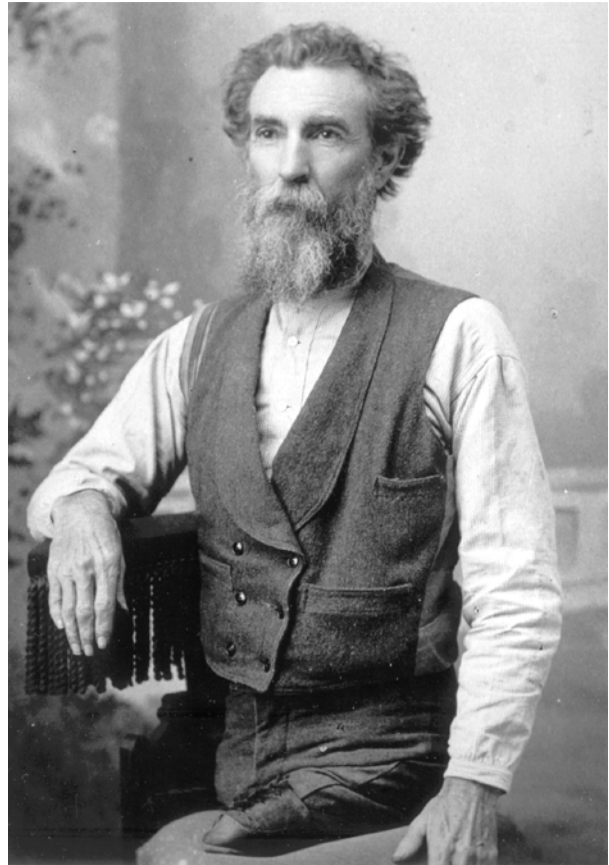


ABRAHAM “ABE” BONNIFIELD
MARCH 15, 1837—JULY 6, 1890

Abraham or “Abe” Bonnifield is one of the better known Bonnifields due to his many adventurous exploits despite his birth defect of being born without legs. Abe was the sixth child of Arnold and Elizabeth (Minear) Bonnifield, born on March 15, 1837 on his father's farm on the Horse Shoe Run in what is now Tucker County, West Virginia. As an adult he stood three feet tall and seldom weighed over seventy pounds; although at one point he did weigh up to 112 pounds. One of Abe's school teachers described his birth and early childhood as follows:³⁸

Abraham Bonnifield, of Tucker County, Virginia, was born at the present residence of his parents on the Horse Shoe Run, not far from its entrance into Cheat River, March 15, 1837.

This singularly interesting and promising young man made his advent into the world without legs; which fact was unknown to his mother for several days after his birth, as it was deemed expedient not to apprise her of it in her enfeebled condition. But she afterwards confessed that she saw by the anxiety depicted in the countenance of her husband and the family attendants, that there was something unusual connected with the child. The father might be seen pacing to and fro—sitting absorbed in deep thought, then suddenly starting to his feet and walking forward as without a motive, and after a few days his violent grief gave way to calm resignation. Then he deemed it best to break the mournful tidings to



Abraham Bonnifield—photo circa 1880. 74-1

the other. When he had told her the child was deformed, she immediately asked if it had no feet. He answered in the affirmative. As to the cause of his being born without legs no reason can be assigned, but the will of Heaven. Neither of his parents nor others who saw him thought he could survive for any length of time. They fancied he would possess no means of locomotion and consequently could not live for want of exercise. But time passed on and the little fellow not only lived, but

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grew well and rapidly and appeared to prosper as well as any child possessing all its members. At the early age of six months he could sit alone and amuse himself with playing; and before he was a year old, to the great joy of his parents and friends, he could move across the floor, not only with as much celerity, but also with as much ease as any other child.

His mind developed with the growth of his body, and at an early age he could speak distinctly; and it was apparent to all who saw him that he was a boy of an excellent understanding.

The amusements of his early years were similar to those of other children. When very young he commenced mechanical operations by whittling sticks into curious shapes. At this he would be employed for hours at a time. Finally he rose with a natural gradation to making little sleds and wagons, with these he spent much of his time. The first two years of his life were passed without his seeming to notice his deficiency of members or to perceive that he was not as other children. At the age of two years and a half his mother called him to look at his little sister [Ann Zilletta Bonni-field], then an infant, only a few days old. After admiring her for a few moments he very sagely inquired: "Mother, who made sister's feet?" "God made them, my child." He replied: "I wish God had made feet for me like sister." He sat for a few moments as if in deep study; when his mother made no reply he turned again to his toys on the floor. He was never known to murmur or repine at his misfortune and seldom would he talk upon the subject unless introduced by others, and even then he manifested unwillingness.

On one occasion he requested someone to carry him to the barn

where the men were thrashing [wheat]. On receiving an evasive reply he said "If I had the feet as you have I would not ask you to carry me."

From some cause his parents neglected to give him a name. When he was old enough to understand conversation between others, on a certain occasion a friend called in and spoke warmly of a benevolent act which a certain neighbor had done the day previous. After the friend had left he inquired who it was that had performed such an act of kindness and was told that it was Abraham Parsons [Jane (Parsons) Bonni-field's uncle]. After a moment silence he said: "Well Mother, that shall be my name." His parents not being particular about the matter had him christened Abraham according to his wish. Having two brother and three sisters older than himself who deeply felt his misfortune, he was by them indulged in almost every request he made. Though his parents wiser in their judgment than they, considering his future happiness of more importance than his present gratification, deemed it their duty (though a painful one) to correct his faults and reprove him for a wrong done, the same way they did the other children. Though when he was reproved it was not without the tears of sympathy from the older children. His parents very seldom had occasion to reprove him as he was strictly obedient to their commands. [Arnold and Elizabeth also did not let the other children over indulge Abe, for they knew that he had to get along on his own if he was to survive to adulthood.] When commanded to do or not to do he would scarcely ever make any reply, but obey immediately. Very early in life he manifested a predilection for humorous and laughable tricks. One of the first of the kind in which he engaged was that of har-

nessing a favorite cat to a wagon of his own making; but to his surprise the otherwise docile cat refused to tug in her trace, and made a violent and successful effort to free herself from his service; and to his no little chagrin and mortification she made good her escape to the woods harness and all and was not heard of for a week afterwards. But perseverance was always his prominent characteristic, and he resolved not to be defeated—so he set himself to work and made an outfit for his favorite dog, Gunner. This Gunner proved more tractable than the cat had done and for several years was his constant companion wherever he went; and often bringing home for his young master the hickory nuts and chestnuts which he gathered in the groves.

As soon as he was able to handle a gun, shooting game became his favorite amusement. Often would he spend the entire long day in search of squirrels, rabbits, and pheasants, accompanied by his youngest brother [Allen Henry “Dock” Bonnifield] who assisted him in carrying the gun and procuring the game. Very triumphantly would they return home at night with their game swung over their shoulders and many were the adventures they would have to relate of running rabbits into hollow trees and of smoking them out with torches. During the fishing season he engaged himself equally well in that favorite pastime. A string of trout was the almost certain result of a fishing adventure. . . .

His sister Sarah Jane described some of Abe’s non-conventional fishing methods to her husband Rufus in a letter dated July 10, 1853 when Abe was sixteen years old: “. . . Abram has caught some beautiful perch since your were here. Shot them with your Shot-gun.”

The following year in 1854, Abe was interested in collecting and clarifying “sang” or wild ginseng, which was some what profitable selling the ginseng to the Chinese. More of Abe’s character is further described in the continuing narrative by his teacher in Abe’s autobiography:

As before stated, numerous tricks and laughable mischief were a prominent trait in his character. One out of the many in which he indulged, I will relate. The first school he attended was under the tuition of his oldest sister [Mary Katherine]. He kept a kind of three-legged stool for his own use. One day, when his mind was more burdened with mischief than usual, he persuaded two of his school mates (boys about his own age) to come and sit with him on his stool taking care to keep the greater part of it for his own use. When they were fairly seated and crowded to the right end of the stool, he suddenly leaped off, thus overturning it and tumbling them head foremost into the floor, to the no small merriment of the other scholars. Many similar capers might be related, but this must suffice for the present.

When he first commenced taking his hunting excursions, he never rambled far from home for fear of being lost in the woods, nor would he tarry long lest he might cause his parents uneasiness, knowing they were always concerned for him in his absence. On one occasion, having rambled about a mile from home, and being much amused by the variety of scenery, and absorbed in the pursuit of game, the time passed more rapidly than he was aware of. On hearing the dinner horn blow and supposing the time far too soon for dinner, he imagined that the family had missed him, and not knowing whither he had went were alarmed for his safety and were out in pursuit of him. He instantly dropped his gun

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and game and made all possible haste homeward, when he arrived exhausted and almost breathless, expectation to find the family in consternation, but to his no small relief he found the men quietly sitting down to dinner. His mother, alarmed at his excited appearance was impatient to learn what had happened to him.

