FORMAN SAMUEL S.

NARRATIVE OF A JOURNEY DOWN THE OHIO AND MISSISSIPPI IN 1789-90

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Содержание

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PREFATORY NOTE

I ACKNOWLEDGE my indebtedness to a friend of the Forman family for calling my attention to the interesting narrative of Major Samuel S. Forman's early journey down the Ohio and Mississippi, and for aiding me in securing a copy for publication. The manuscript of this monograph, as now presented, has been submitted to friends and kindred of Major Forman, who knew him long and well, and they have accorded it their warm approval.

With their kind approbation, I feel encouraged to offer this little contribution to western historical literature to an enlightened public.

L. C. D.

Madison, Wis.

MEMOIR OF MAJOR SAMUEL S. FORMAN

EVERY addition to our stock of information touching early western history and adventure, and of the pioneer customs and habits of a hundred years ago, deserves a kindly reception. The following narrative of a journey down the Ohio and Mississippi, in 1789-90, was not reduced to writing till 1849, after a lapse of sixty years; but an unusually fine memory enabled Major Forman to relate such incidents of his trip as left a lasting impression upon him, alike with interest and general accuracy. A sketch of the writer will give us a better insight into his trustworthiness and character.

Major Forman, the third son of Samuel and Helena Denise Forman, was born at Middletown Point, Monmouth county, New Jersey, July 21, 1765. He was too young to participate in the Revolutionary war, during the stirring period of 1776 to 1780, in New Jersey; but his elder brothers, Jonathan and Denise, were prominent and active throughout the great struggle. Major Forman has recorded some incidents of the war that occurred in his region of New Jersey, and within his own knowledge, worthy of preservation as interesting scraps of Revolutionary history. At one time, a cousin of his, Tunis Forman, about seventeen years of age, met two Tory robbers, and after one had fired at him and missed, he, getting the advantage of them in the adjustment of his gun, forced them to throw down their weapons, when he marched them several miles before him, and lodged them in jail at Freehold. For this brave act, young Forman received a large reward.[1]

During the period while Major Henry Lee and his famous Light Dragoons were serving in New Jersey, intelligence came of the marauding operations of a band of Tory robbers, located in the extensive pine woods toward Barnegat, in Monmouth county, whose head-quarters were at a secret cave in that region. Lee dispatched a select party of fearless men, who approached the dangerous region in a farmer's wagon, concealed under a covering of straw. Fagans, the robber leader, with some followers, stopped the wagon to plunder it, when the concealed dragoons immediately put a ball through Fagans's head, and with his fall his associates fled. Fagans's body was conveyed to Barkalow's woods, the usual place of execution for such culprits, and there exposed on a gibbet till the flesh dropped from the bones.

Mr. Forman mentions that his father, Samuel Forman, did not escape a visit from the Tories and British. At one time, they made a descent upon the village of Middletown Point. There was a mill at this place, which was well known and much resorted to for a great distance; and some of these Tory invaders had been employed in the erection of this mill, and were personally well known to the citizens, and it would appear that their object was, at least, to capture Samuel Forman, if not to kill him. They plundered the houses of the settlement, destroying what they could not carry off, boasting that they had aided in building the mill, and now assisted in kindling the fire in the bolting box to burn it down. They had surprised the guard placed for the protection of the place, killing several of their number, who had been their schoolmates in former years. Samuel Forman eluded their vigilance, but lost heavily by this invasion, for he owned almost all of one side of Middletown Point, and part of both sides of Main street. He never applied to Congress for any remuneration for his losses. He died in 1792, in his seventy-eighth year. In this foray, the enemy burned two store-houses of Mr. John H. Burrows, robbed his house, and took him prisoner to New York. After several months, he was exchanged, and returned home.

My brother, Denise Forman, entered the service when he was about sixteen years old. He was in the battle of Germantown – in which engagement eighteen of the Forman connection took part – where the Americans were badly used, on account of the British having some light artillery in a large stone house. Our army had to retreat; when that took place, Lieutenant Schenck, under whom brother Denise served, took Denise's gun, and told him to take fast hold of his coat, and cling to it during

[1] This incident, occurring in May, 1780, is related in Barber and Howe's *New Jersey Historical Collection*, 345-6.

the retreat. General David Forman conducted himself so well, that General Washington tendered his aid in securing a command in the Continental army; but General Forman declined the offer, as he believed he could be more serviceable to remain with the militia in Monmouth county, New Jersey, as they were continually harassed there by the enemy from Staten Island and New York.

