

Maria G. Underwood

(- 19 Jul 1884)

Evening Post (New York), July ?, 1856

Another Virginian Ostracized

Among the delegates to the Philadelphia Convention was Mr. John C. Underwood, an extensive planter residing in Clarke county, Virginia. During the sessions of the Convention Mr. Underwood made a brief speech, in the course of which he referred to and quoted the forebodings of Jefferson in regard to slavery, and begged the Convention to prevent, if possible, the curse which was blasting Virginia from spreading over the virgin soil of Kansas. This speech, when it reached his home, gave great offence to those who are most interested in enlarging the market for Virginia-bred slaves, and a meeting was held a few days since at Piedmont, at which Mr. Underwood and his speech were not only denounced, but he himself was recommended to leave the state as soon as he could possibly make arrangements to do so.

Happily Mr. Underwood was not wholly unprepared for this demonstration. A day or two before his return to his home he received a letter from his wife, which we were permitted to take a copy for publication, if anything should happen to make such a publication appropriate. Such an exigency seems now to have occurred, and we accordingly give the letter, suppressing some names for obvious reasons. It runs as follows:

“June 23d, 1856.

“My dear John C: A friend communicated to me yesterday that there existed the greatest excitement and indignation against you for representing the state of Virginia in the Philadelphia Convention, and making, as reported in the *Herald*, an anti-slavery speech. As far as we have learned, the excitement is at Markham Station, Piedmont and Paris. --- told our friend, they were watching at Piedmont on Saturday for your arrival, and he had no doubt if you had come that day, so great was the fury, you would have met with personal violence. This friend said to me, 'If I could have been there the man or men who offered Mr. Underwood personal violence would have felt a few of my heaviest blows.' Mr. --- and Mr. --- are the leaders at Piedmont; who at Paris, I do not know. At Markham Station the leaders say they go for giving you notice, and a reasonable time to wind up your business and leave the state. I send this morning to Alexandria to mail this letter at that place, and telegraph to you to remain in New York till you receive it. I know not what to advise. I am afraid the excitement will meet you if you come. You know I am a Jackson and I could not have Jackson blood in my veins without resisting till the last drop is shed in defense of life and liberty; but I do not believe in courting mob law or martyrdom. I feel greatly troubled at this state of things, and fear if your speech can be obtained it will exasperate the people here greatly. I hope you will be prudent; remain awhile in New York. Write immediately and tell me what to do on the farm, and I will try to have your wishes carried out as nearly as I can.

“With sorrow and much love, I remain, as ever,

“Your devoted wife,

“M.G. Underwood.”

As an evidence of the sad degeneracy of Virginia it deserves to be known in this connexion that the author of the foregoing letter, who is to share the persecution of her husband, for opinion's sake, carries in her veins some of the best blood in Virginia. There is one district in the state which was represented in Congress for more than thirty years by members of her family: by Colonel Geoge Jackson, her grandfather; by Edward B. Jackson, her father, and by John G. Jackson, her uncle, whose first wife was a

sister of Mrs. Madison, and whose second wife and widow, now residing in Virginia was the only daughter of Return J. Meigs, formerly Postmaster General, and also Governor of the State of Ohio.

Mr. Underwood himself was born in Herkimer county, in this state – as good a political pedigree as any state can furnish, which fully explains that incurable devotion to the cause of freedom which led him to peril his domestic peace and his property rather than stifle his convictions at a time when, to be silent, is to advocate the cause of slavery and intolerance.

Evening Post (New York), July 19, 1884, p. 2

Personal

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Mrs. Maria G. Underwood died suddenly at Washington, D.C., this morning. She was the widow of Judge John C. Underwood, of Virginia, and was a devoted Union woman during the war, although a double cousin [cousin on both sides of her family] of Stonewall Jackson.

Alexandria Gazette, September 17, 1884, p. 1

[For the Little Falls Journal & Courier]

Death of Mrs. Maria C. Underwood

Mrs. Maria G. Underwood, the widow of the late Judge John C. Underwood, of Virginia, died suddenly, of heart disease, at her home in Washington, D.C., on Saturday July 19th, and a brief sketch of her eventful life will not be without interest to our readers she having formerly resided in Herkimer county, and leaving many warm and devoted friends here to mourn her loss.

