

**ONE LETTER, ONE ENCLOSURE
SUBJECT: THE BEALE TREASURE**

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"Pursuit"

On December 5, 1981, I arrived in Roanoke. I had travelled a great distance and was eager to begin searching for the solution to the mystery of the legendary Beale treasure. The only acceptable solution would be to find the treasure, locate the empty vault, or obtain convincing evidence that the information in the pamphlet entitled "The Beale Papers" published in 1885 was a fictional story.

During the past 4 years, 5 months, I have travelled tens of thousands of miles through many states. I have visited government repositories, universities, churches, cemeteries, historical societies and libraries of every description. I have read hundreds of old newspapers, conducted interviews, sent many letters requesting information, studied old maps, hiked much of the treasure area and engaged in three excavations. All travel and effort were committed to the one objective - find the solution.

I have learned much about the characters and events appearing in "The Beale Papers", but there is much more to be learned; nevertheless, I confidently make the following statements: "There is no treasure, there never was any treasure. The pamphlet is a fictional narrative."

The pamphlet was sold in Lynchburg during the month of April 1885. In the copyright application dated March 26, 1884, James B. Ward is mentioned as the agent for the author. A copyright was issued to James B. Ward on March 31, 1885, and almost immediately upon receipt of this protection, the pamphlet was offered for sale. One Lynchburg newspaper noted at this time that "much interest has been excited by The Beale Papers." Why so much interest?

"The Beale Papers" is a story about Thomas Jefferson Beale leading a party of 29 individuals to the Far West in search of adventure in 1817. North of Santa Fe, members of the group discovered gold and silver. After mining a considerable quantity, the precious metals, along with jewels obtained in St. Louis, were taken to Virginia for burial in Bedford County. Beale stopped in Lynchburg and gave an ironbox containing instructions and three cipher codes to Robert Morriss, a respected hotelkeeper. Morriss was asked by Beale to wait ten years, beginning in 1822, for his return. Beale and his men then left on another trip to the Far West. If no one returned to claim the ironbox following the ten-year waiting period, Morriss was to open the ironbox and follow the instructions. Beale and his party were never heard from again, and it is believed they were killed by Indians. Beale had made arrangements with a friend in St. Louis to mail the key to the cipher codes to Robert Morriss. The friend was to do this following the ten-year waiting period. Morriss never received the key; therefore, he was unable to learn the information contained in the codes. In 1862, Morriss gave all the information he knew about the subject, including the instructions and codes taken from the ironbox, to a friend. (Some people today believe this person to be

James B. Ward. I'm not convinced.) This friend spent the next twenty-two years trying to decipher the codes. He was successful with only one, and its message was that 2921 lbs. of gold, 5100 lbs. of silver and \$13,000. in jewels had been buried four miles from Buford's Tavern in the years 1819 and 1821. (Present-day Montvale is across the road from the old tavern site.) One of the undeciphered codes contains the names and addresses of the heirs of those who mined the gold and silver. The second undeciphered code contains the location of the buried treasure. The person who had spent so many years working on the codes, achieving only partial success, was reduced to poverty and vowed to sever himself from further effort. This person put his information into a pamphlet titled "The Beale Papers". Again, James B. Ward may or may not have been the author.

The beginning of the narrative had its origin ten miles from Buford's Tavern.

James Beverly Risque was a resident of Fincastle, Virginia. He studied at William and Mary College and Washington College. In 1794, he began the practice of law. He married Elizabeth Kennerly in 1799 and this union produced three children: Adaline, Ferdinand, and Harriet. Living one block away from this family was a man named Thomas Beale. (I have never been able to learn whether this Thomas Beale was given a middle name.)

Thomas was born in 1773 and moved from Shenandoah County to Fincastle in the early 1790's to join his brother John, who was engaged in several business enterprises. One writer who knew Thomas described him as a braggart and an excellent marksman. James B. Risque, his neighbor, was a man of excessive pride; the two were on a collision course.

Sometime between the fall of 1806 and May, 1807, a dispute arose between Thomas and James concerning a sixteen-year old girl named Judy Hancock. (This girl would marry Gen William Clark on January 5, 1808, the same William Clark who explored the Northwest. And it is the same Judy Hancock Clark who is buried in the vault on the side of the hill near Elliston, Virginia. She was the daughter of Col. George Hancock.) The dispute resulted in a duel. Thomas shot James. Thomas fled the state of Virginia to begin a new life; he died far from Virginia, having abandoned his family ties. James recovered from his wound and resumed the practice of law. (Handwritten note: Thomas died in New Orleans, 1820, buried in Presbyterian Cemetery).

I have tracked this Thomas Beale through many states, and to a great degree have been able to reconstruct his life. He did not mine gold and silver north of Santa Fe and later bury it near Buford's Tavern. In my judgment, his only contribution to the treasure legend has been the use of his name; I am still pursuing the reason why.