He greatly delighted in domesticating birds, squirrels or anything of the kind he might chance to get hold of. He often had a variety of these pets as he termed them. In one of his rambles along Horse Shoe Run he found a nest of young otters in a stack of drift wood. The dam plunged into the water leaving her young ones which were not able to follow. He sat for several hours awaiting the return of the dam thinking her regard for her young would induce her to come near enough for him to shoot and carry home so rich a prize. But no sooner did she raise her head above water than she discovered her enemy still near, and was in an instant down again. Finding his efforts to decoy the mother hopeless he laid down his gun and made his way to the nest, captured the little ones and bore them off in his hat with all the exulting triumph of a miniature Nimrod. He had now a new source of amusement. He first busied himself in preparing a box with a nice bed in it for them to sleep in; and next to invent some plan to feed them. This he did by making a wooden cup with a handle on one side and a little spout near the bottom of the other side, the end of which he wrapped with soft linen. This invention answered the purpose of a nursing bottle admirably. His next work was to examine the encyclopedia to ascertain what kind of food was best adopted to their nourishment. This ascertained they were now his constant care for a fortnight. For several

days they seemed to do fine, but soon it was evident they did not grow any. A short time passed and it was discovered they were actually growing smaller. He again examined the encyclopedia—changed their regimen—but all to no purpose. They soon lost all vivacity and it was manifest they must die. Though his sisters tried to make him believe that they would soon become immune to their food and do well enough, he replied that “since their tails became so slim he had lost all hope.” And his conclusion was correct, that night death put an end to their piteous cries.

But these pastimes were not permitted to be his constant employment; but rather his recreation; for early was he taught the importance of proving his mind and storing it with useful knowledge. His parents sought the earliest opportunity of sending him to school. The first school he attended was a quarter of a mile from his fathers house. By the assistance of the other children he was enabled to attend regularly during the summer. He learned rapidly and in an unusually short time was able to read correctly. His three elder sisters taught school at different periods both at home and in surrounding neighborhoods, and he attended their schools whenever it was possible for him to do so. One session of four months he walked a distance of three quarters of a mile and was always found at his seat in due time, notwithstanding the weather was often unfavorable. When he arrived at an age capable of reflection he began to devote his mind as eagerly to study when out of school as at any other time. Thus, in the midst of the difficulties that are always to be encountered in a thinly settled mountainous country, he toiled on little by little, till he acquired a tolerable practical education.

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St. George Academy incorporated on July 20, 1885 by William H. Lipscomb, John J. Adams, Bascom B. Baker, Ezekiel Harper, Sansome E. Parsons, Wilson B. Maxwell, Adam C. Minear, & William Talbott. The school ceased to operate in June, 1893. Although Abe's school days ended before this academy was founded, he attended a similar school in St. George. Academy is now a museum—photo taken August 1998.

His riper years were characterized by many novel anecdotes one or two of which I will relate. In the summer of '52 while away from home going to school his sister inquired one Sabbath morning if he was going to accompany her to church. He replied that she had not prepared his clothes to suit his fancy. She insisted upon his going but he refused; but as soon as she was gone and fairly out of sight on her road to church he followed at a distance and concealed himself near the chapel and listened to the sermon. Taking care to start home again before the congregation was dismissed and he actually succeeded in landing home again without any one knowing where he had been. When his sister arrived to her astonishment he repeated the text and good part of the sermon. When she afterward learned what he had done she inquired the cause. He replied that "though his shirt was not fit to go to meeting in yet it would do to hear a sermon in, provided no one could see him for," continued he, "had

I went into the congregation with this shirt on it would have affected my hearing so that I would have been none the better of the sermon, but by keeping myself in secret I enjoyed the benefit of the discourse."

The last school he attended was in St. George, the country seat of Tucker County, in the year 1855. This school was composed principally of large scholars, and there prevailed a general emulation throughout the school for priority in the different studies. At the close of the school there was an examination and a committee appointed to decide who should have the premium. After an impartial hearing he was pronounced master of the day, and I could not but think it was an equitable decision. I was particularly struck with the manner in which he read. The piece he selected was one of considerable length and of such a nature that it required the utmost calmness and fortitude to preserve an equanimity of voice and at the same time observe its different moderation which

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are essential in forming a good reader. When the time for reading arrived the teacher remarked that the day was rapidly passing away and that it was desired that there be as much brevity in reading as possible, and that he hoped the scholars would read in quick succession, one after another, thus leaving them to decide who would take the precedence. The eyes of all instantly turned upon, Abraham as much as to say give us a start, for you have more moral courage than we. After waiting sometime for some older than himself to read the first piece he advanced with calm steadiness and mounted the rostrum. He commenced with a clear audible distinct voice; as he advanced the embarrassment he would unavoidably feel under such circumstances soon left and with a voice full, melodious and clear he read page after page and not one of the audience appeared to grow weary. When he concluded there was an expression of general satisfaction throughout the crowd. The approbation he received at the close of this school seemed to inspire him with fresh courage and to impart increased zeal to his diligence in pursuit of knowledge. After he had been at home several days he remarked to his sister that he had resolved to make a man of himself if hard studying would accomplish it. He remarked that for sometime past he had been trying to decide what profession would be most congenial—he had finally concluded to be a physician.

He accordingly commenced a series of reading and applied himself diligently for two-thirds of each day for six months, when he came to the conclusion that a thorough classical education was first necessary; but how to obtain that he saw no possible chance for want of means. His fruitful imagination, however, went to work to

devise some means by which to obviate the difficulty. To work he could not—to beg he would not. To travel in a show he had thought of, but knowing the prejudice existing in the minds of his parents against this plan he feared to mention it to them lest it might grieve them. But not daring to undertake it without their consent he summoned courage enough to make the proposition. He was at first opposed; but his parents having ever cherished the fond desire of giving him a thorough education and their circumstances being such that they could not accomplish it by their own means, and considering the laudableness of his motive and pleased with his indefatigable perseverance they finally gave their consent. He accordingly set a time and made arrangements for leaving the home of his youth and on the 15th of January, 1857 he bade adieu to parents, friend, home and all that was dear to him on earth and launched into the unknown world, direction his course he scarcely knew whither; trusting himself in the care and protection of that God who had given him being.

As mentioned earlier, Abe liked to joke around. One day he was passing by Jim Goff's cabin on a hot day and saw six or eight little kids playing in the water, "naked as the day they was born." When Abe came home, he told his sister Sarah about seeing the gang of naked children playing in the water, and she asked him: "Was they girls or boys?" Abe answered: "How could I tell? They didn't have any clothes on."³⁹

Abe further detailed his early travels in his autobiography:

Like most young men, I had long cherished a desire to see something of the world. This desire was now about to be gratified. On the 13th of Janu-

ary, 1857 I set out with my brother David to see an Uncle in Missouri. When we got as far as Wheeling I formed the acquaintance of A. J. Mayo, and went with him on exhibition. Our first trip was from Wheeling to Zanesville, Ohio. From Zanesville we went to Newark. Here Mayo left us because we did not prosper according to our expectations. He was very kind to me. From Newark we went to Columbus, where I joined P. Hanes and travelled with Corbin and Densons Indian troupe. We travelled mostly in Ohio—six weeks in Indiana and a few days in Michigan. I saw plenty of drunken fights in Indiana. With regard to the people of Indiana I was greatly disappointed. I had expected to find them to some extent at least a noble and intelligent people; but during my six weeks travel among them I saw nothing scarcely but mud, poverty, whisky, drunken fights and depravity. I am satisfied that Indiana has the right name; for in their love for whiskey the inhabitants are more like Indians than civilized people. But what I saw I am persuaded was not a sample of the state. I am happy to think so at least. My pleasure in travelling was even greater than I anticipated. I saw much to improve my mind, and even from those shameful instances of depravity which so frequently occurred, I drew moral instructions which I will not soon forget. . . .