After this, Denise Forman engaged under a Captain Tyler, who had charge of a few gun-boats that coasted along the Jersey shore, to annoy and oppose the enemy. When the British fleet lay at anchor near Sandy Hook, Captain Tyler went, in the night, and surprised a large sloop at anchor among the men-of-war. Tyler's party boarded the sloop, secured the sailors, weighed anchor, and got her out from the fleet, and took her up Middletown creek, all without any fighting. The whole enterprise was conducted with so much judgment, that the sailor prisoners dared not speak or give the least sign of alarm. "When we first touched the sloop," said Denise Forman, "I felt for a moment a little streaked, but it was soon over, and then we worked fearlessly to get the vessel under weigh, without alarming the fleet." These gun-boats were all propelled by muffled oars, that dipped in and out of the water so as to make no noise; nor did any of the men speak above their breath. On the gunwale of the boat, a strip of heavy canvas was nailed, the inner edge having been left unfastened, under which were concealed their swords, guns, and other implements for use in a combat, and so placed that each man could, at an instant's notice, lay his hand upon his own weapon. Even in port, the men belonging to Tyler's party were not allowed to talk or speak to other people, as a matter of precaution; and the captain always spoke in an undertone, and if a man laid down an oar, it was always done as noiselessly as possible.

At one time, fifteen hundred British and Tories landed on Middletown shore, and marched from six to ten miles back into the country. A beacon, placed on a conspicuous hill, was fired for the purpose of giving an alarm; and soon the militia of the country, understanding the notice, gathered, and opposed the enemy. In Pleasant Valley they checked their advance. Uncle John Schenck and brother Denise so closely cornered a British or Tory officer of this party in a barn-yard, that he jumped from his horse, took to his heels and escaped, leaving his horse behind him.

Major Burrows[2] happened to be at home at that time, on a visit to his family. Some of the Americans dressed themselves in British red coats, which had been captured. The Rev. Mr. DuBois, who, like a good patriot, had turned out on this occasion, with his fowling-piece, when Major Burrows rode near by, eked out in British uniform; Mr. DuBois spoke to Captain Schenck, his brother-in-law, "Look, there is a good shot," and, suiting the action to the word, took deliberate aim. Captain Schenck, better understanding the situation, quickly knocked up the clergyman's gun, with the explanation – "Don't shoot; that's Major Burrows." Mr. DuBois supposed he was aiming at a British officer, within point blank shot, who was endeavoring to rejoin his fellows.

Denise Forman's next move was to enlist with Captain Philip Freneau, the well-known poet, who sailed from Philadelphia in a letter of marque, the *Aurora*, against British commerce on the high seas. While not long out, sailing toward the West Indies, Freneau and his adventurous vessel were captured by their enemies, sent to New York, and all incarcerated on board of the *Scorpion*, one of the prison ships floating in New York harbor and Wallabout Bay, its unhappy prisoners experiencing almost untold horrors. Captain Freneau, at least, was subsequently transferred to what he denominated "the loathesome *Hunter*." These prison ships attained an unenviable reputation for maltreating and

[2] Major John Burrows was first a captain in Colonel David Forman's regiment. Forman had the nick-name of "Black David," to distinguish him from a relative of the same name, and he was always a terror to the Tories; and Captain Burrows, from his efficiency against these marauders, was called by those enemies of the country, "Black David's Devil." January 1, 1777, Captain Burrows was made a captain in Spencer's regiment on Continental establishment; and, January 22, 1779, he was promoted to the rank of major, serving in Sullivan's campaign against the hostile Six Nations, and remaining in the army till the close of the war. Several years after, he went on a journey to the interior of Georgia, in an unhealthy season, when he probably sickened and died, for he was never heard of afterward.Major Burrows left an interesting journal of Sullivan's campaign, which appears in the splendid volume on that campaign issued by the State of New York, in 1887. The original MS. journal is preserved by his grand-daughter, Mrs. Elizabeth Breese Stevens, of Sconondoa, Oneida county, New York.

half-starving their hapless and ill-fated victims, hundreds of whom died in consequence of their inhuman treatment. This sad experience became the subject of one of Freneau's subsequent poems, emanating from the depths of his embittered soul recollections. Brother Denise used to relate to me, after his return home, that, when on the prison ship, he had to shut his eyes whenever he ate the sea-biscuit or drank the water assigned him, so full were they of vermin! Freneau, in his poem, thus alludes to the fare with which the poor prisoners were treated:

"See, captain, see! what rotten bones we pick.
What kills the healthy can not cure the sick.
Not dogs on *such* by Christian men are fed;
And see, good master, see that lousy bread!"

