MEMOIR OF JOHN YATES BEALL

HIS LIFE: TRIAL: CORRESPONDENCE: DIARY

AND

PRIVATE MANUSCRIPT FOUND AMONG HIS PAPERS,

INCLUDING HIS OWN ACCOUNT

OF

THE RAID ON LAKE ERIE

(Pencil not in Congressional Library Copy)

By Daniel B Lucas? Yes, later mentioned.

Montreal - Printed by John Lovell, St. Nicholas St.
1865

Born "Walnut Grove" farm near Charleston, County Seat, Va.?, Jefferson County near Harpers Ferry - January 1, 1835. University of Virginia three years, beginning 1852. Only diploma ever received, page 4 & 5.

Thus, without counsel, and debarred from those opportunities for defence which, before civil tribunals, are allowed to those charged with the highest crimes known to the law, was Beall being hurried to his preadjudged doom. At this juncture James T. Brady, Esq., although not permitted by law to receive any compensation for his services, generously came forward, and undertook the defence. Those who had long admired the intellect, were now taught to appreciate, with equal admiration, the courage and generosity of James T. Brady. 'Tis something to be a great lawyer, but a much higher attribute to be a good man. This is a truth which history has continued to illustrate from the career of the first Public Accuser

of the French Revolution to that of the present Judge-Advocate-General of the United States.

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Fort Lafayette, 14th Feb. 1865.

Mr. James A L McClure
Baltimore, Md.

Dear Sir;

Last evening I was informed of the finding and sentence of the Commission in my case. Capt. Wright Rives, of Gen. Dix's staff, promised to procure you a copy of the record of my trial.

I am solicitous for you, who represent my friends, to have one, and to attach this statement to it: "Some of the evidence is true, some false. I am not a spy nor a guerrillero. The execution of the sentence will be murder:" and at a convenient season, to forward that record, and statement to my friends.

I wish you to find out the amount of the expenses of the trial, and forward it to me at once, so that I can give a check for the amount.

Capt. Wright Rives assured me that my friends could have my body. For my family's sake, please get my body from Fort Columbus after the execution, and have it plainly buried, not to be removed to my native State till this unhappy war is over and my friends can bury as prudence, and their wishes may dictate.

Let me again thank you for your kindness, and believe me to be now, as in days of yore, your attached friend.

John Y. Beall.

The following extract from the eloquent letter of Albert Ritchie, Esq., to Mrs. Beall, which will be found published entire in the "Correspondence," furnishes a most interesting and reliable account of the unavailing efforts made in her son's behalf between the day first fixed for his execution, and the period when the final order therefor was carried into execution.

"On Wednesday morning preceding the day first fixed for the execution of his sentence, Mr. McClure, who had previously been permitted to see him at Fort Lafayette, received the information by telegraph of the finding of the Commission, and of the order to carry into execution the sentence on the following Saturday.

He immediately retained the professional services of Mr. Andrew Sterrett Ridgely, of Baltimore, for the purpose of having the case presented to the President, that he might procure if possible at first a respite, and then a commutation of sentence. Mr. Ridgely entered upon the case with the utmost possible zeal, and we three having passed the day, and most of the night in such preparation, as we deemed the emergency required, Mr. Ridgely went to Washington on Thursday morning. In the afternoon of Wednesday Mr. McClure received a telegram from Daniel B. Lucas, urging him to use every possible means, and spare no efforts to prevent the execution of the sentence. Several dispatches of a similar character were received from Mr. Lucas during the succeeding days.

On Thursday morning, February 16th, Mr. McClure received a letter from John in which he announced his conviction and sentence. .....

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This letter was answered by telegraph through Capt. Rives. He instantly thought that nothing could give to the President a clearer idea of the polished character, and manly tone that John possessed, than the simple reading of this letter - and I went at once to Washington to have it

presented through Mr. Ridgely. Mr. Ridgely, however, had returned to Baltimore before I reached Washington, so that I was obliged also to return the same night. We had immediately an interview with him, to ascertain the result of his visit, and efforts. He brought us no encouragement. Friends at Washington had interested themselves, and had appealed to the President even before Mr. Ridgely's arrival; and in his interview with that gentleman, he was positive in his determination not to interpose against the order, and judgment of Gen. Dix, with whom, without the active interference of the President, the case entirely rested.

At a late hour of the night we roused from his bed one of our personal friends, Mr. Francis L. Wheatly, a gentleman of influential associations in Washington, and told him that we wished him to go over in the morning. He responded with the most willing promptitude, and throughout the whole period of anxiety and effort, down to the last moment, manifested the utmost interest and zeal.

