

Hercules of the **Revolution**

a novel based on the life of Peter Francisco



by

Travis S. Bowman

a 6th Generation Descendant of Peter Francisco

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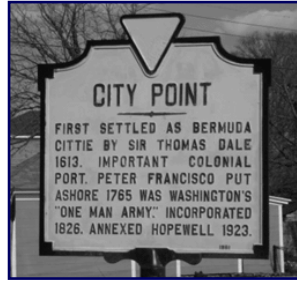
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HISTORIC SITES AND FACTS ABOUT PETER FRANCISCO



Peter Francisco's home in Dillwyn, Virginia called Locust Grove was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1972.



This historic marker in Hopewell, Virginia quotes George Washington's famous saying that Peter was his "One Man Army".



This Peter Francisco monument stands downtown Newark, New Jersey across from Penn Station.



This Peter Francisco monument stands at the Guilford Courthouse National Military Park in Greensboro, North Carolina.

HISTORIC SITES AND FACTS ABOUT PETER FRANCISCO



This Peter Francisco monument stands in Hopewell, Virginia close to where he was found abandoned on a dock in 1765.



This Peter Francisco monument stands in New Bedford, Massachusetts recognizing him as a patriot of Portuguese descent. The plaque quotes George Washington's famous saying about Peter.



The United States Post Service issued this bicentennial stamp in honor of Peter Francisco in 1976.



This portrait of Peter Francisco was painted in 1828 and hangs in the hall of the Virginia State Capitol building.

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In memory of Rosalie Francisco Barret, my great-grandmother and great-granddaughter of Peter Francisco, I am ever indebted to the phenomenal heritage that she passed down to me. I appreciate her lovingly caring for my mother when she was a young girl and for raising a great son.

To Bill and Mildred Barret, Rosalie's first born son and daughter-in-law and my grandparents, I am so thankful that you shared Peter Francisco's story with me when I was a little boy. Granddaddy, who passed away in 2003, was a hard working man and always provided for his family. Grandmother, you're very sweet and I love to hear you share about life events from years gone by. You have an amazing memory! Thank you for raising my mother, Linda-Lee, to be a nurturing and loving mother.

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Last but not least, thank you, James Warder and Bruce Nemet, for working with me to put this epic legend onto paper and into a novel. Without you this story would have never come to life, and my great-grandfather’s story might have never been told.

PREFACE

Have you ever thought about all the things that you enjoy on a daily basis? The average American owns a home, a car, a computer, a cell phone, a television with over one hundred channels to watch at any given time, and many other things that are considered luxuries in other countries. We shuffle our kids around to different sporting events, and we so easily forget that everything we enjoy came at a price...a high price.

When I was nine years old, my father was stationed in Germany with the Department of Defense, and we lived in a small village for three years. It didn't take long for me to realize that many people from other countries could only dream of living in the United States. That experience began a journey in my own life of understanding how blessed I am to live in the United States of America.

When I was young, my grandmother - Mildred Barret, told me that I was related to a giant from the Revolutionary War, but I was well into my thirties before I began to research the stories of my ancestor. It wasn't until I visited one of the four Peter Francisco monuments on the east coast that I found out the whole story.

I really connected with Peter's story on two levels. First, I realized that I stood the same height as Peter, which put me in his shoes and helped me to see life from his perspective. Secondly, I have always despised racism, and this story shows the atrocity of determining a person's worth by the color of his skin. But, Peter doesn't let that ruin his life and, ultimately, he triumphs over racial discrimination.

I hope that you find this story of bravery, strength, romance, and honor about my great-grandfather just as inspiring as I did. But more importantly, I hope that you become more appreciative of the freedom you enjoy and inspired by the blood that was shed for your happiness.

1



GIVE ME LIBERTY OR GIVE ME DEATH

As March 23, 1775 dawned, it was a comparatively mild day for this time of year in Richmond, Virginia. Peter Francisco arose to go to the nearby livery stable to prepare for the short carriage trip from the inn where he and Judge Winston had stayed, to St. John's Church, the largest building in town.