"Your meat or bread," this man of flint replied,
"Is not my care to manage or provide;
But this, damn'd rebel dogs, I'd have you know,
That better than you merit we bestow.
Out of my sight!" No more he deigned to say,
But whisk'd about, and, frowning, strode away.

When the survivors were exchanged, after their long imprisonment, they were so weak and emaciated that they could scarcely walk – perfect living skeletons; and my brother, after his return home, was confined to his bed, and for several days nearly all hope of his recovery was abandoned; but he at length providentially recovered. Denise Forman received a captain's commission when a war was threatened with France, in 1798, and when the army was disbanded, he settled on a farm in Freehold, where he spent the remainder of his days.

About 1790, Captain Freneau married my sister Eleanor. He was a prominent Anti-Federalist in his day, and edited various Democratic papers at different places, and was for a time translating clerk in the State Department. While he was able to translate the French documents, he found it cost him more than he received to get those in other foreign languages properly translated, and after a while he resigned. He had in early life been a college-mate with James Madison, at Princeton, and has been aptly called the "patriot poet" of the Revolution, his effusions having been useful to the cause of the country during its great struggle for independence. He lost his life in a violent snow-storm, in December, 1832, in his eighty-first year, near Monmouth, New Jersey.

While attending grammar-school, the latter part of the Revolutionary war, at Freehold, young Forman records: The hottest part of the battle of Monmouth was about this spot, where my brother-in-law, Major Burrows, lived after he left the army, and with whom I and some fellow-students boarded. Our path to the school-house crossed a grave where a remarkably tall British officer was buried. We opened the grave; a few pieces only of blanket, which encompassed the corpse, remained. One school-mate, Barnes Smock, was a very tall person, but the thigh bones of this unfortunate officer far outmeasured his. I believe this was the only engagement when the two opposing armies had recourse to the bayonet,[3] and this was the place of that charge. The battle took place on the Sabbath. A British cannon ball went through Rev. Dr. Woodhull's church. Dr. Woodhull was now one of my teachers. The two armies lay upon their arms all night after the battle. General Washington and General La Fayette slept in their cloaks under an apple-tree in Mr. Henry Perrine's orchard. It was Washington's intention to have renewed the battle the next day, but the British, in the course of the night, stole a march as fast as they could for their fleet at Sandy Hook.

[3] This is an error. Bayonet charges were resorted to by Morgan at the Cowpens, and in other engagements.

In the spring of 1783, when peace was dawning, many of the old citizens of New York City, who had been exiled from their homes for some seven years, began to return to their abandoned domiciles, even before the British evacuation. Among them was Major Benjamin Ledyard, who had married my oldest sister. In September of that year, at the instance of my sister Ledyard, I went to New York as a member of her family. Every day I saw the British soldiers. Indeed, a young lieutenant boarded a short time in our family, as many families received the British officers as an act of courtesy.

Even before the British evacuation, the American officers were permitted to cross over into the city, and frequently came, visiting the coffee-houses and other places of public resort. Here they would meet British officers, and some of them evinced a strong inclination to make disturbance with their late competitors, throwing out hints or casting reflections well calculated to provoke personal combats. There was a Captain Stakes, of the American Light Dragoons, a fine, large, well-built man, who had no fear about him. It was said, when he entered the coffee-house, that the British officers exercised a wholesome caution how they treated him, after some of them had made a feint in testing his powers. But it all happily passed over without harm.

It was finally agreed between General Washington and Sir Guy Carleton that New York should be evacuated November 25th. In the morning of that day, the British army paraded in the Bowery. The Americans also paraded, and marched down till they came very close to each other, so that the officers of both armies held friendly parleys. The streets were crowded with people on an occasion so interesting. I hurried by the redcoats till I reached the Americans, where I knew I would be safe. So I sauntered about among the officer. Presently, an American officer seized me by the hand, when, I looking up at him, he said, encouragingly: “Don’t be afraid, Sammy. I know your brother Jonathan. He is an officer in the same line with me, and my name is Cumming.”[4] He continued to hold me by the hand till orders were given to advance. He advised me to keep on the sidewalk, as I might get run over in the street.

