

gued that Barclay had neither been in Virginia nor harmed anyone. She blasted Virginia's governor: "You are making radical abolitionists faster than scores of Northern lecturers could do it."

Governor Samuel Kirkwood rejected the first requisition to extradite on the very narrowest of technical grounds. By the time he reluctantly accepted the second, Barclay had given into pressure and left Springdale for Chicago. The Coppoc affair received national attention and fueled Southern thoughts of secession.



Barclay Coppoc

When the Civil War came, 22-year-old Barclay served in a Kansas regiment as a lieutenant and came home to Springdale to enlist recruits. Returning to Missouri, he was on a train that plunged into the river after Confederate guerrillas set the bridge on fire. He died the next day. ❖

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This text blends excerpts from two *Palimpsest* articles by Richard Acton: "An Iowan's Death at Harpers Ferry (Winter 1989); and "The Story of Ann Raley: The Mother of the Coppoc Boys" (Spring 1991).

Politics Be Hanged

Editor's note: Many ardent abolitionists also championed temperance. In this account set in Davenport, one cause is sacrificed for the other in order to save Barclay Coppoc. The story is credited to "Mr. James Thompson, a Scotchman by birth and a merchant tailor by trade, and an all around gentleman of the highest type."

Sitting one evening in my shop, then over [a] book store, late in the fall of '59, an acquaintance came in and abruptly asked me if I had heard that [Barclay] Coppac was in town. Now this man knew me for an old Abolitionist, and I knew him for a whole-souled, dyed-in-the-wool old Democrat, but yet we were very good friends for all that; rather fond of a social chat and a social glass. Judge, then, how the cold chills ran down my back, when I say that at that moment Coppac was within forty feet of where we stood, and I knew it! With a government reward for his arrest, and this loyal Democrat on the war-path, hunting up this rumor, [Coppac] might be discovered. Something must be done, and quickly.

After a second's thought, and a turn or two across the floor, I carelessly answered him: "Oh, pshaw! who cares for Coppac; politics be hanged. Let's go out and take a walk." Knowing his weakness for good eating and drinking, we strolled down Second street and into a famous restaurant of those days, where some choice spirits used to meet, and where some choice "spirits" used to vanish, too.

Well, suffice to say that we whiled away that evening without once mentioning Coppac or politics either, until "the wee short hour ..." when each took his respective road home. ...

"[We had] just had plenty," at least he had, to make him forget all about Coppac, the fugitive slave law, or the ten commandments; which was the little game I had been playing for all the evening, and won it, too.

In the meantime Coppac, that very night, or rather morning, this being the second night he had lain concealed in a little room just back of my room, left town in the care of two young men, both Quakers, born in Philadelphia, both abolitionists, and true as steel. One was a nephew of Adams, and a cousin of Coppac, the other a land agent, but at the time kept a confectionary store under Bailey's Hall, Brady street between Third and Fourth. Coppac arrived safely at Springdale (Cedar County) where his widowed mother lived. ...

To only two individuals did I mention the above incident until some years after, and but to a very few since. To my friend whose patriotism was quenched that night, but not in water, I have never lisped a word on the subject. ... Both the persons to whom I did tell it were old conductors on the "underground railroad," and both strict temperance men. But both were pleased at the use the spirits (if bad) were put to that night. One still lives in Davenport. The other has "gone over to the majority."

But it was very amusing to see the twinkle in the eyes of John L. Davies as in his earnest manner with knit brows, clenched fist, and stammering a little on the first syllable, as he always did when he wanted to knock you over with a conviction, he exclaimed: "I d-don't like liquor. I d-don't use the stuff; b-but I would rather like to have done that myself. You d-did perfectly right under the circumstances. G-God bless you, Bishop."

Source: August Richter Collection, State Historical Society of Iowa (Iowa City). The text has been broken into additional paragraphs for ease of reading.