



Basil Hall

Courtesy of John Prorise

The Photograph of Bazil Hall

BY WILLARD J. WEBB

Bazil Hall was a prominent landowner and a notorious character in Arlington during the latter half of the 19th Century. He arrived in 1850 and lived here until his death in 1888.¹ This photo is the only known image we have of Bazil Hall and it came to Arlington only recently. How the photo was obtained is an interesting story.

Several years ago, on a morning when I was volunteering in the Virginia Room of the Library, a woman arrived who was visiting the area from out of town. Marilyn Dock of Tulsa was doing genealogical research on Bazil Hall and his family. She believed she was descended from a sister of Bazil (it turned out to be an aunt). Since I had just finished researching and writing an article on Mary Ann Hall, Bazil's sister, Judy Knudsen asked me if I would help Marilyn.

I got out all the material I thought would be helpful, including Don Wise's fine article, "Bazil Hall of Hall's Hill," in the 1979 issue of the *Arlington Historical Magazine*; Bazil Hall's disposition for the Southern Claims Commission after the Civil War when he was seeking recompense for damage to his property during the war;² vertical file materials on Hall and his house; and a draft of my Mary Ann Hall article.³ Marilyn copied much of this and went away happy.

About a year later, Marilyn emailed me to say she was returning to the area and would like to look at the Hall material again. She asked me if I could meet her in the Virginia Room and assist her. Again, she looked at all the Hall articles and documents. Don Wise's article included a photo of Bazil Hall's tombstone in Oakwood Cemetery, which is a joint marker and includes both his first wife, Elizabeth, and his second wife, Frances. Marilyn was interested in this tombstone. She was staying with cousins in Bethesda and had come to the Arlington Library on the Metro. Could she get to Oakwood Cemetery on Metro, she asked? Yes, I replied, but it would be long walk up Sycamore Street and I volunteered to drive her there. It would be a learning experience for me. I had often passed Oakwood, but never gone in and, of course, had never seen the Hall stone.

We did go to Oakwood and, after some searching, found the Hall stone. On the base of the stone was a small oval bronze medallion, which appeared quite new with no patina. It bore the inscription "Ship Brooklyn, February 4, 1846 – July 31, 1846." Marilyn and I looked at each other and asked: "What was the Ship Brooklyn and what did it have to do with Bazil Hall?" Neither of us had a clue.

On returning home, I searched the internet for the Ship *Brooklyn*. I discovered that it was a sailing vessel that left Brooklyn, New York, on February

4, 1846, with 238 passengers, all Mormons bound for California. At the time when they departed California was part of Mexico and the Mormons hoped to find a more tolerant place to settle. The voyage on the crowded ship proved extremely arduous. Bitter weather along the coast of the United States was followed by terrible storms that wracked the vessel as it rounded Cape Horn. Food and water were exhausted, and several passengers died during the voyage. After sailing to the Sandwich (Hawaiian) Islands, the *Brooklyn* finally reached *Yerba Buena*, the Mexican name for San Francisco, on July 31, 1846, only to discover that California now belonged to the United States.⁴

The web site provided a complete list of the passengers of the *Brooklyn*, but did not include Basil Hall. Nor was there any mention of him in all the information about the *Brooklyn* and its voyage. Was he a member of the crew? In his statement to the Southern Claims Commission, Hall stated that he had been a whaler out of Massachusetts and spent time in South America and California. The web site showed that there was a Ship *Brooklyn* Association and listed the officers. I emailed the president and posed my questions about Hall and his connection with the *Brooklyn*.

Some weeks went by and one day I received an email from Kerry Petersen in Palmer, Alaska. Kerry is a "senior researcher" with the Ship *Brooklyn* Association. Kerry explained that among the *Brooklyn*'s passengers were George Winner and his wife Mary Ann and their seven daughters, ranging from Elizabeth, 17, the eldest, to baby Sarah, age 4 months when the voyage began. In San Francisco, the Winners found Basil Hall and, within a month, Basil and 17-year old Elizabeth married. It was the first non-Catholic wedding in California and the celebration lasted a week. So it was for Elizabeth Hall that the medallion was placed on the Hall gravestone.⁵ When, how, and why Basil and Elizabeth came to Virginia in 1850 is not explained in available sources.

Kerry Petersen is descended from a sister of Elizabeth Winner Hall, and he put me in contact with a distant cousin, John Prosisie. John, a great, great grandson of Basil Hall, grew up in Arlington and attended Wakefield High School. He then moved west and now lives in Idaho. John sent the photo of Basil Hall that he had received from an elderly aunt.⁶

The original of the photo is obviously in bad shape and our copy is a scanned one received via email, so the quality is poor. In the margin at the bottom of the oval photo is printed "Photograph by PERKINS & CO. 520 Seventh St. Washington, D.C." A search of the DC city directories found that Perkins & Co. was located at the Seventh Street address in the years 1867-1869.⁷ Since Basil Hall was born circa 1808-1809, he would have been about 60 when this photo was taken, though he appears much older.

This photo is a valuable addition to our collection of images of 19th Century Arlingtonians and we are extremely grateful to John Prosize for providing a copy for the Arlington Library Virginia Room photo archives.

Notes

¹ For an account of Bazil Hall's life in Arlington, see Donald A. Wise, "Bazil Hall of Hall's Hill," *Arlington Historical Magazine*, Vol. 7, No. 3 October 1979, pp. 20-28. Although Hall's tombstone, pictured in the article, shows his name as "Basil," most contemporaneous sources use the "Bazil" spelling.

² Bazil Hall, Extract of Testimony, Southern Claims Commission, 1871, Virginia Room files.

³ See Willard J. Webb, "Mary Ann Hall, Arlington's Illustrious Madam," *Arlington Historical Magazine*, Vol. 12, No. 4, October 2004, pp. 24-33.

⁴ Inez S. Davis, "The Good Ship Brooklyn," in *The Story of the Church*, published on the Internet, <http://www.centerplace.org/history/misc/soc/soc38.htm>; The Ship Brooklyn Association web site, <http://www.shipbrooklyn.org>.

⁵ Email, Kerry Petersen to author, "Bazil Hall and the Ship Brooklyn Passenger Elizabeth Winner," February 20, 2006.

⁶ Emails, John Prosize to author, "Bazil Hall," April 25, 2006 and July 9, 2007.

⁷ DC City Directories, 1866-1870, Washingtoniana Room, Martin Luther King Library.