

Rendition Foiled

The dangerous flight through the mountains of western Pennsylvania was only the beginning of Barclay Coppoc's battle for life. Scarcely had he reached home when his presence was betrayed to the Virginia authorities. Governor John Letcher, just entering upon his first term as chief magistrate of Virginia, was anxious to prove himself a true defender of the honor and safety of his State. Accordingly, on January 23, 1860, his agent, C. Camp, appeared at Des Moines, bearing extradition papers for the rendition of Barclay Coppoc, reputed to be a fugitive from justice in Virginia.

When the Virginia emissary presented his papers, however, Governor Kirkwood refused to honor the requisition. There were several reasons. In the first place, the affidavit alleging that Barclay Coppoc was guilty of an offense against the State of Virginia was made before a notary public instead of a "magistrate" as the law required. Moreover, the document was not authenticated by any official seal as it should have been. How could the Governor be sure that it was genuine? But even if it were authentic and legally drawn, the affidavit was "fatally defective" in not charging Coppoc with the commission of treason or any

particular "felony or other crime." It merely asserted a belief that he had "aided and abetted John Brown and others" without offering any evidence in proof of that assumption. Even if the allegation were true, that act in itself was no crime. And finally, Governor Kirkwood maintained that the requisition was defective in not showing that Coppoc was in Virginia at the time he was supposed to have violated the laws of that State. How could he be a fugitive from justice in Virginia if he had not been within the jurisdiction of that State before, during, or after the raid? The affidavit offered no proof that he had ever been in Virginia or that he had fled from justice. If he had not participated in the raid he could not be guilty of any actual offense, and the laws governing the rendition of criminals did not appear to apply to the "constructive" commission of crimes.

Considerably surprised and much nettled by the attitude of Governor Kirkwood, the Virginian undertook by dint of argument to convince the Governor that he was wrong, unjust, and incidentally perverting the letter of the Federal Constitution and the statutes of Congress. Kirkwood was firm, insisting that no chief executive could legally or justly honor such a demand. Mr. Camp raised his voice as his indignation swelled, but his expostulations were in vain.

During the progress of this discussion, B. F. Gue and another member of the legislature

chanced to enter the executive office. When the Governor advised the excited Virginian to keep the matter quiet, Camp replied that he did not care who knew it since the request had been refused, and continued his emphatic demands, arguing that Coppoc would escape before corrected papers could be obtained. With a significant glance at the two legislators, the Governor replied that there was a law under which Coppoc could be arrested and held until the requisition was granted.

The intruders felt that there was not a moment to lose if they would save Coppoc from his threatened fate. Hastily communicating with several other members of the legislature, it was decided to send word at once for him to flee from the State. A message to John H. Painter of Springdale was then prepared; and in less than two hours after the two men had left the room of the Governor a messenger was galloping eastward on his one hundred and sixty-five mile ride. His instructions were to reach Springdale as soon as the endurance of the horses furnished at the Underground Railroad stations would permit. It was confidently expected that Camp would take the first stage for Iowa City, thence to Springdale, and there arrest Coppoc before he could be saved. As the stage travelled day and night, it was imperative that the warning should reach Springdale as soon as possible.

On the morning of January 25th the messenger arrived at Painter's, delivered his message, and warned Coppoc and his friends of the impending danger. Camp, upon reaching Iowa City, heard of the preparations for his reception in case he should appear in Springdale, so he prudently passed on to Muscatine to await the arrival of corrected extradition papers.

It is related that after a time he grew impatient at the delay and obtained the aid of the sheriff of Cedar County to arrest the fugitive. The sheriff understood the situation perfectly. At Springdale he went up and down the street asking in a loud voice of every one he met if they had seen Barclay Coppoc, and saying that he had a warrant for his arrest. But no one knew where Coppoc was. Barclay was actually sitting quietly in his mother's house, while the sheriff looked everywhere else but there. There is another story to the effect that Camp himself repaired to Springdale and there actually saw Coppoc, but was afraid to arrest him. And he had good reason for his prudence.

Soon after Coppoc returned to Springdale a number of his friends, hearing that a United States marshal was coming to the village to arrest him, had organized an armed association for his protection. Relays of these men were constantly on duty to prevent surprise. Many people urged Coppoc to go to Canada, or at least leave home

since that would be the first place the authorities would look for him. But Barclay steadfastly refused to flee, saying, "I have done nothing criminal, nothing that I am ashamed of. Why should I hide, or run away to Canada?"

To further insure his safety only a few of Coppoc's most trusted friends knew continually where he was. He was never seen at the same place at night as during the day; and rarely was he seen at all even by the few trusted friends. After the message came from Des Moines, the vigilance was redoubled. Coppoc was seen less than before, and he was always under heavy guard. Measures were also taken to send him into Canada at a moment's notice, in spite of his own objection.

The corrected extradition papers were received by Mr. Camp at Muscatine on February 10, 1860, and, upon presentation to Governor Kirkwood, being found satisfactory, were promptly honored. Camp, however, instead of hastening at once to Springdale in order to serve the warrant, timidly returned to Muscatine from Des Moines.

Upon receipt of the news of the arrival and honoring of the corrected papers, word was again sent to Coppoc and his friends at Springdale. On the evening of the day upon which the messenger arrived a sleigh might have been seen hastening toward Mechanicsville. This sleigh contained John H. Painter as driver, and Barclay

Coppoc and Thaddeus Maxson as passengers. The arguments of friends had at last convinced Coppoc that he must flee, though he strongly objected to a proceeding which to him seemed cowardly. Since he had but lately suffered from a severe attack of asthma as the result of his exposure in the mountains of Pennsylvania, he was barely able to take care of himself. Thaddeus Maxson was therefore selected to accompany and care for Coppoc in his flight.

Boarding the night train at Mechanicsville, Maxson and Coppoc took passage for Chicago. From Chicago they continued to Detroit, intending to cross into Canada. Upon their arrival at Detroit, however, word was received from the Brown boys asking them to come to Ashtabula County, Ohio. There they remained for more than a month. "Well armed and thoroughly disguised," they eventually proceeded to Columbiana County where they remained with friends several weeks before venturing to return to Iowa.

Despite the harrowing experiences he had endured, Barclay Coppoc was not one to forsake the cause he espoused. When the Civil War began he went to Kansas where, on July 24, 1861, he was commissioned lieutenant in the Third Kansas Volunteer Infantry. This regiment was commanded by Colonel James Montgomery, well known for his prominence in the Kansas war.

Coppoc was authorized by his commander to

enlist recruits for the regiment and with this purpose in view he returned to Springdale where he secured the enlistment of eleven young men who had been his schoolmates. While returning to Kansas with these men, his life was brought to a tragic close. As the train which was bearing him and his companions to Kansas was crossing the Platte River near St. Joseph, Missouri, the bridge, which had been partially burned by rebel guerrillas, gave way, precipitating the cars into the river.

Coppoc lived until the following day when he succumbed to the injuries received. His remains were buried with fitting military honors in the beautiful Pilot Knob Cemetery at Leavenworth, Kansas. Cedar County, Iowa, has not forgotten the sacrifice made by her valiant and patriotic son, and graven with the names of other Civil War heroes upon a commemorative shaft in Tipton, Iowa, may be read the name of Barclay Coppoc.

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