

## George Henderson

George Henderson and Fannie Jones were married on Tuesday, January 12, 1870. The day of the wedding, George and his good friend, William Nelson, made plans to commit a robbery. They decided they would wait a couple of days and meet on Friday to break into the Lansdown bar & store, known as Davis and Lynn Tavern. On Friday night, they broke into the bar and carried the loot to the Henderson house where it was later found by the sheriff. It is not known if good police work was used, or someone told on the pair; however two days after the robbery, the sheriff and deputy were at the Henderson house to make an arrest. Upon entering the house, they saw all the stolen items were laid out on the bed. According to the Alexandria Gazette, "Henderson's wife, who is of respectable parentage and possesses some beauty, is greatly horrified at the conduct of her husband."

In the 70 years the jail was in use, some prisoners came and left without a footnote in history, but Henderson was not one of them. As unusual as planning a robbery on the day of one's wedding might be, it's not the focus of this story.

If one were to accept in entirety the articles written in newspapers and court records, Henderson was surely a man of enormous strength and one of the strongest men ever to occupy the Brentsville jail. It is not known if all the cells were full, but Henderson and Nelson were housed together. After a few weeks, they decided they would break out of the jail. Henderson, as the records state, removed one of the bars with his hands and started removing the bricks with his bare hands.

The jailor, W. N. Tansill, heard an unusual noise and came in time to catch the pair just before their escape. He immediately put them in chains; but, to his amazement, Henderson "with his naked hands snapped one of the chains entirely in two pieces." Tansill, with the help of an unnamed constable, was able to find another chain for Henderson and secure him in another cell.

Was George Henderson a man strong enough to pull bars from his cell, remove bricks with his hands, and snap a chain into two pieces with his bare hands? Or were the bars loose, the bricks in need of repair, and his chains inferior? I would like to think the former is true.

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