James B. Risque moved to Lynchburg with his three children around 1815, his wife having died in the fall of 1808. While in Lynchburg, his daughter, Adaline, married Giles Ward in 1819. From this marriage came one child, James Beverly Ward, born on January 27, 1822. Sixty-two years later, he would be selected as "agent for the author".

James B. Ward received his education from private tutors and from his mother and father. His father was a bookstore owner, lawyer and editor. James, at the age of sixteen, was admitted to the United States Military Academy, where he studied for approximately eighteen months. He resigned from the Academy in January, 1840. From the state of New York, he journeyed to St. Louis, Mo., where he worked as an assistant to the Military Pay Clerk. In St. Charles, Mo., he married Harriet Emaline Otey. The Wards returned to Lynchburg in early 1843; Harriet was born and raised in Bedford County and had close family ties here. It was during this period of the early 1840's that a close relationship developed among James and Harriet Ward and Robert and Sarah Morriss.

Robert Morriss was a businessman who engaged in many enterprises. During his long career, he dealt in land, foods and tobacco. He also earned a far reaching reputation as a hotelkeeper par excellence. He possessed considerable wealth at one point, but lost it. Later in his career, he and his wife Sarah were reduced to being tavern owners. The two had no children of their own, but took great interest in the children of others. Ann Ward, daughter of James and Harriet Ward, carried the middle name Morriss. Sarah Morriss died at the home of James B. Ward on May 11, 1861. Robert died at the home of his niece on January 3, 1863.

An interesting bit of information surfaced while I was reading a Lynchburg newspaper dated May 28, 1846. The following is an excerpt from a message printed by Robert Morriss: "... extends his warmest thanks to those who sympathized and sided with him during his late dangerous illness." In 1862, Morriss gave the contents of the ironbox to a friend for further study; he took a considerable risk in waiting so long. In 1846, he nearly died at the age of sixty-nine. What conclusion do you draw? Did Morriss have knowledge of secret codes?

Harriet Ward had an especially close relationship with Robert and Sarah Morriss. This closeness began, in part, due to the business affairs of Robert Morriss and John B. Otey, father of Harriet Ward. Robert Morriss and John Otey engaged in business together beginning in the early 1820's. The Otey family had deep roots in the Goose Creek Valley of Bedford County, just two miles from Buford's Tavern, the center of the treasure area.

John H. Otey, the grandfather of Harriet Otey Ward, was a large landowner along Goose Creek in Bedford County; at one point, he owned 1100 acres. In 1790, he married Elizabeth Buford, sister of Paschal Buford, the owner

of Buford's Tavern. (This is the same tavern where Thomas Jefferson Beale is alleged to have stayed for a month in 1819, plus two other shorter visits, one before and one following this month long visit.) Many children resulted from the marriage of John H. and Elizabeth Otey, including John Buford Otey who, in 1817, married Angelina M. Brown. Harriet, the daughter of John B. and Angelina Otey, married James B. Ward.

Harriey Otey Ward was born on a farm near Buford's Tavern in 1827. She knew the Paschal Buford family well. Paschal even married an Otey; in October 1820, Paschal united in marriage with Frances Ann Otey, niece of John H. Otey. Harriet was soon to introduce her husband, James Ward, to the area surrounding Buford's Tavern.

After James B. Ward returned from St. Louis, he engaged in farming on his mother's plantation in Campbell County; she inherited the property from her father, James B. Risque, who died in 1843. In March, 1852, James Ward, in partnership with his brother-in-law, John W. Otey, purchased a sawmill and a few acres of land not far from where his wife Harriet was born. The sawmill and land were sold in September, 1856. During this 4 1/2 year period, there was much contact among the Oteys, Wards and Bufords.

Paschal Buford was an influential man in the affairs of Bedford County. He inherited a large estate from his father, who died in December, 1814. In July of the following year, Paschal requested and was granted a license to operate a tavern. Paschal's father began the tavern business many years earlier and Paschal would continue the business almost uninterrupted until 1861. Across the road from the tavern developed the town of Bufordville, which is present day Montvale. Paschal Buford would have had much to say about the contents of "The Beale Papers" if questioned.

From "The Beale Papers", it is learned that Paschal was host to Thomas J. Beale and his associates. In 1845, Robert Morriss viewed the contents of the ironbox received from Beale and in 1862 Morriss gave the contents to a friend for further study. Paschal Buford died on July 23, 1875. He would have had valuable information about Beale's movements while in the treasure vicinity, yet no one questioned him. What questions would you have asked Paschal Buford?

And what about the contribution Mrs. Paschal Buford would have made, if questioned? What questions would you have for Mrs. Buford? She died February 5, 1882. (Please recall that a copyright was applied for on March 26, 1884.)

If the contents of the pamphlet were true, Paschal Buford and his wife would have been very important sources of information to the few living in Lynchburg (Morriss and his friend), who were aware of the existence of the treasure but unaware of its location. Paschal died in 1875 and his wife died in 1882. They were available for questioning for many years and yet not one shred

of evidence exists to denote they were. The question that must be proposed and confronted is, "Did Paschal and Frances Buford host Thomas Jefferson Beale in 1819 and 1821?"