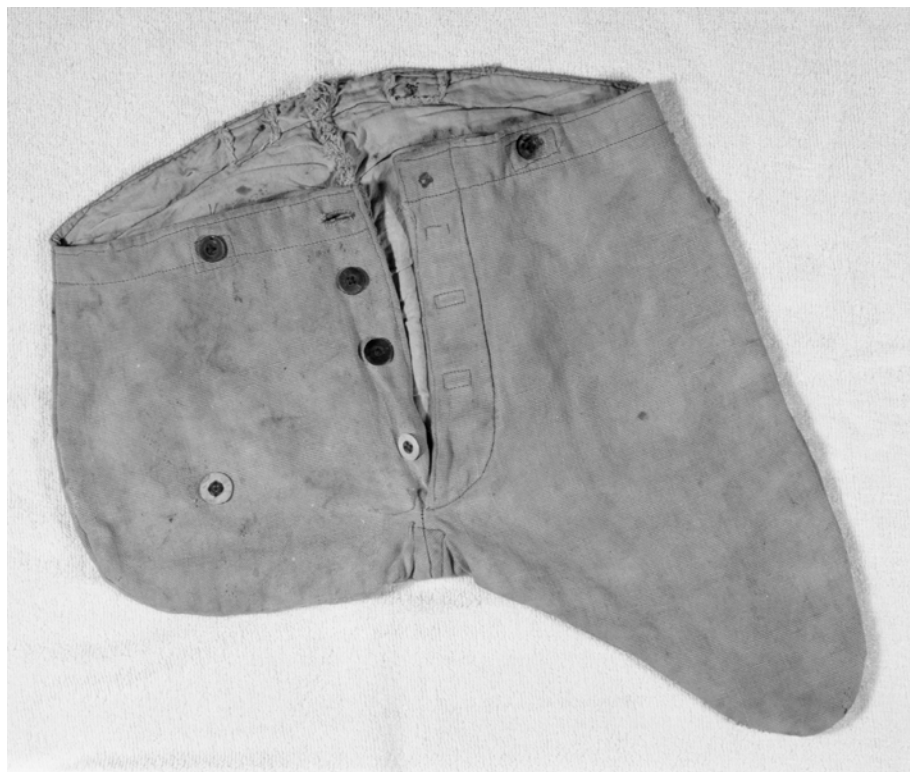
Hu Maxwell, Abe's nephew, further described Abe's traveling adventures; the first mentioned being an incident with the Indians in Corbin and Denson's Indian Troupe:⁴⁰

The main feature of the show was the Indians. They soon became fast friends with Bonnifield, and would do whatever he told them to. By taking

advantage of this, he created a big disturbance in camp one night. The Indians were lounging about on their blankets, some asleep and others not, when he offered three cents to one if he would bite the chief's toe off. The chief was asleep, but his toe protruded from under the blanket. The Indian snapped it up in his teeth, and probably would have gotten it off if the chief had not happened to awake at that moment, and set up a terrible yelling and flouncing about so that he pulled loose from the Indian's teeth. The fight became general, and the war-whoops rang through the town until the people thought the world must be coming to an end.

He passed over into Canada, and wandered up and down over that desolate wilderness of pine trees. Canada was at that time a great rendezvous for negroes who had escaped from slavery in the United States. Small colonies of these runaways were found at intervals throughout that country. It was a bad place for them. The land was poor and the winters were long and cold. The negroes were not prospering. They were too lazy to work much, and were trying to make a living by manufacturing soda from ashes. They lived in miserable log huts, and poverty and forsakenness was written on every door, and was visible about the premises everywhere. "Hello there!" said Bonnifield to an old negro who was trying to hoe his patch of corn, that was hardly knee-high at the middle of August. "Hello there! you old black scalawag, don't you wish you were back in Virginia twisting tobacco for your grub?" The negro looked up and seemed to be startled; then leaning lazily on his hoe-handle, he answered with a sigh: "Deed I does."

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Pants of Abe Bonnifield.
Note buttons along bottom
that held Abe's shoe in
place—Photo taken in 1992.
19-3

In a letter to Mary Katherine Bonnifield, Abe's sister Sarah Jane describes how the Bonnifield family looked on that evening of January 14, 1857 after Abe and David departed to Ohio and on to St. Luis, Missouri in the road show. Sarah Jane also recounts some of Abe and David's travels:

If you want to know how we all look this evening imagine my two chaps asleep in the bed, myself sitting in the fire corner next to the looking glass—humped up doing nothing—can't pick up my work—Rufus sitting by my side—as usual with little to say—Bet [Betty, one of the slaves] laughing big and knitting little by his [Rufus] side—Jack [another slave] and Doc [Allen Henry] sitting in the other corner making an ox yoke—the shoemaker up stairs—David, Abraham and George Hesslet just left today for the far west [Ohio and St. Luis, Missouri—Bonny [Arnold Taylor Bonnifield (second cousin to Allen Henry)] took them

to Rollsburg—Father gone to see Al Dumire's sick child—Mother to see John Lipscomb's sick wife—nobody here last night. . . . We were loth to see the boys start, but I believe nobody took a cry except father and the shoemaker. You can't think how bad the boys hated to start—though they tried to conceal it. George Hesslet almost gave out going after he had packed up and had his clothes on to start.

July 10, 1857:

Father came home from Rollsburg yesterday very tired and is not rested yet. I recon you will be surprised as we were to hear that David paid us a flying visit. He came home on Friday a week before the 4th and left the Tuesday after the 4th. He left Abraham near Cincinnati one morning and the next day got home. Abraham was well. David came home on purpose to see how things were progressing and to

see us. He would have stayed at home until after harvest if Father had requested him, but we would rather have him return to Abraham. They are travelling with an Indian Show consisting of 10 Indians, one of whom is a chief, another a squaw, one a graduate of some northern college and five of them raw from Indian land and as savage as monsters. They are all kind to Abraham and very fond of him. One of them gave him an Indian bead money purse. Abraham sent it to Mother, also 10 dollars in 3 cent pieces to pay postage on letters to him. . . .

. . . Mother has a big fat mountain girl hired, one that knows how to stand one half her time, sit the other half and walk from one house to the other the balance. She is as stupid as Peggy Gower multiplied by (mutilated CJM [Charles Joseph Maxwell]). . . .

Sarah Jane (Bonnifield) Maxwell to her sister Ann Zilletta Bonnifield, Dec. 19, 1858, Bonnifield Mills, Tucker Co., Va:

. . . Of course you know Abraham came home last Wednesday fat, ragged & saucy. Brought you the prettiest little silver watch with gold hands and two port monies, one of them the prettiest thing you ever saw, you & Dorcas ear drops, beautiful in the extreme. You a pair of silk mitts, extremely handsome. My Lettie [Ann Zilletta Maxwell, age 3] very nice little bob pops. She says she will have her ears pierced when she goes to meeting [church meeting]—he brought all of us something very nice—the shoemaker a watch with a great heavy gold chain. He brought his book home again. . . .

. . . Abraham scolds plentifully about your leaving Mother lame—says he will go down to see you, but I know he won't. He drinks coffee equal to anybody, weighs 112.

Mother's leg is better, but she is nearly worked to death. Father grunts and lays round on the floor all the time nearly.

Sarah Jane (Bonnifield) Maxwell to her sister Ann Zilletta Bonnifield, Jan. 2, 1859:

. . . Bet went up to meeting Saturday then up to Notts and spent the night, Abram & George went to the party last week and hadn't got home yet. Jack went to help Dianner pull taffy, all the rest went home and Rufus went out to Bonny's [Arnold Taylor Bonnifield] and me and the other brats went up and staid with Gran. Mothers leg is so she can hobble about right smart, Abram walks round sits around stands around, creeps around, lies around and then can scarcely keep the blues away arms length; the Shoemaker is trying hard to get right with Betsy Ann again, he says he & Abram will come to see you in two weeks—but I reckon they will go "next week at middle day." Abe & Emily [Parsons, Jane (Parsons) Bonnifield's uncle & aunt] have gone to Washington on their visit. Abe's Wash [Washington Parsons] has another girl [Emeline], Wash says he would a heap ruther it would a bin a boy. . . .

