

Northern Kentucky Views Presents:

Sketches of Old-Time Petersburg Residents

by

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Sketches Of Old-Time Petersburg Residents As Written By E. Y. Chapin

We are in receipt of a couple of sketches of old-time inhabitants of the Petersburg community, written by E. Y. Chapin of Chattanooga, Tenn. The sketches follow:

Brother Bristow

The songs of older year and the "exhibition" of the "select" school of long ago, are things remembered by the old. Attending them; two other figures emerge from the past: the old-fashioned circuit-rider, who sang as well as preached; and the old-fashioned teacher of the village school.

Of these, Brother Bristow had the more intimate connection. Our village Methodists could afford only one "preaching Sunday" in the month. When Brother Bristow came to fill it, his presence was a benediction. Generously built, his snow white hair framing his kindly face, his eyes beaming benevolence, he was a fit apostle of brotherly love.

He could preach of course—always of God's love; if he had ever heard of divine wrath he never chose to speak of it—but he moved us most by his singing. He told this story of himself. He was riding to a rural church where he was holding a revival. Another horseman joined him on the road. Brother Bristow asked where his fellow-traveler was going.

"To the revival," he answered. "Who is holding it?" Brother Bristow asked. "An old fellow named Bristow," replied the stranger. To which Brother Bristow inquired "Is he much of a preacher?" "I haven't heard him," said the stranger "but they say he can sing like an angel but can't preach worth a damn."

At the conclusion of his sermon, Brother Bristow would sing a solo without accompaniment. He would render it in a voice of wonderful sweetness, compass and power expressing the sentiment of the song with understanding and sympathy.

His favorite song and that of his congregation was "Scatter Seeds of Kindness." This song brings back to me the picture of this saintly man whose kindly heart and beautiful voice used to move us to tears.

Sanford Gaines Botts

It is easy to drop into the ruts in village life; to live today as we lived in many yesterday; to accept a narrow horizon.

Sanford Gaines Botts refused to do these things. With modest resources in education and no resource in property, he built where building was hardest. His was an enquiring and a developing mind in a community often too well satisfied with what it had.

His life stretched backward to the beginnings of Petersburg; to a few scattered houses around a store or two where the farmers traded; a distillery which ground their grain; a wagon-maker's shop which mended their vehicles, a harness-maker's shop which looked after their saddlery, and a blacksmith's forge which sharpened their plows and turned out shoes for their horses.

He was our Postmaster for many years and built two structures for the accommodation of that Institution and conducted it on a basis of accommodating service which persist.

His young manhood saw that poignant intensity of feeling which estranged friends from friend and set brother against brother in the years of civil war. No section felt its animosities more deeply than Northern Kentucky. A community which furnished its full quota to each of the contending armies, was a community which was deeply stirred.

The character of Mr. Botts was too positive and too frank to escape its share of this controversy. Always a man of firm conviction, outspoken and fearless in his expressions, his way parted from that of many friends for awhile; but the generosity and fidelity of his nature made it easy for his neighbors to drift back into their old associations with him after the passions aroused by the war had cooled.

A reverence for freedom showed itself in many phases of his life. That, more than other things, separated him from the majority of his neighbors upon the issues of the Civil War. It was equally manifest in his religious views. His life exemplified a tolerance which others were not willing to extend to him. God, to him, was a Being of infinite kindness; who loved His children; and was forever patient with their infirmities. Very few of his time

were in sympathy with him; but he showed no resentment of criticism which came to him from those whose religion was of a sterner sort.

The popularity which he enjoyed was never sought. He never hesitated to espouse an unpopular cause. He bore his share of prejudice—racial, religious, political—without a murmur. It never varied his course by a hairs-breadth from the path his ideals had set.

He was keenly interested in the progress of the greater world outside his village. He sought to bring the varied phases of its development to his own community. His dream of a waterworks for Petersburg is still unrealized after two generations. Some day its realization will stand as a monument to a man who thought beyond his time. But he did care for our cemetery when the rest were neglecting it. He gave it a temporary resting place for our dead long before any other community of our size enjoyed such a thing.

He appreciated the possibilities of our river banks while others were neglecting them. He did what he could to make them sightly; and to afford us a place of rest and recreation there. When others were indifferent about our steamboat landing, he did what he could to make it more convenient and accessible.

His was a fraternal spirit. He loved to touch shoulders with his neighbors; to join them in organizations that worked for relaxation and enjoyment as well as for the higher things of life. He was a leader among the Odd Fellows; and he, more than any other, promoted and encouraged the Sons of Temperance when the work of that organization was sorely needed. He brightened village life in many ways; and his touch was always kindly, intelligent, and helpful.

He was of my grandfather's time; and his contact with me, and with others of the village's youth, was that of an old man with children. We tried his patience sorely; yet it never failed. He understood us better than we knew ourselves. He had a kindly sympathy with our pursuit of happiness in boyish ways that seldom appears in riper age; a tolerance for our waywardness that I ravel over as I look back upon it. The boys of the seventies and the early eighties owe him a deep debt of gratitude. I wish that these belated words of appreciation might reach him, somehow, in that better world of which we dream; and which he was so peculiarly fitted to enter.

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