As Peter exited the inn, he looked up and down the main street of Richmond. It was the largest town Peter had ever visited, yet it would appear that the entire population of nearly 600 was still fast asleep. The lone figure of this giant of a man, about six-feet, six inches tall, yet only nearing his fifteenth birthday, walked silently down the street. His feet, though not nearly as large befitting a man of his size, crushed clods of

dirt as he made his way to the livery. Each made a distinct crunching sound as it was flattened under the weight of 240-pound Peter.

When he arrived, he was happy to see that he really wasn't the only person awake in town. The stable owner was there preparing for yet another busy day, for Richmond had seldom seen the large number of visitors as those who had descended upon the town the last few days. They had come from all parts of the Virginia Colony for the Second Virginia Convention, which had begun three days prior.

"Good morning, sir." said Peter to the man whose back was turned as he gathered oats for his equestrian guests to breakfast on.

Startled, the man turned around to see Peter's giant figure standing in the doorway. "Good morning to you, too. I was just getting ready to feed your two American Cream Drafts...beautiful creatures they are."

"Yes, they are beautiful," Peter replied. "But you look like you've got lots of horses to feed, so I'll take care of mine." The fact that the two horses actually belonged to the judge and not to Peter was of little consequence. From the very first day Peter had laid eyes on these two horses, he had adored them as if they were indeed his own.

Peter took a bucket of oats, one in each of his huge hands, and walked over to the giant beasts. At his height, Peter could look them in the eye. "There, there, now, I've brung you something to eat." Almost in unison, the horses seemed to nod a greeting to Peter as he approached.

Each, in turn, nuzzled his face before dipping their massive heads in the buckets.

"We've a big day before us," Peter said softly to the horses. "The judge says we'll be hearing great and powerful things at the church

today. Then, later in the week, the judge says we'll be headin' back home to Hunting Tower. Do you miss Hunting Tower? Of course you do."

After they had finished eating, Peter entered their stall and began brushing and rubbing their coats of ivory-colored hair. He loved feeling their well-defined muscles as they twitched under his deft hand. The closeness of feelings between man and beast was unusual to say the least.

Having finished their rubdown, Peter gathered their collars, bits and bridles, and prepared them to hitch up to the carriage that he and Judge Winston had ridden from Hunting Tower Plantation. The plantation was located in Buckingham County and the judge was the local representative to this convention...a convention that would ultimately go far in deciding the fate of the colonies in their disagreements with England.

Now, most carriage drivers would simply take their horses around to the back of the stable where all the visitor carriages were kept, but Peter decided to wheel it around to the front himself. He grabbed the tongue of the carriage and, as big as he was, easily guided it to the massive doors on the front side of the stable. As he brought the horses out and began to hitch them up, Peter noticed Judge Winston walking down the street.

"Good morning Peter. I trust you slept well," he said.

"Yes sir, and good morning to you," Peter replied.

"Have you had your breakfast?"

"No, sir. I had the innkeeper's wife fix me some biscuits last night, and I'll eat them later. I just thought it best to be ready to go whenever you wanted, seeing as how you don't like to never be late for meetings and things."

“You know me well, Peter, you know me well.”

All during the conversation, Peter had been finishing the job of hitching the horses to the carriage and presently, the carriage stood ready to take the judge to his destination.

“Excellent, Peter,” said the judge. “Then we best be getting to the church. I have a feeling in my bones that we are about to make history today.”

Peter opened the door to the carriage, and the judge took his seat. Then Peter climbed onto the driver’s station. He reached down beneath his feet to feel where he had placed the sword and pistol the judge had asked him to bring on this trip. They were still there where he had placed them only a few minutes before.

“Gidup,” Peter prodded the horses in his gentle voice, and the Creams obeyed his command instantly.