Abraham Bonnifield to his sister Ann Zilletta Bonnifield, Jan. 2, 1859:

As Sarah is tired I shall just give you all she don't know. 1st. she don't know half how bad I have the blues and next she don't know one quarter how bad I want to see you. I'd heap rather see you than the prettiest girl I know of, I think I shall come to Hampshire some of these sometimes. Tell for a little party news, we have had a busting time down at the party for the last two or three days. I just went to see how they did have parties in

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Tucker any how, to say the least of it, it was the most fancy table that I ever saw in Tucker and from beginning to ending (I saw it all) it beat the very D--l himself. There was only three girls there. Cass [Catherine Minear], Jane Malcom and Jane Kalar. I never seen Miss Malcom before and I came mighty nigh fallen in love with her. I do think she has the sweetest little mouth in Tucker. Oh it is so pretty! but as nice a mouth as she has it won't go off for her, she can't talk much and that about suits me for I like to talk too well. She has the St. George Shoemaker, Stewart, for a protector at the party. Cass had Lewis Stump, Jane Kalar, Cousin David. I and Sam Ewin were partners and had a good old time of it. I enjoyed myself first rate outside and inside too when supper came. I'll bet I didn't eat no oysters nor one thing another. I was up to see Sally Ann and stayed all night with her. she talked lots and I like her first rate. I was to see Adaline yesterday. I saw B that done me just as well. I do think there is more stupid folks in Tucker than all the rest of Tuckers in the United States. I would rather have some of them spit in my face than spin a long yarn to me about their fast hounds, fat cattle or long eared mules. I have no idea of staying here more than some weeks or so. I have seen none of the up the river folks since I came home nor don't know as I shall soon. Cass is teaching school at Bethel, she went up there yesterday. I'll bet she has a sweet old time of it this winter as she has some thumping big boy scholars. Adaline is going to teach up at Kalar's. I hope she will learn something for I rather think she don't know much. I told Ad that I was coming up to see her when she got to teaching. (Yes, I should like to have just anybody come up to see me from down this way. I wouldn't care who it was—ahem thinks I, you

think I am just any body and you don't care who it was. Hesler is some struck after all the girls in general and Betty in particular. I hope he will make a go at it if he does. I mean to just go down there and raise thunder. I do wish I had something to do so as to keep off the blues. What must I do Lettie you know and tell me. I think I shall be in Hampshire before long. I stayed all night with Betty Barman the other night. She don't like me very much I don't think, though she didn't say so. Write to me and tell me a thing or two and when I see you I will tell you a thing or two.

Sarah Jane (Bonnifield) Maxwell to her sister Ann Zilletta Bonnifield, Jan. 13, 1859, Cool Springs, Va:

. . . Abram the simpleton is going to N.Y. to practice riding on horseback in a show. He has not even whispered it to them at home, oh I did try to coax him out of the notion but how can you without letting the secret out there. I wish he would take the clerks office, it is worth \$300 a year. He didn't make but two dollars for last summer except your jewelry. . . .

As Abraham mentioned in his letter about the party, he was very interested in girls, but unfortunately due to his birth defect, many were not interested in him, and the few who were most likely could not get past the hurdle of their parents' disapproval, for at that time most all the parents had absolute veto power over whom their children saw and especially married. Abe never did marry, but he did have a romance with a girl in his school class around the year 1855, and he recounted it in his 1859 autobiography:

. . . Yes, reader, I honestly confess it. I did fall in love with a pretty girl—and desperately in love too. And so

deep and intense was my passion that I would have given a whole mountain of California metal [gold] to live forever in her smiles. And some how or other I don't feel much ashamed of it now it's all over and I have gotten safely out of it. But it liked to have killed me while it lasted.

I never knew before that love would make a fellow grow slim so fast. I reckon I must have lost about one hundred and twenty pounds in weight during its continuance, though I didn't weigh that much at its commencement. I supposed if it had continued a little longer that I would not have made a shadow by moonshine. Well, after all I'm glad it happened, for it learned me a great deal about human nature and human life which I never could have learned otherwise, and now I will tell you something about how it happened.

Scene—a school room. About eighteen boys of all ages from six years up to twenty—and of girls some fifteen of similar ages. Some of the girls were tolerable good looking, others not so, and there were two of them just about as homely as they ought to be. Among all these there was one who appeared to form an exception; and to be entirely different from the rest. Miss Charlotte F--- studied in the same class with myself. She was quiet in her studies and frequently pronounced head of the class. She had not the sprightliness and vivacity of some, but was always pleasant and cheerful. she was kind and polite to every one without any effort to be so. Indeed it was her natural element. It was the channel in which her heart moved of itself without any constraint. . . . To me, at least, there appeared an angel-like dignity and loveliness in the expression of her countenance which language must ever fail to describe. and the more intimate my acquaint-

tance with her the more her loveliness appeared. But I am to some extent anticipating my subject. although she was possessed of all these excellencies, I acknowledge I did not particularly appreciate them until after an incident I will presently relate. On several occasions, instead of going out to play with the boys as usual, I had spent the hour of intermission in the school room conversing with Miss Charlotte, and some how or other I had a decided relish for her company; and this relish was in no wise abated by discovering that she appeared to enjoy my company equally well. I took considerable pains to make myself agreeable to her, and thus the time passed pleasantly away without, however, producing any particular change in my feelings, save only that Miss Charlotte appeared more and more amiable with the return of each succeeding day. I highly admired her virtues as far as I understood them. I loved her as a social companion. I was happier in her company than any where else; but other love at this time I had not. If the reader has ever passed through the refining furnace of love he will have no difficulty in perceiving that combustible materials had been for sometime collecting in my heart and every day added considerably to the magazine already stored. The powder, in sufficient quantity was there and the fire not far distant, and it was only necessary to apply the match and a terrible explosion would follow. And this casualty happened as follows:

On a particular day, after we had conversed a few minutes, as usual Miss Charlotte arose, left the school-room and joined the other girls some distance from the school house. Presently a pretty little girl sparkling bright eyes, so keen that they darted volleys of mischief in every direction,

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came running into the school room, and coming close up to me she whispered in my ear: "Abraham, Miss Charlotte loves you." I pretended not to regard it. "Abraham, Miss Charlotte loves you," at the same time jerking my elbow. "How do you know that?" said I, as cool as a cucumber. "Why Sally L. told her so four or five times and she just turned red in the face and wouldn't deny it, and so I know she loves you." This was spoken in a common whisper, but it sounded great deal louder than thunder to me. It rushed like a tornado, not only through my ears and head, but through every part of my frame. I seemed to hear it even in the ends of my fingers. After it echoed and reechoed through me a great many times, the sound at length appeared to settle in my heart, and there I could still hear it as plain as ever. It bounded from side to side of that little enclosure as though there was not room enough to contain it. and I reckon my heart would have split open, but I commenced panting like a lizard on a hot rail, and this afforded me some relief. I sat for sometime spell-bound—or rather love bound. I knew not where I was, or what was the matter. Presently the perspiration broke out in large drops all over me and then my senses slowly returned. My handkerchief was perfectly saturated with the perspiration which I had unconsciously wiped from my face. Sensation strong and new filled my heart—what I had heard was enough and more than enough for me. I was now in a new country and in a new world for every object had changed its appearance. The trees, the fields, the sky and clouds were all dressed in a new garb. The flowers appeared more beautiful and the birds sang with a new and sweeter voice; and to my love heated imagination some of them appeared actually to chirp her name.

I went to the window and looked out on the green where the girls were at play. I saw Miss Charlotte sitting alone occupied with some needle work. she appeared sedate and thoughtful. I rubbed my eyes and looked again to be sure I was not mistaken. It was indeed her, the most lovely object in all creation. And although at a distance of more than fifty yards I fancied I could almost see her lips move while she was sweetly pronouncing the words: "Abraham, I love you," and here, reader, if you will listen to me, I will try to tell my feeling in the passionate language of poetry:

I knew not why but yet the sight
Did fill my heart with strange
delight-
Roused thoughts and feelings fresh
and fair
I never knew existed there.
The distant hills—the clouds and
trees,
And meadows bright with sun and
breeze,
In lovely garments all were dressed
And dazzling in their crimson West.
I wandered in myself to find
Such mystic pleasure fill my mind,
I sought all nature round
But fitting emblem never found.
The flowers of spring and rainbow's
hue
Were in succession brought to
view.
The brightest things of earth and
sky
Now faded in my love charmed eye,
No beauty could attract the sight
But was eclipsed by one more
bright.