Mr. Wheatly and myself went to Washington on Friday, February 17. We there met at once with the cooperation of several gentlemen from New York, who had come on to Washington, representing the anxiety felt by a number of their friends in the former city. Acting together we secured the additional professional services of Mr. O. H. Browning, Ex-Senator from Illinois, and an intimate personal friend of the President. In the meantime, we learned that many others, very few of the names of whom we were able to ascertain, had taken a deep interest in the case, and that several interviews had been had with the President. We learned, however, that among those who saw the President, were, Mr. Mallory of Kentucky, in company with several ladies, and Mr. Hendricks of Missouri. Mr. Browning, like Mr. Ridgely, entered upon the case not only with his professional ability, but with his personal feelings zealously enlisted. While he prepared in his office a statement to be laid before the President, we invoked the influence of our

friends in Congress, and immediately placed in their hands an application asking a commutation of punishment. To this application we secured the names of more than ninety members during the day. The Rev. Dr. Bullock, of Baltimore, had also come over to use his influence in John's behalf. We heard through every hour of the day, also, of the interest manifested, and exertions made by others - strangers to us, and strangers to John, except so far as he was known to them by the appreciation they had formed of his character, and by those sympathetic ties which unite the generous, and hightoned, no matter what may be the differences of political or religious creed.

Late in the afternoon Mr. Browning, two gentlemen from New York, and myself went to the President.

Mr. Browning had an interview with him of more than an hour's length. He told us when he returned, that he felt assured the sentence would not be carried into execution on the next day; but could give us no idea of the probable period of the respite, which he thought would be granted.

Mr. Ridgely came over from Baltimore late in the evening, and in company with several other gentlemen who were deeply interested, we consulted in Mr. Browning's office, in regard to the further measures it was desirable to adopt.

On Saturday morning, February 18th, we received the gratifying intelligence, that a respite had been granted, but whether for any particular length of time, or indefinitely, we could not tell. Mr. Browning endeavored to see the President during the day, that we might be informed in this particular, but was not successful. In our final interview with Mr. Browning, on Saturday afternoon, we asked to know fully and frankly his opinion of the prospect before us in endeavoring to secure a commutation of sentence. He told us that he had little hope that we would be able to accomplish more than the respite; but added that if we could obtain the approval of Gen. Dix, he felt assured the president would commute the

sentence.

Mr. Wheatly and myself returned to Baltimore, leaving Mr. Ridgely in Washington with the assurance from him, and from Mr. Browning that nothing there should be left undone. From Baltimore, we immediately proceeded to have such measures taken in New York, and such considerations connected with the case presented to Gen. Dix, as would, we trusted, induce him to recommend, or, at least approve a commutation.

On Monday morning, February 20th, Mr. McClure went to Washington to advise with Mr. Ridgely, and Mr. Browning, while I remained here to procure letters to Gen. Dix, and to others, whose counsel and influence we deemed valuable, should it be found necessary to go on to New York. On Monday evening I received a telegram from New York which brightened our hopes; on Tuesday evening, after the return of Mr. Ridgely and Mr. McClure another, which was discouraging. It was then thought best that I should go to New York to ascertain, if possible, the exact position of the case there, we having been still unable to learn the precise character of the respite.

Hearing at a late hour that you were in Baltimore, Mr. McClure and myself at once endeavored to find you, but only to learn that you had left the city. I went to New York on Wednesday night, and soon after my arrival Thursday morning, February 23rd, I was startled by the rumor that the sentence was to be carried into execution on Friday, Feb. 24th, the following day. The announcement was made, I believe, in but one of the morning papers, and in that one not officially. I immediately inquired at the office of that paper the authority upon which the statement appeared; but receiving no clear information, went to the Head Quarters of Gen. Dix. I there found that the fact confirmed the rumor, and that the order actually had been issued. I presented my letters, and had an immediate interview with Gen. Dix, the result of which convinced me that as far as we relied upon him, "there was

not" - in his own words - "a gleam of hope," and that there was no hope but in Washington. Other appeals to Gen. Dix continued, I believe, through the day, but I felt that my own personal resources were exhausted, and that I was helpless for the accomplishment of any other service than the discharge of those offices of friendship, which the most trying hours of our life require. Gen. Dix tendered me a pass very promptly, adding at the same time, that while he had been strict, in order to prevent intrusion, any one whom Capt. Beall wished to see, would be permitted to go to the Island.