As they rode to the outskirts of town in silence, they passed many fine homes belonging to some of the wealthier residents of Richmond. Soon, St. John’s Church came into view sitting almost majestically on a hill overlooking the James River. It was by far an imposing structure, adorned in white with a massive spire rising out of the front and center of the church and encasing the large front door. Completed in 1741, the church was a part of Henrico Parish, a parish that had been established as far back as 1611.

A few others had arrived early as well. Patrick Henry, the judge’s nephew, was talking to two other men who also appeared to be of equal substance and stature as he. Peter couldn’t know it at the time, but they were Thomas Jefferson and George Washington. Washington was an especially imposing figure at six-feet, two, although he didn’t seem to

be saying much, just nodding in agreement as Jefferson and Henry engaged in animated conversation.

Indeed, today history would be made, and the world would be set on a course that would change the destiny of a new nation and, ultimately, the entire planet; but no one here could possibly imagine that...at least not yet.

Among those arriving at the church to occupy seats in the visitor's gallery were Susannah Anderson and her father, James. Peter noticed their arrival, and just a single look at Susannah made his heart skip a beat...at least it felt that way to Peter. Even though they lived in totally different social strata, his previous encounters with both she and her father emboldened Peter. Although his knees felt like the jelly Peter had often spread on a Sunday morning biscuit, he ambled over to their carriage. When he had covered the twenty or so yards distance, Peter reached up to take hold of Susannah's hand as she exited the fully enclosed carriage. That touch sent chills down Peter's spine.

"Why, Peter," she said, "you are always such a gentleman...and how are you today?"

"Seeing you has made it much better already." Peter was almost shocked to even say such bold words.

Susannah's father had exited the opposite side of the carriage and walked around the back to where Peter and Susannah stood. He noticed that their eyes seemed locked on each other as he tapped Peter on the shoulder. He wasn't entirely sure he liked that but, after all, Peter had saved his daughter's life. "Peter, my boy, it's good to see you again...and I see you're wearing the hat I gave you...wonderful, wonderful."

“Yes, sir,” said Peter. “I save wearin’ it for special occasions like this.”

“Indeed, today should be very special. It will be good to get all this nonsense out of the way at last. Come now, Susannah, we want to find good seats in the church.”

As her father grabbed her arm, Susannah glanced back. “Bye, Peter, I’ll see you later.”

“Good day, Miss Susannah,” Peter’s mouth went dry.

Peter rejoined the judge, regaining his senses and remembering his duties as bodyguard.

Other dignitaries also began to arrive and soon, they were all filing into the church. Judge Winston looked at Peter and said, “You might want to take station near one of the windows today. My nephew intends to address the body with words I think it important for you to hear.”

During the previous days of the convention, Peter had lingered around the windows that had been opened because of unseasonably mild temperatures, but most of the speeches that he had heard had not been very inspiring, and most seemed to favor keeping relations with Great Britain as they were.

But Peter knew the position that the judge’s nephew would take, and he wanted to hear each and every word. Thus, at his size, Peter was easily able to make his way to one of the windows. Through it, he could see the judge, Patrick Henry and the two men that Henry had been speaking to earlier. He could also see Susannah Anderson and her father, and his heart skipped a beat again, for this young lady had truly captured his fancy.

Different people rose, spoke, and sat. Some of them inspired mild clapping of hands or audible “Here, here’s.” None of them was very noteworthy until Patrick Henry rose from seat number forty-seven, strode purposefully and confidently to the center of the room and turned to address the delegates.

“No man, Mr. President, thinks more highly than I do of the patriotism, as well as abilities, of the very honorable gentlemen who have just addressed this House,” Henry began, his tone almost apologetic. “But different men often see the same subject in different lights; and, therefore, I hope it will not be thought disrespectful of those worthy gentlemen if, entertaining as I do opinions of a character very opposite to theirs, I shall speak forth my sentiments freely and without reserve.”

Henry’s voice began to rise. “This is no time for ceremony. The question before this House is one awful moment to the country. For my own part, I consider it as nothing less than a question of freedom, or slavery; and in proportion to the magnitude of the subject ought to be the freedom of the debate....

