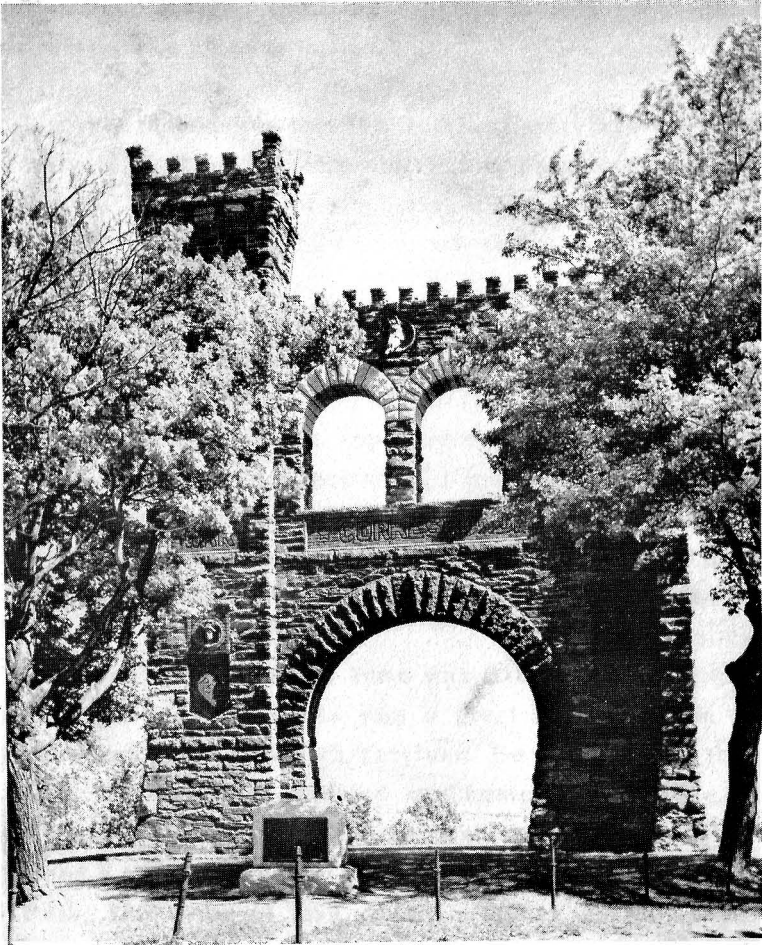


THE CASE OF THE LOST MONUMENT

The History of the National Newspaper Hall of Fame, Gathland State Park, Frederick County, Maryland

By **Mary-Carter Roberts**



Substantially as published in the Evening Capital, Annapolis, Maryland, June 15th, 1959.
Reprinted by the Tourist Development Division, Maryland Department of Economic
Development, Annapolis, Maryland, in cooperation with the Maryland Press Association.

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I was asked to write something about Maryland's Gathland State Park, and I agreed with satisfaction. I happen to be a teller of stories. The story of Gathland happens to be a good one. That is one reason why I was satisfied.

Another reason was that the Gathland story has not yet been accurately told. It is 75 years old. It has been told many times. But never with much care for precision. It is so picturesque in fact as to breed picturesqueness in fancy - a natural danger.

I know this from my own experience. The statements I write here were derived from records kept by the man called Gath himself, records now in the hands of his living descendants. These descendants, moreover, have approved my report. Yet, even after taking this severe care for factuality, I found myself influenced by the fictional quality of what the records showed. So I made a mental compromise. I write only facts but I privately keep a fictional title. To myself, I call the story "The Case of the Lost Monument."

Who was Gath? His real name was George Alfred Townsend, Gath being a pseudonym. He was a great newspaperman (1841-1914) who had close ties with Maryland. He was born on the Delmarva Peninsula, was educated at Chestertown College, wrote books about Maryland, and for the last thirty years of his life maintained a famous Maryland estate. That estate is now the Gathland Park, 100 acres of lovely mountain land on the borders of Frederick and Washington Counties.

Why did Maryland make a park of it? What is the Lost Monument? The answers to those questions make the story.

Gath came there in 1884, aged 43 and well known on both sides of the Atlantic. He had covered the final battles of the Civil War for the New York Tribune and the Austro-Prussian War for several London papers, and then, with no more wars to write about, he had started a Washington Column. We would say today that he syndicated. Some of the great papers that bought his features were the New York Sun, the Boston Globe, the Chicago Tribune, the Cincinnati Inquirer. He was the founder of the Washington Column, professionally written.

He bought his Maryland land as the result of love at first sight. He was driving along South Mountain Ridge top, he had not seen that part of the State before, he thought it ideally beautiful, he decided to live there. Within a few days he had purchased the tract.