The British steadily marched in the direction of their vessels, while the Americans advanced down Queen (since Pearl) street; the British embarking on board their fleet on East river, I believe, near Whitehall, and the Americans headed directly to Fort George, on the point where the Battery now is. Stockades were around the fort, and the large gate was opened. When the British evacuated the fort, they unreefed the halyards of the tall flag-staff, greased the pole, so that it was some time before the American flag was hoisted. At length, a young soldier[5] succeeded in climbing the pole, properly arranged the halyards, when up ran the striped and star-spangled banner, amid the deafening shouts of the multitude, that seemed to shake the city. It is easier to imagine than to describe the rejoicing, and the brilliancy of the fireworks that evening.

After the evacuation, Mr. Forman witnessed the affectionate and affecting parting of Washington and his officers, when he entered a barge at Whitehall wharf, manned by sea captains in white frocks, who rowed him to the Jersey shore, to take the stage for Philadelphia, on his way to Congress. Mr. Forman also saw General Washington while presiding over the convention of 1787, to form a Constitution for the new Republic. The general was attired in citizen’s dress – blue coat, cocked hat, hair in queue, crossed and powdered. He walked alone to the State House, the place of meeting, and seemed pressed down in thought. A few moments before General Washington took his seat on the rostrum, the venerable Dr. Franklin, one of the Pennsylvania delegates, was brought in by a posse of men in his sedan, and helped into the hall, he being severely afflicted with palsy

[4] This was John N. Cumming, who rose from a lieutenant to be lieutenant-colonel, commanding the Third New Jersey Regiment, serving the entire war.

[5] The editor, while at Saratoga Springs, in 1838, took occasion to visit the venerable Anthony Glean, who resided in the town of Saratoga, and who was reputed to be the person who climbed the greased flag-staff at the evacuation of New York, and who himself claimed to have performed that feat. He was then a well-to-do farmer, enjoying a pension for his revolutionary services, and lived two or three years later, till he had reached the age of well-nigh ninety. The newspapers of that period often referred to him as the hero of the flag-staff exploit, and no one called it in question.

or paralysis at the time. On the adoption of the Constitution, a great celebration was held in New York to commemorate the event, which Mr. Forman also witnessed. A large procession was formed, composed of men of all avocations in life, and each represented by some insignia of his own trade or profession, marching through the streets with banners, flags, and stirring music. A full-rigged vessel, called "The Federal Ship Hamilton," was drawn in the procession, and located in Bowling Green, where it remained until it fell to pieces by age.

After spending some years as a clerk in mercantile establishments in New York City, and once going as supercargo to dispose of a load of flour to Charleston, he engaged in merchandising at Middletown Point, New Jersey. Mr. Forman subsequently made the journey down the Ohio and Mississippi, in 1789-'90, as given in considerable detail in the narrative which follows. While spending the winter of 1792-'93 in Philadelphia, he witnessed the inauguration of Washington as President, at the beginning of his second term of office, and was within six feet of him when he took the oath of office. "I cast my eyes over the vast crowd," says Major Forman, "and every eye seemed riveted on the great chief. On Washington's right sat Chief-Justice Cushing, and on his left Senator Langdon, of New Hampshire. After sitting a little while in profound silence, the senator arose, and asked the President if he was ready to take the oath of office. General Washington rose up, having a paper in his left hand, when he made a very short address. Then Judge Cushing stood up, with a large open Bible before him, facing the President, who laid his hand upon the sacred volume, and very deliberately and distinctly repeated the oath of office as pronounced by the chief-justice. When Washington repeated his own name, as he did at the conclusion of the ceremony, it made my blood run cold. The whole proceedings were performed with great solemnity. General Washington was dressed in deep mourning, for, it was said, a favorite nephew who had lived at Mount Vernon during the Revolutionary war. He wore his mourning sword. Mrs. Washington was about the middling stature, and pretty fleshy."

Mr. Forman now entered into the employ of the Holland Land Company, through their agents, Theophilus Cazenove and John Lincklaen, to found a settlement in the back part of the State of New York, where that company had purchased a large body of land. He accordingly headed a party, in conjunction with Mr. Lincklaen, for this purpose, conveying a load of merchandise to the point of operations, passing in batteaus up the Mohawk to old Fort Schuyler, now Utica, beyond which it was necessary to open up a road for the teams and loads of goods; lodging in the woods when necessary, living on raw pork and bread, which was better than the bill of fare at the well-known tavern in that region, kept by John Dennie, the half Indian – "no bread, no meat;" and one of Dennie's descendants indignantly resented being referred to as an Indian – "Me no Indian; only Frenchman and squaw!" At length, May 8, 1793, the party arrived on the beautiful body of water, since known as Cazenovia Lake, and founded the village of Cazenovia, where Mr. Forman engaged in felling trees, and erecting the necessary houses in which to live and do business, and in this rising settlement he engaged in merchandising for several years. He held many public positions of honor and trust; was county clerk, secretary for over thirty years of a turnpike company; served as major in a regiment of militia early organized at Cazenovia.