I at once telegraphed to our friends in Washington the information I had received, and to Mr. McClure in Baltimore, telling him to send Mr. Ridgely and Mr. Wheatly to Washington, and himself to come on to New York, that we might both be prepared, when the last hope died, to carry out what had been our purpose from the beginning - which was, should it be impossible to arrest the coming of that hour, to at least share it with him if permitted. Those gentlemen went instantly to Washington, and in common, with many anxious and earnest friends, labored to the last, as if for a brother or a son. Mr. John S. Gittings, of Baltimore, who, from the beginning had manifested the most active interest and kindest feeling in behalf of John, went in company with Mr. Ridgely. Mrs. Gittings, Mr. Montgomery Blair, and Mr. Ridgely called upon the President at a late hour on Thursday, February 23rd, evening. The President, by his messenger, inquired of Mr. Blair the purpose of his visit, sending word at the same time that if it related to the case of Capt. Beall, he could not give an interview. Mr. Brady went on from New York Thursday night - Mr. Griffin, of Baltimore, went also to Washington on Thursday afternoon. Mr. Brady, in company with Mr. Francis Blair and Mr. Stabler of Montgomery County personal friends of the President, and Mr. Wheatly, called upon Mr. Lincoln at an early hour on Friday morning, February 24th. There had already been two companies of gentlemen to see him on the same mission; whether they procured an interview or not, I cannot say - but Mr. Brady and the gentlemen with him

were informed by the President's private secretary, that the case of Capt. Beall "was closed," and that he could not be seen any further in reference to it.

Mr. McClure, in company with Mrs. Basil B. Gordon, reached New York, from Baltimore, on Friday morning. Mrs. Gordon, at a very early hour, had an interview with Gen. Dix, and appealed to him in John's behalf, in the most earnest manner.

It will thus be seen that no stone was left unturned to obtain a reprieve, and to the extent of a short respite these efforts were successful: during this respite every legitimate means was resorted to to influence the President or Gen. Dix, either of whom had the power to interpose between the sentence and its victim, but all intercessions were vain. For days before the execution the President closed the doors of the Executive palace against all suppliants, male or female, and his ears against all appeals, whether with the tongue of men or of angels, in behalf of his unfortunate prisoner. From the first Mr. Lincoln had responded to all applications for his interposition, - "Gen. Dix may dispose of the case as he pleases - I will not interfere". Gen Dix, on his part, replied, "All now rests with the President, as far as my action is concerned there is not a gleam of hope!" Thus they stood as the pillars of the gallows, on which Beall's fate was suspended, and between them he died. The credit, if any, in resisting all appeals for mercy belongs jointly, in whole or in part, to both; and in the same manner, the infamy, if such attach to the execution, pertains in the same undivided, indivisible estate to both. There was one expedient which might have proved successful had it been adopted: that was to have purchased the more influential of the Republican journals of New York over in favor of mercy. There was one influence to which President Lincoln never failed to yield when strongly directed against him - the voice of his party;

this he did upon principle, as the head of a popular government. It was in response to such partizan appeals that Fish, Ex-provost Marshal of Baltimore, who on conviction of open and shameless bribery, and peculation was sentenced to the penitentiary, obtained pardon; while Gen. Paine, found guilty before a military tribunal of ontraging all the proprieties of war upon the persons, and property of women, children, and other defenceless non-combatants, succeeded by similar means in propitiating executive clemency. Unfortunately neither Beall nor his friends belonged to the Republican party; hence the doors of mercy were closed against him.

RAID ON LAKE ERIE

Immediately on my arrival in Canada I went to Col. Thompson at Toronto, and made application to start a privateer on Lake Huron. He informed me of a plan to take the Michigan (14 guns) and release the Confederate officers confined at Johnson's Island. I immediately volunteered, and went to Sandusky, Ohio, to meet Capt. Cole, the leader. We arranged our plans, and separated. Cole stayed at Sandusky. I came to Windsor to collect men, and carry them to the given point. On Monday morning we started, some from Detroit, some from Sandwich, some from Amherstburgh. When off Kelly's Island, I seized the "Philo Parsons," and mustering my men, found only some twenty there.

We went back to Middle Bass Island to procure wood and wait for the time when the steamer "Island Queen" came up, and we took her. I then started back to attack the Michigan, when seventeen of my twenty men mutinied, and refused to go forward, and this necessitated my turning back, thus abandoning Cole to be hung, a most cowardly and dishonorable affair.