

The Murder of Thomas Turner

Thursday the 28th day of August 1856 was not a typical day in Brentsville, the circus was in town on the green and crowds of people were moving about. Most I'm sure were happy but little did anyone suspect that this would be a day few would ever forget.

James Cornwell, according to some, had been in town at least two days and was drunk most of the time. He was known to be a hard working family man on most occasions but as folks here knew, that with a few drinks, that could change. On this day he had complained that some people had tried to "blacken him" and he wasn't going to be taken advantage of. Along about sunset he found his way to Davis' where tonight Mrs. Davis was tending the bar. He was only there for a little while before he threatened James Fair and then got into a fight with John Renoe. This fight was broken up by Wm. Renoe and Thomas Turner. William took John Renoe outside. About a half hour latter James got mad at Thomas Turner stabbing and killing him with what is described as a 25 cent knife.

James Cornwell was charged with 2nd degree murder, convicted, and sentenced to 16 years in the state penitentiary. There were a lot of mixed feelings that the sentence was too harsh and within months the citizens had started to circulate petitions to get him pardoned. A couple of times it seemed that Governor Wise was going to issue the pardon but retreated. When Governor Letcher took office the petitions started again with Wm. Brawner and Eppa Hunton leading the charge. On the 23rd day of January 1861 and being over 60 years of age he was pardoned and returned to Prince William County.

Ron Turner