundation is of brick, and the bricks are twice as large as modern bricks, showing that they were the kind made by the first settlers. Knowing the custom [which still exists in Va.] of burying their dead in the rear of their dwelling and not in a general graveyard, he began a search of the ground in the rear of the ruins of the old colonial house, and soon found lying on the ground, broken into fragments, (some of the pieces missing) the headstone with the inscription, "Here lies the body of Mrs. Hannah Montague wife of William Montague and daughter of Capt. Richard and Sarah Ball." Near by were the headstones of Capt. Richard Ball, 1726; of Sarah Selden, dau. of Capt. Richard Ball [and sister of Hannah Montague]; and of John Selden her husband. All of these stones were dark slate color, and lay upon the ground broken in pieces. Here then was a stone indicating a Montague and Ball marriage, the grave of Peter OUGHT to be near here.

After a further search a well defined grave was found some yards distant, heavily bricked with a solid cube of colonial bricks extending apparently deep in the ground, but not above it, and laid in mortar. Deeply imbedded in this masonry there had originally been an upright stone, which was now broken off close to the foundation, and lay face down upon the ground, while on top of it, covering it up was a large fallen tree much decayed but heavy. This Stone was white or gray, showed great age, had become decayed through age, so that it had in places crumbled into small flakes, that lay about it. It was so aged, that with a little handling it would crumble all to pieces, and from its position imbedded in colonial bricks it is beyond all doubt the

grave of a first settler. It is different in material from the stones of 1726 and at first sight of it, the mind is convinced of its antiquity.

Mr. Eugene George of Lancaster, a most kind and courteous young gentleman, kindly volunteered to get horses and a man and have that large log removed from the stone, which was done, but it was found that any inscription upon it had been entirely obliterated, and the stone had cleaved off in flakes from extreme old age. Nothing whatever was upon it to identify it. There are no other graves in that locality.

The writer learned that when Judge Montague wrote that letter in 1849, he was residing in the Co. of Lancaster only seven miles from this very spot, and that the road from his house to the village of Lancaster ran within 300 yards of this spot, and that every time he visited the centre he passed within 300 yards of it. Taking this fact in connection with the fact that no other ancient Montague graves are known in the Co. and that this spot agrees with what he wrote about Montague and Ball marriage, and that one grave and only one of a first settler IS THERE, there seems to be no room for doubt that this is the place he visited in 1849, and that upon his testimony, the OLD GRAVE IS that of Peter Montague, because he was at that time able to read the inscription, though he then said it was much defaced by time. The probability that this is Peter's grave is as strong as anything can be without actual inscription on the stone to prove it. The evidence is convincing when it is remembered that there was only one marriage between the Montagues and Balls, namely that of this Hannah, dau. of Capt. Richard Ball, and when Judge Montague wrote in 1849 that he visited Peter's grave, found the headstone standing but defaced by time and referred to another stone there which proved a marriage between Montague and Ball, this is the place he visited, if it was not, how could he have mentioned the Montague and Ball tombstone? In other words, the identification of Hannah (Ball) Montague's grave also identifies Peter's grave, although the headstone has become so obliterated it cannot be read.

Some doubter may say, how do you account for the burial of Peter Montague on a Ball plantation? The opinion of the compiler is that the spot was a plantation of Capt. Richard Ball, but not an original Ball homestead. The following is the evidence to support it.

Capt. Richard Ball in his will, bequeaths as follows: "To my dau. Sarah Selden I give the plantation where now live and all the land below the road from Col. Wm. Ball's to Cundiff's; to my dau. Margaret Ball. I give my plantation and land at the mouth of Carotoman river; to my dau. Hannah [Montague] I give my OLD plantation and all the land above the road from Col. Wm. Ball's to Cundiff's."

Here we have three estates, the plantation at Carotoman, the OLD plantation, and the NEW one, where he lived when he made his will and where he died. This new plantation was evidently a purchase, the old Ball homesteads were at Carotoman 17 miles distant. Records also prove, that as early as 1700 the two sons of Peter had left Lancaster and were living on, or near Montague island in Middlesex. And the evidence is that they had sold the Lancaster property and that Capt. Richard Ball had become the subsequent owner of it. This explains why Peter's grave and the grave of Capt. Ball are on the same plantation. This purchase now contains the graves of Capt. Richard Ball, his daughters Sarah Selden and Hannah Montague, John Selden husband of Sarah, and the tomb of Peter Montague, and was the place where Peter Montague lived, died, and was buried 67 years before. Capt. Richard Ball's tomb is accounted for there because it is the place where he lived at the time of his death. John and Sarah Selden's graves are accounted for there because Capt. Richard gave the place to them in his will and it was their home. Peter Montague's grave is accounted for there, because either Capt. Richard Ball (or his father) had purchased the place where Peter Montague lived, died, and was buried. Hannah [Ball] Montague's grave is accounted for there because she was buried by the side of her father Capt. Ball. Her own plantation given her by her father was not far distant and, as this compiler understands it, was separated from that of her sister Sarah, only by the road which now passes from Lancaster to Heathville [vide the will].

The compiler takes no credit to himself in this matter beyond identifying the spot visited by Judge Montague in 1849. All the honor of finding the grave of Peter, the English Emigrant, belongs to the late Judge Montague of Middlesex, and to his honored memory which is revered by us all. He not only found it, but left a record by which it was possible to identify it.

The spot is located half a mile from Lancaster, C. H. Take the road to Heathville [Co. seat of Northumberland] for half a mile, then turn into an old wood road on your left, which follow for 300 yards into the woods and you will reach the place.

Merry Point on the Rappahannock is the nearest point for Lancaster C. H. The Weems line of steamers from Baltimore and Fredericksburgh stop at Merry Point, where there is a conveyance to Lancaster, C. H., five miles distant.

The old grave is only a pleasant walk or ride of half a mile from the hotel. The locality is one of great historical interest to the antiquary. Only a pleasant ride in one direction to ancient Christ Church built by King Carter, and in another direction to the White Chapel Church, with old gravestones around about, and both relics of a bygone age