I continued for sometime to gaze through the window upon her whom I now felt I loved as myself and reading over in my mind the days of happiness

I imagined we should spend together. I had long desired to be happy. Now, thought I, perfect bliss lies within my reach. I could not believe for a moment it was possible. I should be otherwise than perfectly happy if once I could call Miss Charlotte "My Own." But alas! the old adage that "the course of true love never runs smooth" must again be verified. The sun which just now shone so brightly must suddenly be overcast by a cloud. The trees, fields and skies, which, but a moment since appeared in garments bright and glorious must at once array themselves in shades of sombre hue. While I was indulging in this delightful day dream of superlative bliss—O, horror to relate! a hurried movement was observed among the scholars and a man on horseback suddenly appeared. A hurried voice distinctly pronounced "Charlotte." She sprang toward the rider and in a moment she was seated behind her father and without looking at the schoolhouse they rode swiftly away. To undertake a description of my feelings at this crisis would be but a mockery of words. The whole transaction of her leaving was performed with such rapidity that I could scarce believe my own eyes. It appeared as though I dreamed and she must be sitting there still. I turned to look—but no, she was gone. I strained my eyes in looking after her but she was hidden behind a clump of trees. It was some days before I learned the cause of her hurried departure, which was the sudden illness of her mother. Suffice it to say that the day on which this occurred was Friday and that evening I had to return home and I saw dear Miss Charlotte no more for six weeks after this affair.

But now intermission was over—the school bell rang, the scholars quickly found their seats and study

commenced. But to me the school room appeared empty and dark. The sun shone in at the windows as usual, but it gave no light. The teacher and some thirty scholars were present but I was altogether alone. Of course, with my frame of feeling, study was altogether out of the question—but I must pretend, at least, to be employed. So I took up my arithmetic and commenced a hard question, but I soon forgot what I was doing and before I was aware had written on the slate:

A thousand worlds I'd freely
give

My days on earth with her to
live.

I thought this would never do. I tried it again, but presently I found myself trying to calculate the difference between the worth of Miss Charlotte and all the United States, but the difference in her favour was so great that I had not room on my slate for all the figures and so I rubbed them out. I laid aside my arithmetic and took up my geography but instead of studying my lesson to be ready to recite with the class I got to calculating how many times round the earth I would travel to get my love if I could not otherwise obtain her. Reader, it appeared to me that six times around the world in the biggest place wouldn't be any farther than formerly it seemed from my father's door to the first good apple tree in the orchard.

When we came to recite one or two laughable incidents occurred. The first question the teacher presented to me was this: "How many geographic miles around the world," but my mind was so absorbed about Charlotte and the distance to her father's house, that I answered: "About two miles." This of course, excited some merri-

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ment, and the question passed to the next scholar, and when I awake I found myself one degree nearer the foot of the class. But I presently relapsed into a sort of dreamy muse again. The next time the teacher came round my question was: "How long would it take a man to travel round the world at the rate of thirty miles a day?" My mind still occupied with other matters, I answered: "I reckon about one hour." This was perfectly intolerable, and a roar of laughter succeeded, and I awoke again and found I had reached the foot of the class. The teacher, supposing I was unwell released me from further study that afternoon. For a short pastime I opened my grammar and commenced looking over that, but I could see nothing but the feminine gender. All the nouns and pronouns were of that gender, and even the verbs, prepositions and adverbs appeared to be of the feminine gender also; and it appeared strange to me that I had never noticed it before. I laid aside my grammar and opened a volume of astronomy; but I couldn't help being astonished at the madness of the author in talking so wildly about the sun, moon, planets, etc.; strange, thought I, he should be so infinitely concerned about matters of such little consequence, when one beautiful young lady was worth a million times more than they all. . . .

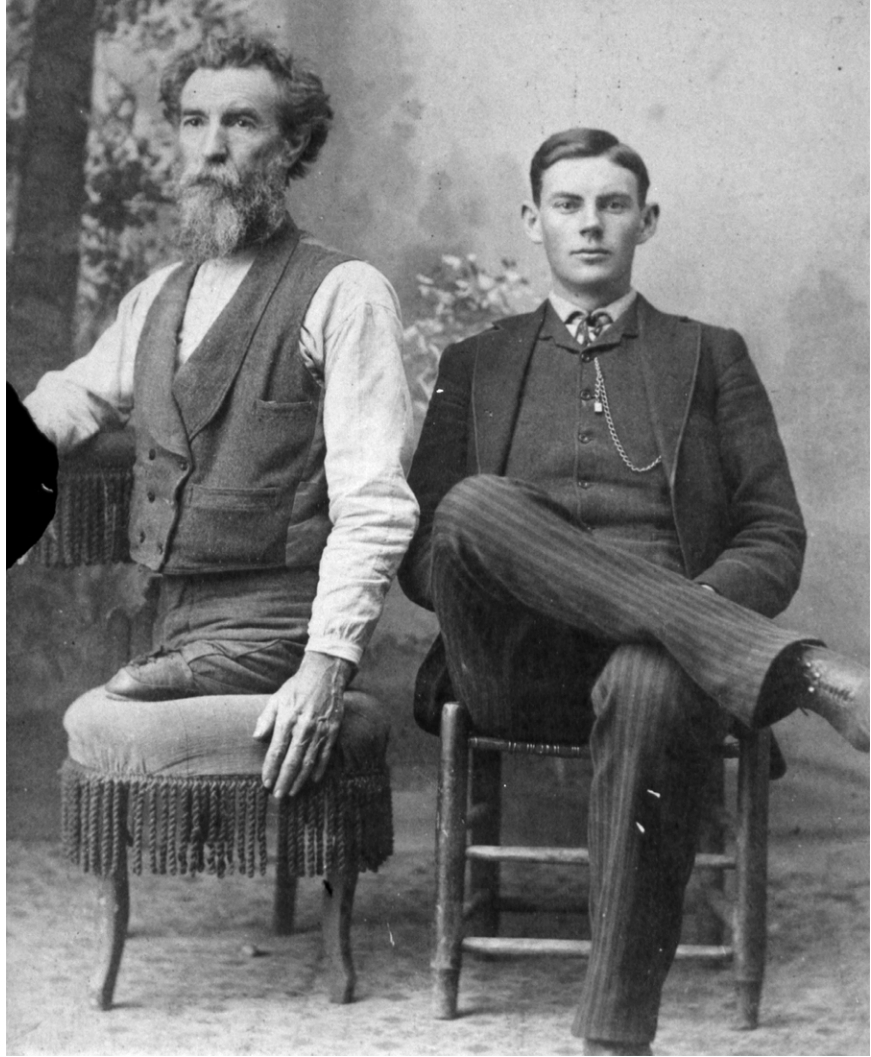
The following week, I was from some cause which I do not now recollect, detained at home; but the second week I returned to school. Not to study as the teacher mainly supposed, but to grieve because Miss Charlotte was not there, and to muse on love and love stories. . . .

For five long weeks did I continue in school grieving on account of my

absent love. They were the longest weeks I ever saw in my life. they appeared more than twice as long as that many years had done before. More than once I was reprimanded by my teacher for inattention. But I had other matters to think of besides getting my lesson. But as the sixth week of her absence drew to a close, report said Mrs. F. was well again, and next Monday Charlotte would reenter the school. This was to my stricken heart like cold water to a traveler in a scorching desert. Sabbath morning I went to church not to hear a good sermon, as I pretended, but to get a peep at Miss Charlotte. But in this I was disappointed, for she did not come. A mischievous schoolmate, who had wickedly guessed at my feelings (for I had told no one) whispered in my ear: "Miss Charlotte is sick." This he did, of course, to torment me; and no one ever succeeded better, for that night I slept none at all. But to my great joy I accidentally learned from the family where I boarded that she was not, but would be at school that day. this so far relieved me that I ate a little breakfast, but not much. From some cause I was now more in a hurry to get to school than I had been for a month. It appeared to me the children would never get ready to start. But at last we got off and arrived at the school house long before school time. After awhile the teacher came. I chose a seat where I could conveniently see Miss Charlotte when she entered without appearing to look at her. By this time the scholars were collecting. As one after another appeared I watched the door like an argus* to get a sight of her. Now three or four came at once, but Miss Charlotte was not among them. Presently I heard the noise of footsteps as if half a dozen or more

*. An argus was a giant with 100 eyes ordered by the Greek goddess Hera to watch Io after he was killed by Hermes. His eyes were put in the tail feathers of the peacock.

