

# Notes on Two Arlingtonians

BY PAUL COVEY\*

BASIL HALL

Justice of the Peace, Washington District

Basil Hall was a retired sea captain who came to Arlington about 1852. Richard Smith sold him 327 acres of land in north Arlington for about \$3,000. This land had been owned by Peter Van Ness, who was deceased at that time. Hall's first wife, Elizabeth, died in 1857. All of the children by that marriage also died. An interesting story about his wife's death is that she was thrown onto a hot stove by a colored woman and was burned to death. An old family book states that the colored woman was tried for this crime, but no record has been found of the trial. Later, so it is said, the woman was hung in Alexandria.

During the Civil War, the Union Army retreated to a spot near Hall's home. The soldiers felt that Hall was hiding Confederate spies, so they burned his house to the ground.

Hall married a second wife and they had six children who all lived. When Mr. Hall began to sell this land which is located approximately from the corner of Glebe Road and 16th Street to Lexington Street, then northwest to 22nd Street, southeast to Lee Highway, and back to the corner of Lee Highway and Glebe Road, he sold the largest parcels to his children. These usually contained over 20 acres. Mr. Hall sold one acre blocks to some of his ex-slaves in the northwest corner of the land. This was the beginning of what is now known as Hall's Hill.

In 1888, Mr. Hall died. In his will he gave the four older children \$300 and a piece of land, and to the two minor children he gave \$10 each. Walter Hall received the family home. In 1900, it was purchased by the father of Mrs. Ross O'Donoghue, the present owner of the house which is located at 5137 - 16th Street, North. This is the house that Mr. Hall moved into after his first home was burned. It is near Arlington Hospital but cannot be seen from 16th Street. It is located in a green meadow which is surrounded by woods. As I approached the house I had the feeling that it looked just as it did when Mr. Hall lived there, except there was a car sitting in the driveway. There is a porch which runs across the entire front of the frame house. As I stepped inside the front door, I felt that I had crossed a time barrier and had entered

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\*Paul Covey, a junior member of the Arlington Historical Society, did the research and wrote these sketches while in the fifth grade at Woodlawn Elementary School in Arlington.

the original Hall household. The floors appear to be the original ones; some of the doors are the ones that were put up by Mr. Hall. The first floor rooms are filled with antiques from Mrs. O'Donoghue's family, the Hunts. These are undoubtedly as old as the furniture that Mr. Hall himself had, and they are very beautiful. On the second floor there are beamed ceilings which made me wonder if this might have been a remodeled barn which had been converted into a house after the original one burned.

After Mr. Hall's death, several stories grew up about him. One was that he would never allow anyone to sleep in the room in which he finally died. Also, it has been said that ghost carriages have been heard coming to the door at night.

There was a family cemetery in which most of the Hall's were buried, but the graves have been moved to Oakwood Cemetery in Falls Church. There Basil Hall lies, with both of his wives beside him. Behind Trinity Presbyterian Church, I found a stone wall which may have been the wall which surrounded the cemetery. I believe this because I read a book which was written by Mrs. O'Donoghue's father in which he said that the cemetery was a "stone's throw" from the original house which was close to the site.

#### ROBERT S. LACEY

Robert S. Lacey, a Union soldier, was born in Cadiz, Ohio, in 1832. He came to Arlington after the Civil War in which he was a Captain in the Quartermaster Corps, operating in the area of Richmond-Appomattox and in Appomattox.

After the Civil War, with his back pay, Robert S. Lacey bought several hundred acres of land—the major portion of this land held a mortgage. This does not indicate that he was in need of money, but shows that he was wise enough not to use all of his money for one purchase but used it for making purchases of other properties.

Captain Lacey held no political office. He was well known for his generous nature having given land for cemeteries, including the Mt. Olivet Methodist Church cemetery, and several streets, including Fairfax Drive. Two streets at one time were named for him. North Frederick Street was once called Lacey Street, and so was North Vernon Street. Lacey was also a station on the railroad to Falls Church and Fairfax.

Lacey's home was situated on 14th Street and is still standing. This was the only house he had. No record of a marriage has been found. In his will, nephews are mentioned. Lacey died in 1916 and was buried beside his brother, Anderson Lacey, just inside the north gate of Arlington National Cemetery. In Captain Lacey's will, he gave his nephew, a Mr. Johnson, 50 acres of land and the Lacey home.