

## The Tale of Samuel Hawe

Samuel Hawe, a free person of colour, was arrested, but he wasn't worried. He knew something the sheriff didn't know. John Williams, the county clerk of Prince William County and one of the victims of his thievery, pleaded with him to tell the whereabouts of his horse. He said nothing. His counsel tried to talk him into implicating others in order to reduce his sentence. He still didn't talk. After all, they didn't know it yet, but he knew they would never get him to the penitentiary. The guards would be overtaken when they tried to transport him from the Dumfries jail to the Haymarket jail to await his trial at the District Court. If not, then he would be broken out of jail before he even went to trial. After all, this was part of the gang's creed.

To Samuel's surprise, he made the trip to Haymarket without incident. He was not as sure about getting off as he had been while confined in the Dumfries jail. However, in his first few days in the new jail, he was contacted and given assurances by Ned Tolbert and his brother that they would testify in his behalf at the trial and all would be ok. He should keep quiet; but if convicted, they and other gang members would ambush the sheriff and guard on the way to Richmond. The Tolbert brothers were white and not only fellow gang members but considered to be in charge. They lived and operated what they considered a business near the Occoquan Mills in the lower part of Prince William County.

The trial commenced at the district court in Haymarket about 100 feet from where he was imprisoned in the jail. Not only did no one come forward to testify on his behalf, but the state had talked one of his co-conspirators into giving evidence against him.

Nelly Bullitt, a free person of colour, lived in Dumfries and had been an intricate part of the gang. In transporting the stolen goods north to south and the reverse, the thieves made the transfers at her house. They would also use her house to store objects that could be sold at a later date. Nelly, although she never personally stole any goods for the gang, certainly knew Samuel Hawes' part in the grand scheme. In the trial for a favorable punishment, she told enough to get the conviction against Samuel for the commonwealth.

In the words found in the court minutes, "Samuel Hawe, late of the Town of Dumfries in the county of Prince William, laborer, otherwise called Samuel Hawes who stands convicted of horse stealing was again led to the bar in custody of the keeper of the public goal and thereupon it being demanded of him if anything further for himself he had or knew to say." Upon Samuel's not speaking, he was sentenced to eight years in the penitentiary house of the commonwealth. Then, adding something that was not suspected, he was to serve the first one sixth in solitary.

It was still a long way to Richmond. Samuel, after all that had happened, believed the Tolbert brothers and some of the others would not let him reach the penitentiary. It was a very uneventful ride to Richmond and then on to prison. He was beginning to think that not talking was as bad an idea as trusting the Tolbert brothers.

Just two months into solitary confinement, Samuel told the guards he wanted to make a statement and tell all. He would give the names of the others and tell where the stolen property was located. A man by the name of Martin Mimms took the statement and put it in the form of a letter to Governor Cabell. Samuel started by saying that he was admitting to his part in the thievery; and although he would like a lesser sentence, he did not expect one. He belonged to a gang of thieves that included white men, free people of colour and slaves. All were by today's standards exceptionally loyal to each other. No one in the group had ever gone to jail or at least not for long. All, upon joining the group, had sworn an oath: "to be true to each other and steal all they can & to make an equal division, one with the other, of all the profits arising from their

different species of plunder. They would get a bill of sales for all, any and everything they steal, that they wanted a bill of sales for, from the white men, which they have ready to shew, if called on whenever they attempted to sell & generally two or more of them go together, & very frequently one of the white men, in order that if any suspicion should arise of the horses &c. being stole they may manage so as to swear the one that attempts to make the sale clear, or the property to be good, so as to clear the one charged. Then when they steal a horse or horses, whose to the north or south of Dumfries, meet at Nelly Bullets generally, or at Jno Belford's near Falmouth in order to make exchanges of their different species of property. Those that have stolen to the north will receive from those from the south, what they may have stolen & carry to the north & those from the south; run the property stole from the north southwardly so as to keep up a continual trade."

He went on to name the following people as being the members of the gang of thieves: Ned Tolbert and his brother, whose name was not given but both lived near Occoquan Mills; Thomas Bows, a Free Negro, living in Dumfries; David Arston, a Free Negro, living in Federal City; John Lenard a white man, living near Federal City; William Goleman, a Free Negro, living near Richmond; Nelly Bullet, a Free Negro Woman, living in Dumfries; John Belford, a Free Negro man, living near Falmouth; Jesse Tyler, a Free Negro man, living near or in Fredericksburg; a Slave Negro man, belonging to James Hays in Dumfries, whose name he forgot but thought it was James but described as dark, 5 feet 8 inches high and about 30 years of age and "nockneeded"; and other slaves, belonging to James Hays, but did not know their names.

The 1806 letter, written by Martin Mimms that relayed information from Hawe, was sent to Governor Cabell. Hawe revealed that many of the above were involved in the stealing of John Williams' horse but David Arston and William Goleman ended up with the mare. The two took the horse to within four miles of Culpeper Courthouse, and either swapped or sold her. Also revealed was the theft of a bay horse with saddle and bridle still on the horse, stolen in the Federal City just above the President's House "near the seven buildings." This horse was then resold to Thomas Cary, a barber in Fredericksburg who was to keep the saddle and bridle for Hawe to pick up at a later date.

It is not known what action was taken by the governor as the lack of records doesn't afford us this. One would hope that John Williams and the others had their property returned.

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