Abe Bonnifield with nephew
Max Adams, son of Dorcas
(Bonnifield) Adams—photo circa
1880. 74-2



were coming now, thought I, she will appear. As the door opened my heart ceased to palpitate—but vexation! The first one that appeared was the homeliest girl in school, the next was not much better, and the balance of the company were little boys. Disappointment was still my portion. But again there is a sound of approaching foot steps and again the door opened, but these were Sarah L. and her little sister. again the latch raised and the door swings, but these were Rebecca R. and her brothers. By this time my sense of hearing was tormented into such acuteness that I could distinguish footsteps at an immense distance. Again the sound of

approaching footsteps is heard, and the door opens. But this was John W. He came and sat close to me. I whispered to him as coolly as I could: “Did you hear from Mrs. F. this morning?” (Charlottes mother). “Yes, I was there, she was up again, and the children are coming to school, they well be here directly.” This was good news again. After all the disappointment and vexation I shall see her once more. Hark! there is a noise of footsteps—they are coming—surely they are coming! and my love among them. Again my tortured heart ceased to palpitate and my eyes swam in my head, while with intense eagerness I watched the door. The latch raises, the door swings on

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its hinges and in come her brothers—one, two and then her sister, but Charlotte is not there. The door closes and they take their seats. By this time, love, disappointment and vexation had driven me almost to frenzy. There, thought I, with a heavy but suppressed sigh of unutterable grief after all Miss Charlotte is not coming. Surely something is the matter or she would have come with her brothers and sister. She will never come to school again! I shall see that lovely face no more! Millions would I give were it in my power to see and converse with her once more, but that pleasure will forever be denied me. Despair seemed now quietly settling in my heart. When suddenly! listen do you hear that? surely I was not mistaken. Yes, positively another scholar is coming. I listened most intensely and discerned there were two of them. and, oh kind heaven! could it be possible! the step of one of them sounded like Miss Charlotte, and I would have known hers among a thousand. Every moments they approached nearer. When they arrived at the door they paused a few moments. Had my entire frame been composed of eyes I could not have watched the door more intensely and so keen was my vision that it appeared to me I could almost see through the door. But the latch was grasped. My heart stopped beating and seemed to die within me. The door swings open, and oh! torment unutterable! Sophia B. is there—but she doesn't come in—and surely my eyes did not deceive me; I thought I saw behind her another bonnet, but Sophia still stands there. Why does she not get out of the way that I may see. It appeared to me if I had been near enough I could have thrown her five rods. All this time I was suffering intolerable torment I had no more of breath or pulse than a stone. My brain seemed to swim and I felt a

giddy, sickening sensation and my eyesight began to fail. Then suddenly Sophia moves—the door opens wide—and oh! joy never to be expressed or forgotten! in stepped Miss Charlotte with a countenance glowing with roseate health. And could you believe it, reader, her eyes seemed to fall upon me the moment she entered the door.

Now, reader, just as Miss Charlotte made her appearance and I saw it really was her, I had a most singular sensation which was perfectly new to me, and alarmed me very much; for my heart, which had lain right still for some time, as though it was dead, suddenly made a desperate leap to get out of my mouth, but fortunately my mouth happened to be shut at that time, it stopped in my throat, and I commenced swallowing it down again as well as I could squeezing a little with my fingers to help it along. The time that Sophia B. stood at the door waiting for Miss Charlotte was but a few seconds, but it seemed to me a full month and more, and all this time I had to do without breath. No wonder I became impatient; and I verily believe had not Charlotte appeared just when she did I must have fainted out-right, for I was very near gone. Although this occurrence come very near killing me, yet it so happened it didn't quite do it, and after a while with a good deal of trouble I coaxed my heart to stay down in its own place and then it began slowly to palpitate as it used to. About the same time my pulse commenced responding to the stroke of my heart, and my blood began to circulate with a slow tremulous motion at first, but it soon flowed more freely. Now, I suppose somewhere along there I commenced breathing too, but I forgot to notice that—but it's quite certain I resumed it again before I was too far gone. And very soon after this the perspiration broke out of me in

torrents, and then I soon felt better. I used my handkerchief freely and when I became a little cool, I took three or four good peeps at Miss Charlotte over my book, and soon all the currents of life began to flow quietly in their ordinary channel. Finally, intermission came and with it the pleasure of again conversing with her I loved. By her absence from school she had gotten considerably behind the class. This afforded me a fine occasion for helping her along with her studies. Of course, I was under the necessity of remaining with her every intermission. Again and again did I enjoy this privilege before school closed. And to my no small satisfaction she appeared quite as willing to be helped as I was to help her. Or, in other words she seemed to relish my company about as well as I did hers.

But time rolled on and the last day of school came, which of course, was examination day. At intermission I conversed with my dear Charlotte for the last time. And though I saw her once at a distance yet I have never spoken to her since. In this, our last interview, I fully unburdened my heart and told her as far as language could possibly express as the depth of my affection for her; and we made such promises as none but lovers ever thought of. As I pressed her hand for the last time I saw the large tear drops gather in her eyes, and her sweet voice tremulous with affection, bade me farewell. . . .

The next day which was a beautiful day in October, I returned home and found my father's orchard bending beneath a load of the most delicious fruit, and many an hour that autumn did I spend in it eating fruit and pleasantly musing on the object of my affections. And, here perhaps, I ought to remark that in this love affair I have concealed her real name, and so

shaded the circumstances as to obscure identity. . . .

Born in the days before automobiles, Abraham's main mode of transportation was horseback. His saddle had a brass rail around it that kept him from sliding off. However, despite his lack of legs, he was an excellent horseman, and his learning to "trick" ride in New York may have served him well during the Civil War. He served as a messenger, and when in a tight situation, he rode by enemy lines hanging from the side of his horse—one hand hanging on the saddle, the other holding the reins, no legs to weigh him down or to dangle below the horse to reveal his presents. Thus he evaded enemy fire, for all the enemy thought they saw was a riderless horse. The strength in Abraham's arms were such that he could maintain this style of riding over an hour without fatiguing. Hu Maxwell further describes Abe's involvement in the Civil War:⁴¹

Bonnifield got tired of show-life, and came home. His father was then clerk of the Circuit and County Courts of Tucker, and Abe took charge of the office. He was at this employment when the war commenced. He sympathized with the South; but, he remained at his business in St. George until it began to be unsafe there for a southern man who made no secret of his opinions. On Monday morning, June 10, 1861, just after daylight, about forty Yankees came galloping into St. George, and rummaged through the town in search of Rebel flags. They found one, or claimed they did, and with it returned in triumph to Rowlesburg. Bonnifield was charged with having something to do with the flag, and he was warned by friends that he was not safe. The next we hear of him he was in the South, accompanied by George and Bax

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Kalar, William Talbott and other Tucker County boys.

He remained in the war till the last gun was fired, and then did not surrender, but escaped on horseback from the Valley of Virginia, and when the fighting was at an end he came home. The whole four years that he was in the army was one continued succession of adventures and dashing marches. He was regarded as among the very best riders in the Confederate cavalry. His weight was about seventy pounds; and being thus light, his horse, which was a powerful one, was about the last to give out when it came to a long raid or a long retreat. He remained for the most part in the Valley of Virginia; but he was frequently in other parts. He accompanied the Imbodens in some of their memorable raids. As he was always in the very

front in every kind of adventure, he was often in the hottest part of the battle, and in the foremost rank of the charging columns. If he was cut off from his men, and in danger of being shot, he would throw himself from his horse, hang by his hand to the horn of the saddle on the side least exposed to the enemy's fire, guide his horse with the other hand, and thus escape. In the tumult of the battle the foe would not notice but that the horse was riderless; and thus he often dashed through the very lines of the enemy unseen. Such was the strength of his arms that he could hang by them for an hour without very great fatigue.

He was in front of the pursuit that chased Hunter, and was among the few, who, after a terrible night of marching through the wilderness, got in front of the flying army, and gave



Saddle of Abe Bonnifield. Note the rod on the far side that he use to keep himself from sliding off. Saddle on display at the St. George Academy Museum, St. George, Tucker County, West Virginia—photo taken August 1998.

them the check which well nigh resulted fatally to the Federals.

Bonnifield was not in the battle of Gettysburg; but he joined Lee's army in its retreat before it reached the Potomac, and was with it a few days. He went back to the Valley, and was there when General Early, who had been sent to Lynchburg to drive Hunter out, came down the Valley. He joined Early, and the fifteen thousand men moved off toward the Potomac, and chased General Sigel over the river into Maryland. Early set out for Washington, and got within five miles of the city, when he was obliged to retreat. Thus, Bonnifield was one of the fifteen thousand Rebels who got near enough to see the flag on the Capitol at Washington, and got away. He escaped back to the Valley of Virginia.

When the war ended, Bonnifield returned to Horse Shoe Run, where he has lived ever since, although he has traveled some since then. He visited Washington a few years ago to press his claim for payment for cattle carried off by Union soldiers during the war. He spent some time at the National Capital, and had the satisfaction of seeing how near he had come to taking it during the war.

He has a horse on which he has ridden nearly forty thousand miles. The horse is still living, and is now (1884) over twenty years of age. This horse and its rider are known all over the eastern part of the State; and they have been out of the State more than five hundred times in the last twelve years. . . .