Then he developed the estate that was to become famous. To understand it, we must remind ourselves that, in his period, Americans took for granted that attainment of wealth brought with it the attainment of some dream. That was why men desired wealth in those days, - not to be like somebody else, but to have freedom to be themselves. So Gath built the home he had dreamed of. Its ruins can still be seen.

It was not a house, or even a mansion, but an arrangement of houses, half a dozen or so. There was a lodge, a hall, a library, a huge guest home, servants' quarters, stables. All but one were of stone, most were spacious - a single wing of the hall contained ten rooms. Finally there was a tomb. The builder, satisfied with what he had built, had clearly decided to lie down at the end in the midst of his creation. So he erected a mausoleum on which he had carved the epitaph, "Good Night, Gath." A statement of acceptance and fulfillment.

He had not retired to this place. On the contrary, he worked steadily - prodigiously. One entry in his diary states that in a single day he wrote and dictated 18,000 words. As well as his column, he produced stories, novels and works of history and

reminisence. He lectured widely too. And he entertained generously, his friends being the chief people of the day, in his own profession, in politics, in business, in the arts. Eleven years went by.

It was then 1895 and Gath conceived his last dream. In its first form - giving no sign of the utter uniqueness it was later to attain - it was for a Civil War memorial.

Successive entries in his diary tell of the progress of the project. The federal government was by then transforming the Antietam battlefield into a national memorial, and part of this work was the opening of an avenue between the old battle lines. Gath wrote that he thought of building a similar avenue along the South Mountain ridge, to commemorate the fighting there.

A short while later he had changed this concept. He had been in Hagerstown, he wrote, and had noticed some men working with stone near the B & O railroad station, from which commonplace street scene he had derived an entirely new plan. His memorial would not take the form of an avenue, nor would it belong to any single field of battle, or even to the soldiers, who were already being widely honored. He, the correspondent, the reporter, the working newspaperman, would erect a monument to commemorate the writers who had covered the war, men who had been in the thick of the fighting and to whom no one was giving a thought. A great and enduring monument too. A towering arch. Of stone. That was the flash of inspiration he had drawn from the sight of some village masons at work.

Inspiration came to definiteness seemingly on the instant. For as the diary records, Gath made a sketch that same day, as he was riding home from Hagerstown "on the cars." I have seen this initial drawing. It shows the arch he subsequently built. Details were added, but design and proportions remained as he first visualized them.

He was equally prompt in acting. Within a few days he had had a blueprint made, had circularized his newspaper friends asking their opinions, and had sent out appeals for subscriptions. All responses were enthusiastic. And perhaps the best way for me to give you appreciation of Gath's prestige in his day is to name some of the personages who contributed to his plan.

There was a former vice president of the United States, Levi P. Morton; a future secretary of state, John Hay; the then secretary of war, Daniel Scott Lamont; the governor of New York, David Hill; the financiers J. P. Morgan and George Pullman; the editor of the New York Tribune, Whitlaw Reid; the editor of the Louisville Courier-Journal, Colonel (Marse) Henry Watterson; a member of the British Parliament, Sir Henry M. ("Dr. Livingstone, I presume?") Stanley. This is a partial list. All the subscribers were people of recognized achievement.

Gath himself, however, bore the largest of the cost. And of course he supplied the land. From the beginning he had known where he wanted his arch to stand - on the crest of South Mountain at a spot called Crampton's Gap, where both the view and the very ground itself were appropriate to a correspondents' monument. Six great battlefields could be seen from that point - Antietam, Monocacy, Harpers Ferry, Gettysburg, Winchester and Cedar Creek. That was the view. The ground had been fought over, hand to hand, as the Union soldiers crossed the mountain on their way to meet Lee at Antietam. This site was in the very heart of Gath's estate, so that he actually built his arch within a stone's throw of his lodge door.

Nor was he satisfied with an appropriate location only. He also put his purpose into his materials, the stones he chose being those found on the battlefields below - red rubble from Maryland and blue limestone from the quarries of Winchester, Va. In every way, in short, the arch expressed its creator's idea.

Within a year it was finished. Fifty feet high it rose from a forty foot base, crowning the mountain, massive and most dra-

matic. Boldly across its face were the words, "War Correspondents." Also, making it clear that this was a memorial to all war correspondents, in all times and places, were the names of great reporters of battle from Joshua to the present. For Gath had broadened his original plan. He was not dedicating his memorial to Civil War writers merely, but to the whole profession of war correspondents. And, going beyond even this, he honored the very principal of freedom of the press, for, listing the reporters of the Civil War, he gave the men on both sides the same treatment. Objective good reporting was his criterion, not political opinion. So there it stood, the huge, impressive thing - the only monument to newspapermen and a free press in the world.