The latter years of his life he spent in Syracuse, where he was greatly respected for his worth, his fine conversational powers, his social and generous feelings. He lived to the great age of over ninety-seven years, dying August 16, 1862. His closing years were embittered over the distracted condition of his country, embroiled in fratricidal war, and his prayer was that the proud flag which he witnessed when it was placed over the ramparts of Fort George, November 25, 1783, might again wave its ample folds over a firmly united American Confederacy. His patriotic prayer was answered, though he did not himself live to witness it.

NARRATIVE OF A JOURNEY DOWN THE OHIO AND MISSISSIPPI, 1789-'90

GENERAL DAVID FORMAN,[6] of New Jersey, entered into a negotiation with the Spanish minister, Don Diego de Gardoque, for his brother, Ezekiel Forman, of Philadelphia, to emigrate with his family and sixty odd colored people, and settle in the Natchez country, then under Spanish authority.

I agreed with General Forman to accompany the emigrating party; and, about the last of November, 1789, having closed up my little business at Middletown Point, New Jersey, I set out from the general's residence, in Freehold, with Captain Benajah Osmun, an old continental captain, who was at that time the faithful overseer of the general's blacks. There were sixty men, women, and children, and they were the best set of blacks I ever saw together. I knew the most of them, and all were well-behaved, except two rather ill-tempered fellows. General Forman purchased some more, who had intermarried with his own, so as not to separate families. They were all well fed and well clothed.

We had, I believe, four teams of four horses each, and one two-horse wagon, all covered with tow-cloth, while Captain Osmun and I rode on horseback. After the distressing scene of taking leave – for the general's family and blacks were almost all in tears – we sat out upon our long journey. The first night we camped on the plains near Cranberry, having accomplished only about twelve or fifteen miles. The captain and I had a bed put under one of the wagons; the sides of the wagon had tenter-hooks, and curtains made to hook up to them, with loops to peg the bottom to the ground. The colored people mostly slept in their wagons. In the night a heavy rain fell, when the captain and I fared badly. The ground was level, and the water, unable to run off, gave us a good soaking. I had on a new pair of handsome buckskin small clothes; the rain spoiled their beauty, and the wetting and subsequent shrinkage rendered them very uncomfortable to wear.

The next morning we commenced our journey as early as possible. We drove to Princeton, where we tarried awhile, and all were made comfortable. We crossed the Delaware five miles above Trenton. On arriving at Lancaster, in Pennsylvania, the authorities stopped us, as we somewhat expected they would do. General Forman had furnished me with all the necessary papers relating to the transportation of slaves through New Jersey and Pennsylvania. While Judge Hubley was examining the papers, the servant women informed me that the females of the city came out of their houses and inquired of them whether they could spin, knit, sew, and do housework, and whether they were willing to go to the South; so, if the authorities stopped us, they could all soon have new homes. But our colored women laughed at the Lancaster ladies, who seemed mortified when they learned that we could not be detained.

In Westmoreland county we had a little trouble with a drunken justice of the peace and some free blacks. These free blacks, as we learned from a faithful old colored woman, furnished the two ill-tempered blacks of our party with old swords and pistols, but nothing serious grew out of it.

The weather began to grow very cold, the roads bad, and traveling tedious. We encamped one night in the woods, kindled a fire, and turned the tails of the wagons all inward, thus forming a circle around the fire. Another night we came to a vacant cabin without a floor; we made a large fire, and all who chose took their bedding and slept in the cabin, some remaining in the wagons. The captain and I had our beds spread before the fire.

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[6] General Forman was born near Englishtown, Monmouth Co., New Jersey. He was, during the Revolutionary war, a terror to the tories of his region, and as brigadier-general commanded the Jersey troops at the battle of Germantown. No less than eighteen of the Forman connection were in his brigade in this engagement. He was subsequently a county judge, and member of the council of state. He died about 1812.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.