The following Bonnifield family letters mentions Abraham after the Civil War:

Sarah Jane (Bonnifield) Maxwell to Rufus Maxwell, Jul. 10, 1867:

Yesterday Abraham dogged Loshes cattle out of our premises. Bill returned the compliment by shooting his dog. Abe came up a few minutes after the deed was done and was some mad. . . .

Sarah Jane (Bonnifield) Maxwell to her sons Hu & Cyrus Maxwell, Nov. 6, 1883:

Winter in full blast, old as Lapland. The cattle standing around with their backs humped. Nick is building a poultry house for me. Bell Notts has killed 5 "wild turkeys." Abe has lost more than that out of his drove of turkeys. Abe has a new Buck sheep—cost \$40. He looks like a buffalo. . . .

Sarah Jane (Bonnifield) Maxwell to her daughter Dorcas (Maxwell) Lowther, Nov. 19, 1884:

Abe is writing in the clerks office, "learning how." He was the maddest man you ever saw when the "Ring" nominated him and wanted to cut capers but Doc lit on him and made him accept the nomination. He came to your Pap [Rufus Maxwell] with his troubles, and he advised him to not act until his mind became more tranquil. Rufus pitied him so much he had not the heart to electioneer against him. Now Abe is elected and will sit in the office for six years and work hard to make money for Doc's family to live easily on.

Grandpap and Granny sit there all day alone now. Jane [(Parsons) Bonnifield] sits with them but that is about the same. She has a dry fork girl to do her work. Gives her \$1.50 a week.

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Dorcas (Bonnifield) Adams to Sarah Jane (Bonnifield) Maxwell, [no date between 1867-1886]

. . . I just heard a few days ago of Abrahams being so near launching himself into eternity, it made me shudder whenever I think of it. It is too horrid to think of and yet I cannot forget it. It so shocked and grieved me that at first I was hardly capable of attending to my school. I tried to banish it from my mind but it seemed that everything that occurred seemed to lead to the one thing. The class that came up to recite read about the "town pump," the next was "the worm of the still," a third was the "lost child" and so on all day. I have oftentimes looked at Abraham doing things to harden him in sin, and wondered how any rational being could be so spell bound as to rush headlong to everlasting destruction and not to seem to be conscious of their whereabouts.

Oh! how sin blinds the eyes and hardens the heart. I have long felt that there was no hope left us but in prayer, and though I have never ceased to pray that our once happy family might be an undivided family in the upper and better world, yet I must confess that it is with a faith mingled with many doubts and fears. . . .

Abraham Bonnifield to his brother Allen Henry Bonnifield, Aug 15. 1888, at the National Surgical Institute, Indianapolis, Indiana:

I have been waiting for several days that when I did write it would be intelligent and satisfactory. The Drs. have at last told me what's the matter. I don't know the name they call [it,] but [they] say it is the same that Genl[?] Grand [sic Grant?] died with. I suppose Billy Ewin say on general principals it is incurable, though they claim that they have cured several cases, have just been feeling of me up to this

date, and told me that in eight or ten days more they would say whether it was worth while to remain here any longer—or whether I would have to go home and die—I am reduced, weak nervous and writing is a fearful task, need[n't] give yourself any uneasiness about my case, can have a nigger by my side all the time for small extra pay.

I go to my meals and have most of the time since here. My constant pain is not much, only the shots received every four or five days. Treatment has been very mild for the last 12 days, was fixed up to the ice paint, which I have had to apply day and night since Monday week ago. I am but little more encouraged than when I started from home. Only one thing can be done, face the music—. The Drs. have been all the while since here talking of putting me through a treatment on a \$27,000 Battery. I believe in my case this is their greatest hope, but cannot get the sore to the point at which they are willing to make the application or at which they think it would be successful. They tell of many cures of cancer by this wonderful shocking machine, when I came here I thought I was availing myself of the skill of the United States. Dr. Baker advised me one year ago to see a specialist, but I was afraid of his recommendations. I believe that Dr. Allen and Dr. McLean of the firm a men of high integrity and skill. Dr. Wilson, financier of the firm, I don't like. There is one thing certain, they have too many patients for all to receive proper attention. I think there is about 200 now. They come and go every day. Tell Sarah I read her letter just 12 days after date, had run round until black in the face, I ought to answer it, maybe will next week, think it doubtful as this is a big job. I also received a letter from Frank at Valparaso[?], I ought to answer—I will try

and write every few days, unless I get a hot shot.

We are having the biggest Harrison Delegation visiting the old man that the state can kick up. From 3 to 10 delegation of from 50 to 300 each have passed my window for the last three weeks, but the Democrats are not dead. When the different clubs give us a torch light, a fellow would think all Gala[?] was afloat—. See that mother gets everything she wants. I know she is uneasy about me, but she must not be. I am cared for, and if the worst comes that my mind is shut off, that is the end of it, nothing more.

Luke, have you rode that colt any, if it isn't a stud you know it don't belong to you—. Bex, Maw, get me a pan of water and shirt, wait a little and a nigger will do that—. The bell has rang for dinner, will any wild goose plums ripen.

Abraham Bonnifield to niece Edna Bonnifield and the other children of Allen Henry & Jane (Parsons) Bonnifield, Aug. 1888, at the National Surgical Institute, Indianapolis, Indiana:

Dear little old Peg and Edna, Bex. and Bertie, Soos and Jennie, Luke and Haruswagler[?], Jake, Annie, and the others, this being Sunday and I don't have much to do on Sundays, I will try my best to fill up this sheet with little things that will be new to some folks bigger than you. There is about 200 sick and crippled people in the house the most are cripples, crooked legs, crooked feet, cooked back bones, crooked necks, and crooked and twisted in every shape. They are from every state and territory in the United States, and one left here not long ago from London England. They are of all ages, but there is about fifty boys and girls about the size of you children who are running about the house on crutches and braces. These have been

here for some [time] and are on the road to be let go home before long, but there is another set who have been here not long and have just had the braces put on who are sore and stay pretty close. There is in my room a young fellow about 18 or 19 years old who has had on braces for about two weeks. One leg is crooked about as crooked as if you was standing on your knee. He has drawn the stretcher about two inches and is coming a little to the hurting point. Can hear him all times of the night saying how, oo, oo. I am satisfied that he has not yet had a taste of the good hurting that will come in about a month from now. I have just had my dinner. A small chunk of a nigger brought it to my room. Taint I proud to make niggers wait on me that way. I had pepper, salt, sugar, milk. The ler [sic] makes me drink milk or something white, butter or something that



Shoe of Abe Bonnifield made by Abe's sister-in-law Jane (Parsons) Bonnifield—photo taken 1992. 20-8

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looks like butter, but they can't fool me on that stuff—you can pile as much ice on it as you please and it won't get hard—chicken leg and soft potatoes, cabbage, roasting ear cut from cob[?] bread, ice cream and three kinds of pound cake. This remember was a Sunday dinner. Most of the time we have red dog potatoes and oat meal. They try and give us our salad meal each day [at] dinner. I recon sick folks ought not to eat too much. I have eat more oat meal since [I've been] here than I ever saw in my life before and more than I will ever eat after I leave here if I live to be 104 years old.

I have not heard but one chicken crow since I have been here. One fellow across the street has a red bird that whistles every morning. Another fellow has a parrot that will take a spell of squacking like as if some one was killing a child. Lots of little dirty nasty muddy English sparrows. They set on the telegraph wires that pass my window and make me mad because they are so ugly.

This is a fearful noisy place. Eight street cars pass my window every 15 minutes day and night, besides 100 d's of other rattle traps. Tell your papa I saw one horse pulling 30 kegs of nails through the street. What has become of Charley. Tell him to write me and tell all about corn, oats, wheat, buck wheat, grass, sheep, and other things. It won't be long until him and I ought to go coon hunting. Make him write.

Well this sheet is pretty full and you can't imagine what a big job it has been. And now to. . . Let me ask you to be good to old granny [Elizabeth (Minear) Bonnifield]. Give her every

thing she wants. Keep the flies from plaguing her. I do not know when I can come home, hope before long. Edna you can write.