On October 16, 1896, there was a dedication. So great was the general interest, the governor of Maryland, Lloyd Lowndes, consented to deliver the address. The New York World and Post sent reporters. So did the Baltimore and Washington papers. Crowds came out from the cities. There was a great spread of publicity.

And then the curious, the unbelievable thing happened. This utterly unique monument got lost. There is no other way to put it.

Gath continued to own it for ten years. For eight of those, everything went on with him as usual. Then, in 1904, Mrs. Townsend died and the bereavement seemed to make him suddenly aware of himself as an old man. He ceased to come to the estate regularly. He no longer entertained. In 1906, evidently looking to the future, he gave his arch away - deeded it, with the half acre around it, to the federal government. Thus ended his part in the Lost Monument's story.

It must be added, however, that when, in 1914, he died, he was not interred in the tomb he had long before prepared, but instead in a family plot in Philadelphia. His grave is marked there by a marble column surmounted by a bronze bust.

A period of desolation began at the once brilliant estate. The heirs found the elaborate establishment an intolerable ex-

pense under 20th century conditions and in 1922 sold it - acres and buildings - for a mere \$9500. A succession of indifferent owners followed. By 1938 the place had come to the point of being put up for back taxes - \$750. Most shameful, vandals had had heyday in the once handsome houses. They had broken in, carried off stone and timber, splintered, smashed. Ruins alone were left. A generation of local people had grown up unaware of what those ruins meant.

And all the time the arch just stood there - lost. But - how could it be lost - when it was the property of the federal government? I do not know. I know only that when I began my own study, I could find no mention of a war correspondent's arch in any governmental listing.

A telephoned inquiry to the National Park Service brought me a promise to let me know. This promise was kept by dispatch through the mail, without covering letter, of a catalogue of National Park areas, nationwide, including also Hawaii - a fairly thickbook. The world's sole memorial to war correspondents was not mentioned in it, even in the fine print.

A Maryland official, William Bayliff, of the Board of Natural Resources, questioning a National Park man about the arch, was answered with a surprised counter-question - "Do we own it?" Finally Mr. Bayliff was informed by letter that National Park Service does administer the arch and rates it as a "detached area" of the Antietam Battlefield. He kindly placed this letter in my until-then empty hands.

I was glad to know so much, but wondered why there was no explanation of the arch's omission from the catalogue, and also why this monument to newspapermen was considered part of Antietam, since it has no connection with that battle. I am wondering still.

Lost indeed. Not only is it absent from the records. There are no signs directing one to it, no explanation of its history when

one gets there. One comes along the road to the top of the mountain, and there it is. Alone among the trees. An unidentified phenomenon, save as the names of great writers utter their silent shout from the stone face. This, after more than half a century of federal ownership.

Maryland, as everyone knows by now, has acted to rescue the old Townsend estate. It is now the park. There was a group of never - to-be-sufficiently - praised gentlemen in Frederick who put this development into action. They, history-minded, in the tradition of their city, contributed their own funds, bought the property and turned it over to the State, stipulating that it should become a memorial to George Alfred Townsend. The State accepted. Much work had to be done. Buildings utterly wrecked had to be removed, ruins of others had to be cleaned, the still standing wing of Gath Hall was restored and turned into a museum of Townsend relics. In November 1958 the new park Gathland, was ready. There was a dedication, former Governor McKeldin delivered the address, and on this occasion the New York Times sent a writer and photographer. So vividly had the memory of the place persisted through decades of neglect.

And what of the future of this unique memorial? That would seem implicit. Gathland, with the Arch in its center, is, as if designed for the purpose, the perfect site for a National Newspaper Hall of Fame. Everything about it is natural for that development, with the journalistic profession, the State and the nation working together.

(The paragraph immediately above does not appear in the story as published in the Evening Capital. It was in the original version but was deleted for the following reason: - After the Capital had accepted the story, I learned that Governor Tawes had decided to issue his Proclamation of Gathland as a Hall of Fame, and, as the story would appear BEFORE the Proclamation, and, as I did not want to precede the Governor, I asked the Capital to cut any reference to the Hall out. Mary-Carter Roberts.)

As far as the arch is concerned, it was dedicated to a free press by a great newspaperman with the approbation and help of other great newspapermen. As far as Maryland is concerned, the State's tradition is in harmony, since the first important act passed by the General Assembly was in defense of press freedom - in the case of William Goddard, editor of the Maryland Journal, who had been threatened by the Whig Club of Baltimore. That was February 1777, and today Maryland has the oldest paper in the United States. While, as far as the nation is concerned, freedom of the press was one of the principals the Founding Fathers wrote into the Bill of Rights. And there the Lost Monument stands, waiting. What could be more right?