Mrs. Underwood belonged to one of the oldest and most prominent Virginia families. She was a daughter of Edward B. Jackson, who represented in Congress a district of Virginia (Clarksburg, now a part of West Virginia) which might almost be said to be his by inheritance, as for over thirty years members of her family held that position, including her grandfather, Colonel George Jackson, and her uncle John G. Jackson, who married a sister of the wife of President Madison. She was an own cousin on both her father's and mother's side, of General Stonewall Jackson, but politically sided with her husband, Judge Underwood, whom she first met when he was a tutor in her father's family. He was a native of Herkimer county, and after their marriage, in 1839, they came to Herkimer, where their oldest child, a daughter, was born, who lived less than a year. While a resident of Herkimer county, Judge Underwood founded (about 1841) under the title of the Herkimer County Journal, one of the parent-branches of this newspaper, which he ever after alluded to as his "oldest son," and in Herkimer their son Edward and daughter Alice were born, who both survive. After a residence of some ten years they all returned to Virginia, settling in Clarke County, in the valley of the Shenandoah, in the shadow of the Blue Ridge, and here they resided peacefully until the time of the first Republican Nominative Convention, at Philadelphia, in 1856 which Judge Underwood attended, unofficially, but made a speech in favor of Fremont, which so incensed his neighbors that he was only permitted to return to Virginia to settle up his affairs there. Judge Underwood accepted a position as Secretary and Agent of the "Virginia Emigrant Aid and Homestead Society" (which largely aided in populating western Virginia with loyal northern citizens, and secured that portion of the Old Dominion to the Union cause) and made his residence in New York, while Mrs. Underwood staid most of this time in Virginia. At the time of the "John Brown raid" Governor Wise sent a detachment of the noted "Black Horse Cavalry" to search the house, and subsequently the Governor declared the place confiscated, and all their property there stored was sold stolen, or otherwise made away with and destroyed. Judge Underwood was a member of the Chicago Convention which nominated President Lincoln, and stumped the Western States as a speaker during that exciting canvass, and after the election was appointed Consul to Callao, Peru, and all

preparations for the journey were made; but the President and secretaries Seward and Chase were unwilling to have so loyal and stalwart a citizen leave the country, and prevailed upon Mr. Underwood to accept, instead, the post of Fifth Auditor of the Treasury, which he did, settling in Washington with his family, and there remaining until 1863, when he was appointed United States District Judge for Virginia, which post he held until his death. He resided in Alexandria, Virginia, although he died in Washington in December, 1873, in which city he was spending the winter, meanwhile going every day to Alexandria; but Mrs. Underwood never set foot on the soil of her native State after the day of her husband's death but remained in Washington, finding what comfort and solace she could in the renewed intercourse with her old friends of the troublous time when her husband was Fifth Auditor.

Her nature was singularly bright and sunny, and her mind gifted, intellectual, and highly educated. She was a prime favorite with all who knew her, old and young alike, and entered into the enjoyment of the society and pastimes of the latter with a zeal and appreciation which kept her ever young, so that few could realize the burden of years and weight of infirmities which oppressed her physically, but never subdued her spirit. Her death was a shock and a surprise to all, as she was on the eve of departure for Saratoga with her sister, and hardly thirty-six hours before the final summons seemed in unusually good health and spirits. Friday she was very sick but continued the preparations of her journey; but that night she sank into an unconscious state and expired about four o'clock Saturday morning, with her sister and children by her side. The funeral took place the succeeding Monday, July 21st, from her late residence, (being conducted by the Rev. Mr. Nailor of the Methodist church, of which she was a member) and the house was crowded for hours all that day, with those who came to pay their last tribute of respect. In death, as in life, her face was regal in its calm and quiet beauty, and none who looked upon her in the flower-hidden casket, could gaze unmoved, all, even those bound by no ties save those of acquaintanceship, seeming to feel a sense of personal loss and bereavement.