I believe the pamphlet was conceived and written after the deaths of Paschal Buford and his wife. And to a great extent the Buford children were responsible for the pamphlet being withdrawn from further sale shortly after its distribution in April, 1885.

Rowland Buford, son of Paschal and Frances, was born in 1827 and died on February 3, 1921. For twenty-two years, beginning in 1855, Rowland was Bedford County Clerk. He was widely respected for his ability to recall names and dates of Bedford County residents. At the time the pamphlet was published, Rowland was living near Liberty, present day Bedford. When readers of the pamphlet learned that Paschal Buford was host to Thomas J. Beale, one can assume that Rowland was asked many questions. And Rowland, most certainly, had a few questions of his own.

He knew James B. Ward and his wife, Harriet, well. He was aware of all Ward's property transactions which were recorded at the courthouse. Rowland knew the Otey family from which Harriet Ward descended. In fact, Rowland in 1879 purchased much of the estate of John B. Otey, father of Harriet Otey Ward. When Rowland learned that his father was an important part of a buried treasure story which carried the name James B. Ward, agent for the author, it is easy to imagine that Rowland had a few difficult questions for Ward.

And what questions did Margaret L. Buford, daughter of Frances and Paschal, have for James B. Ward? What questions did people ask her? She was living on her parents' estate, the location of Buford's Tavern, when the pamphlet was issued.

And there was Mrs. Ann Buford Hall, daughter of Paschal and Frances Buford, who was living on Church Street in Lynchburg when the pamphlet was distributed. What did she know? What questions did she have?

It is reasonable to conclude that James B. Ward, living in Campbell County at the time, came under close scrutiny and intensive questioning when he associated himself with a story involving buried treasure. Ward had knowledge of the treasure area gained from operating a sawmill. His wife's family lived near the sawmill. Ward had close ties to the Paschal Buford family. Ward had a close relationship with Robert and Sarah Morriss. Within the ancestry of James Ward was a Thomas Beale who, although not related by blood, was related by the bullet that struck Grandpa Risque. The characters and events contained in the pamphlet did not stand the test of inquiry primarily because the life of James B. Ward did not stand the test of inquiry. Ward and others wanted the story to be

forgotten and it probably would have, had not two brothers, Clayton Ingersol and George Luzerne Hart, become involved.

Clayton and George Hart were living in Roanoke when they learned about the undeciphered codes which gave the location to buried treasure. This was in 1897 and both immediately developed an interest. In 1903, Clayton Hart learned about James B. Ward's association with the pamphlet and journeyed to Campbell County to question Ward. "Ward confirmed all that is in the pamphlet and also said that all but a few copies had been destroyed by fire which broke out in the printing plant before a plan of distribution and sale at 50 cents a copy had been made and carried out." (See "Hart Papers", Roanoke City Library) It seems apparent that James Ward has explained to Clayton why so few pamphlets were sold.

The Lynchburg newspapers for this period have survived and are on microfilm. There is no mention of a fire destroying a print shop anytime near the time when the pamphlet was offered for sale. Assuming the pamphlets were destroyed by fire, regardless of their location, would not a reasonable person have them reprinted? There were five print shops in Lynchburg capable of doing the job. And if printing costs were a problem to pay, one Lynchburg newspaper reported that "Much interest has been excited by The Beale Papers." With the likelihood of strong sales, a print shop would be receptive to the idea of some degree of credit.

If there was any truth to this tale of hidden treasure, the pamphlet would have been reprinted and sold by the tens of thousands across the entire country, and Bedford County would soon begin to sink from the weight of all the people digging.

Clayton and George Hart maintained an interest in the undiscovered treasure until their deaths, 1949 and 1968 respectively. Before George died, he put into writing what he learned about the legend, including a copy of "The Beale Papers." His work, known as "The Hart Papers" resulted in a 1964 national magazine article. The interest generated by this article was responsible for a book being published in 1973, followed by a second edition of the same in 1981. When will it end?

James B. Ward and others of his time were decent, hard-working individuals who struggled to make their way. The creative efforts of a few remain today in the form of a short innocent treasure story. Those responsible meant no harm to anyone but unfortunately the story assumed a life of its own. For many, it has become a dream without possibility for success.

Computer groups have been formed to crack the codes. Researchers track the imaginary footsteps of Thomas Jefferson Beale. Dreamers roam the treasure area poking the land with holes. These are futile exercises by those who

have an obligation to themselves to put this research material and conclusions to the test of inquiry.

Why was the pamphlet written and by whom? There are many questions remaining and, although revealing itself grudgingly, yesterday will honor persistence. Within this arena of time past are ghostly figures running, hiding, distorting, shielding - most leaving their footprints. Some yield to the hunter, some remain elusive. In this dimension of distant lives and fading events are answers awaiting discovery.

If you get bored with the daily affairs of life and seek high adventure, you may want to "join the pursuit".