Your loving unkle [sic]—Abe

Sarah Jane (Bonnifield) Maxwell to her son Hu Maxwell, Sep. 23, 1888, St. George, WV:

. . . Mother [Elizabeth (Minear) Bonnifield] is so feeble that all I can do for her to lighten her afflictions and sufferings is but my duty. Today I went up to see her. She was too feeble to sit up only a few minutes at a time. She has been much more feeble the last week than before. She told me this morning that her sufferings are nearly over. Abraham is home from Indianapolis, a hundred fold worse in health than when he went away. I do not think there is any hope of his getting better under the treatment the Faculty is giving him. I do not think that nux vomica*, morphine, and a score of like poisons cures anyone. He is a skeleton, cannot sit up. Has fistula in Ano—no control of his bowels, and a cancer in his bowels. The Faculty sent him home after getting \$300 from him. He still has hopes of getting better, but I fear, I fear. . . .

Sarah Jane (Bonnifield) Maxwell to her son Hu Maxwell, Nov. 22, 1888, St. George, WV:

. . . Abe's health is much better, but his bowel diseases are no better. He will go back to the hospital soon to be operated on. He says he dreads to go back. It is lonely for him since Granny is gone. She was sick only a week, had a cough and erysipelas.† Her face was swelled and disfigured when she died, but that look all left

*. A medicine made from the poisonous seeds of an Asiatic tree containing strychnine, brucine, and other alkaloids.

†. An acute disease of the skin caused by a streptococcus and marked by spreading inflammation.

her. Her face was full and white and she was as pretty a corpse as I ever saw. She was perfectly straight in body. . . .

During Abe's terminal illness, his niece Jennye Susan Bonnifield often took care of him, fetching things that he needed. Abe would often sing to Jennye. Jennye's daughters Jo (Jeffreys) Moyer and Billy (Jeffreys) Ross recounted some of the songs that Abe used to sing to their mother:

*I once knew a lady, a beautiful lass
Who wasted her time in consulting her
glass.
"My beauty," said she, "is a fortune to me.
The wife of a noble I'm sure I shall be."*

*She lives here today, and quite often we
meet
In a short little alley, she calls it a street.
She dresses in calico, pretty well patched.
She counted her chickens before they were
hatched.*

*Don't think I am joking by what I've just
sung,
I learned long ago how to bridle my
tongue.
The gate to prosperity you may find
latched,
So don't count your chickens before they
are hatched.*

*A country jay from off the farm
Came into see the town.
He registered at Smith's Hotel
As Mr. Hayseed Brown.
He took his key, went up the stairs,
With Whiskers green as grass;
Took off his boots, jumped into bed
And then blew out the gas.
He never came back, He never came back,
But when they broke open the door—
The last words he said before he dropped
dead
"Where'll we meet on that beautiful
shore?"*

*An old maid who was forty five,
She madly fell in love,
With a young man just nineteen
Who called her "Turtle Dove."
The wedding day at last arrived,
The birds did gaily sing.
He touched her up for a hundred bucks
To go out and buy the ring.
He never came back, he never came back,
He never came back any more.]
The saucy young thing, he may bring that
ring
When they meet on that beautiful shore.*

*He went into a restaurant
As hungry as a bear.
And like a raving maniac
He grabbed the bill of fare.
The waiter said, "That will you have?"
"Give me a steak," I say.
He took my order, bowed his head*

12: THE BONNIFIELD FAMILY

*And slowly walked away.
He never came back, he never came back,
He never came back any more.
His face will I break if he's not got that
steak
When we meet on that beautiful shore.*

*A soldier kissed his wife good-bye.
He was going to the war.
The tears they trickled down the cheeks
Of the one he did adore.
"Be faithful until I return
My own sweetheart," he cried.
But at the battle of Bull Run
He like a soldier died.
He never came back, her sailor boy Jack.
His dear face she never saw more
But happy she'll be his dear face to see
When they meet on that beautiful shore.*

*He sat on the front porch and smoked his
cigar, smoked his cigar, smoked his cigar,
He sat on the front porch and smoked his
cigar, smoked his cigar.*

*She sat down beside him and played her
guitar, played her guitar, played her guitar,
She sat down beside him and played her
guitar, played her guitar.*

*He told her he loved her, but oh how he
lied, oh how he lied, oh how he lied,
He told her he loved her, but oh how he
lied, oh how he lied.*

*She took the smallpox and she up and died,
she up and died, she up and died,
She took the smallpox and she up and died,
she up and died.*

*He went to the funeral just for the ride, just
for the ride, just for the ride,
He went to the funeral just for the ride, just
for the ride.*

*She went to Heaven and flip-flopped and
flied, flip-flopped and flied, flip-flopped
and flied,*

*She went to Heaven and flip-flopped and
flied, flip-flopped and flied.*

*He took the fever and he up and died, he
up and died, he up and died,*

*He took the fever and he up and died, he
up and died.*

*He went to Hades and frip-fropped and
fried, frip-fropped and fried, frip-fropped
and fried,*

*He went to Hades and frip-fropped and
fried, frip-fropped and fried.*

*There was an old woman all skin and bone,
oh, oh, oh.*

*She went to church to hear the Parson
preach and pray, oh, oh, oh.*

*When she got to the church yard gate, she
thought she'd better rest and wait, oh, oh,
oh.*

*When she got to the church's door, she
thought she'd better rest some more, oh,
oh, oh.*

*Then she looked up and she looked down,
she saw a corpse upon the ground, oh, oh,
oh.*

*This woman to the Preacher said, "Will I
look so when I am dead, oh, oh, oh."*

*The Preacher to the woman said, "Yes,
you'll look so when you are dead, oh, oh,
oh."*

*This woman to the Preacher daid,
"Oh!!!!"*

Abraham Bonnifield died July 6, 1890 from cancer of the bowels. His obituary reads:

Abe Bonnifield, who died at the residence of David Minear on 6th of this month, was born on Horse Shoe Run in 1837. He was born without legs, but could move from place to place with ease and rapidity.

In his early life he was studious and observant, and acquired a great fund of information that served him in after years.

Prior to the [Civil] war, he traveled extensively in the West and British Provinces [Canada].

When the war came on he joined the Confederate army and fought till the close of the war, never surrender-

ing, but dodging the enemy when the troops he belonged to were dispersed and came home with his sword strapped to his side.

He was at Lynchburg when Early defeated Crook & Hunter; he was at McDowell when Jackson routed Milroy; he suffered defeat when Breckenridge's command were scattered by Hunter; he was with Imboden in Hampshire and saw him blow up the armored gondolas sent down the railroad by the Federals; he was at the battle of Frederick, Md, and witnessed the whole transaction; took part in Early's raid on Washington. At Crab Bottom he was taken prisoner but escaped in less than two hours.

After the war he devoted his attention to stock raising especially to fine grades of sheep.

He was mail contractor for many years, and rode many thousand miles in carrying the mail.

He was a noted sportsman among his neighbors, and no one entered into the chase with more enthusiasm than he.

He held several offices of trust and profit in this County, holding the office of County Clerk at his death. He was elected to this office in 1884 and discharged the duties with marked ability.

He was wide and favorably known being a favorite among his neighbors.

His last illness was distressing but he bore his suffering with heroic fortitude. His disease was of an incurable nature, having received treatment from eminent physicians both in Baltimore and Indianapolis.

His last hours were peaceful, and resignedly passed away

The following family letters mention Abraham after his death:

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*Sarah Jane (Bonnifield) Maxwell to her son
Charles Joseph Maxwell, Oct. 16, 1890, St.
George, WV:*

. . . The personal property of Uncle Abe is to be sold the last of the month, cows, & etc. After his debts are paid, everything left good goes to Jane [(Parsons) Bonnifield].

Rain is pouring down and wind is howling. I think tomorrow morning we will have snow. I will send to Frank, Abraham's picture soon. I have a right good one, full length. It was taken while he was sick, and was finished after he was gone. Frank [Maxwell, Sarah's son & founder of Maxwell Studio in Fresno in 1896, which is still in business in 1995 and run by his son Ed Maxwell] wants to enlarge it. . . .

*Sarah Jane (Bonnifield) Maxwell to her son John
Franklin Maxwell, Oct. 19, 1890, St. George,
WV:*

I will send you Uncle Abe's pic-

ture—which I highly prize. I too would like [you] to crayon [the] picture, but I do not want to tax you to make it, when you can get paying work nearer home. Doc gave me this. A photographer in Davis bought out the apparatus of a traveling artist and among his negatives he found Abe's, which he used and struck off a number of pictures which sell readily. I want to get a dozen, \$2.00, so that all you children can get one for each of the other boys. . . .

Abraham's property was sold. Listed in the Appraisement Bill of his estate were several farm animals that Abe had pet names such a black mare (Bird), two bay mares (Molly & Lucy), a bay horse (Pete), a grey horse (Patrick), two white cows (Sally & Snow Ball), a red cow (Rex), and two other cows (White Face & Wildeyes).