Peter watched as Henry began to circle the room, making eye contact with as many delegates as possible, during which he spoke not a word. “Mr. President,” Henry began again, “it is natural for a man to indulge in the illusions of hope. We are apt to shut our eyes against a painful truth, and listen to the song of that siren till she transforms us into beasts. Is this the part of wise men, engaged in a great and arduous struggle for liberty?”

With that utterance, Henry held out his arms from his sides as if asking the question of all there assembled. “Are we disposed to be of the

number of those who, having eyes, see not, and, having ears, hear not, the things which so nearly concern their temporal salvation? For my part, whatever anguish of spirit it may cost, I am willing to know the whole truth; to know the worst, and to provide for it.”

Henry let his arms drop to his sides and his shoulders to slump. He stood silent for several moments, and Peter wondered if he was finished. Then, Henry raised his hands above his head and looked toward the ceiling. “...I know no way of judging the future but by the past. And judging by the past, I should wish to know what there has been in the conduct of the British ministry for the last ten years to justify those hopes with which gentlemen have been pleased to solace themselves and the members of this House...”

Peter looked around the room. Some of the listeners just sat impassively, but others were nodding in agreement, including Judge Winston, Thomas Jefferson and George Washington. As for Jefferson, a small smile crept across his face. Peter took a moment to further survey the visitor’s gallery until his eyes rested on Susannah. She was shaking her head, and Peter was a bit disheartened, for he was drawing his own conclusions, and they were much different from hers. Nevertheless, at that moment, she looked at the window where Peter was standing, and when her eyes met his, she couldn’t help but smile demurely. “Suffer not yourselves to be betrayed with a kiss. Ask yourselves how this gracious reception of our petition comports with those warlike preparations, which cover our water and darken our land...”

Henry was again moving around the room, and his arms were waving, and the tone of his voice was imploring for an answer to his questions. Peter, too, was being swept up in the emotional pleadings.

“Let us not deceive ourselves, sir. These are the implements of war and subjugation; the last arguments to which kings resort...”

Once more, Henry dropped his arms to his side. He looked as though he had been beaten, but he had not, for when he spoke again, his voice seemed to reach a crescendo. “They are meant for us; they can be meant for no other. They are sent over to bind and rivet upon us those chains which the British ministry has been so long forging. And what do we have to oppose them?...”

More of the delegates were nodding in agreement now, and Peter could also sense that his own head was doing the same. “Shall we resort to entreaty and humble supplication?... Let us not, I beseech you, sir, deceive ourselves. Sir, we have done everything that could be done to avert the storm which is now coming on. We have petitioned; we have remonstrated; we have supplicated; we have prostrated ourselves before the throne, and we have implored its interposition to arrest the tyrannical hands of the ministry and Parliament.”

Henry’s voice grew louder and his gestures more exaggerated. “Our petitions have been slighted; our remonstrances have produced additional violence and insult; our supplications have been disregarded; and we have been spurned, with contempt, from the foot of the throne!...”

Henry allowed himself a moment to turn completely around and cast his eyes across the sea of delegates. His eyes gazed out the window where Peter was standing, and a look of acknowledgement was exchanged between them. Henry began to speak more rapidly. “If we wish to be free...if we mean to preserve inviolate those inestimable privileges for which we have been so long contending...if we mean not

basely to abandon the noble struggle in which we have been so long engaged, and which we have pledged ourselves never to abandon until the glorious object of our contest shall be obtained...we must fight! I repeat it, sir, we must fight.” Henry had grabbed a nearby banister that separated him from some of the delegates. He had known these men to be for appeasement, and he lowered his face to theirs, his eyes fierce with passion.

“An appeal to arms and to the God of hosts is all that is left us!” Henry turned to face the rest of the body there assembled. “They tell us, sir, that we are weak; unable to cope with so formidable an adversary.” Everyone knew that Henry was referring to those men he had just personally addressed. “But when shall we be stronger? Will it be the next week, or the next year? Will it be when we are totally disarmed, and when a British guard shall be stationed in every house?...”

Henry’s tone had moderated such that some of the delegates were straining to hear every word. Peter cocked his head further into the window as well with the added benefit that he could more easily see Susannah. “Shall we acquire the means of effectual resistance by lying supinely on our backs and hugging the delusive phantom of hope, until our enemies shall have bound us hand and foot?...”

The volume of Henry’s voice began a gradual rise. “...The battle, sir, is not to the strong alone; it is to the vigilant, the active, the brave. Besides, sir, we have no election. If we were base enough to desire it, it is now too late to retire from the contest. There is no retreat but in submission and slavery! Our chains are forged! Their clanking may be heard on the plains of Boston! The war is inevitable...and let it come! I repeat, sir, let it come.”

It was all Peter could do to contain himself. He so dearly wanted to cheer; yet he knew it was not his place to demonstrate in such a manner. There were some shouts of affirmation from within the church. Other delegates yelled in the negative. Patrick Henry just stood silent, waiting for their voices to still themselves.

When Henry spoke again, his voice was measured. “It is in vain, sir, to extenuate the matter. Gentlemen may cry, Peace, Peace...but there is no peace. The war is actually begun!” His voice was rising, now. “The next gale that sweeps from the north will bring our ears the clash of resounding arms. “ Henry’s voice was louder than at any other time, and it was getting louder. “Our brethren are already in the field! Why stand we here idle? What is it that gentlemen wish? What would they have?”

Henry once again circled the room. “Is life so dear, or peace so sweet, as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery?” He returned to the center of the room and again raised his eyes skyward. “Forbid it, Almighty God!”

He raised his arms above his head. “I know not what course others may take; but as for me, give me liberty or give me death.” His last words were delivered as thunder, and he remained in his pose.

Many of the delegates were on their feet cheering and clapping their hands. Among them were Washington, Jefferson and Judge Winston. Some of the people remained seated. Peter had never felt such emotion. His very soul had been swept away. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw the Andersons rise and make their way to the front door.

Peter pushed through the crowd of men that had gathered around him, pressing toward the window so that they too could hear. He ran around to the front of the church just in time for the Andersons to exit.

“Wasn’t that wonderful?” Peter said to the Andersons. “Do you not agree with it all?”

Susannah’s father just brushed past Peter, preferring not to engage conversation.

Susannah, turned and the eyes with which Peter had been so enchanted glared back at him. “If that foolishness is truly what you think, Peter Francisco, then you are also a fool...a fool on a fool’s errand. So go back to your...foolish friends, but I warn you, this course will render nothing but heartache and despair. Good day.”

Peter just stood there crushed as Susannah entered the carriage with her father. It felt as though someone had hit him in the chest with a twenty-pound blacksmith’s hammer. As her carriage pulled out of sight, leaving nothing but a dusty trail, Peter thought about the words of Patrick Henry, and one word stood out more than any of the others...freedom. What did it really mean? What would it mean to him? If he were free, could he come and go as he pleased? Could he one-day own property? Could he marry a young lady like Susannah Anderson?

He sat down on a nearby tree stump and slumped over propping his head up in his huge hands. His eyes focused straight down on the dirt road as he continued to ponder over Patrick Henry’s words. They seemed to reverberate in his head like waves crashing on a beach...their ebb and flow much like the emotional ride Peter found himself experiencing at this very moment.

Regardless of how the Anderson’s had reacted, Peter knew...he knew deep in his very soul...that freedom was well worth fighting for...well worth dying for.

As these thoughts continued to play out in Peter's mind, he looked down at the James River. It was that river on which Portuguese pirates had abandoned Peter Francisco at City Point nearly ten years ago. He wondered where his family was and what they were doing now. He had been just five-years-old when the precious gift of freedom had been stripped away from him at such an innocent age, and Peter thought about the long journey he had taken since that time when he was so young...and so afraid.

