

## "A Mid-life Crisis Caused a Mystery"

Carroll County Times article for 20 September 1998

By Jay A. Graybeal

The September 17, 1898 issue of the Democratic Advocate newspaper carried an unusual story about a former county resident, Thomas B. Richey. The story ran under the headline of "Mysterious Disappearance":

"The Thomas B. Richey, mentioned in the following dispatch, was for four years a clerk in the store of Mr. David E. Stem, Sam's Creek, and for nearly the same period the Sam's Creek correspondent of the DEMOCRATIC ADVOCATE. He was an exemplary young man then, and his bright letters to the ADVOCATE were universally read:

Washington, August 31.—The disappearance of Thomas B. Richey, a merchant at Woodstock, Va., has proved a mystery to the police and detectives. Mr. Richey is a brother of Dr. S. O. Richey, of this city. His wife has been for some time at Manhattan Beach, and it was there that Mr. Richey left her when he started for Washington last Tuesday a week ago. He left New York at 11:30 A.M., arrived in Washington shortly after 5 o'clock, and went immediately to the Howard House, where he engaged a room. His trunk left New York on the 2:15 train, and was received at the Pennsylvania depot with check No. 34,605 attached. Acting upon instructions, the trunk was rechecked that same night to Cortland Street Ferry, New York.

The last seen of Mr. Richey was about 9 P.M., when he left the Howard House office.

That night a letter was mailed from Washington to Woodstock. It was addressed to a niece of Mr. Richey and was received by her the next day. Its postmark was 2:30 A.M., which indicated that it was postmarked after 1:30 A.M., as a general collection is made at that time. The idea that Mr. Richey intended to go back to New York is dispelled by this communication, which says:

'WASHINGTON, D. C., Aug. 23.

Dear Niece: Well, I am here tonight, and have to stay until my trunk comes. It is so hot I do not know how I am to sleep. I will take a ride out in the suburbs on the trolley, and see if it is cooler where the breezes blow up the river. Look for me tomorrow if the trunk comes.

Yours,  
UNCLE.'

The family and relatives all say that he was a most exemplary man and had never used intoxicating drinks. They are quite certain that the address on the envelope containing the letter to his niece is not in his handwriting, although the letter is. How to account for some one else addressing the envelope is one of the unexplained factors in the case."

Two weeks after the above article appeared, the mystery was solved and the Advocate ran the story:

"RICHEY MYSTERY SOLVED.

The Woodstock Merchant Eloped With Another Woman.

A dispatch from Woodstock, Va., on Wednesday, disposes of the mystery surrounding the disappearance of Thomas B. Richey, a prosperous merchant of that place, once a clerk in the store of Mr. David E. Stem, at Sam's Creek, this county. The dispatch says:

'The disappearance of Mr. T. B. Richey, a former merchant of this place, from the Howard House, in Washington, D.C., on the night of August 23, which has mystified his friends here, and the police at Washington since that time, was wholly cleared up today. The facts as ascertained indicate that beyond doubt, Mr. Richey had become enamored with a young woman, with whom he made every arrangement before he left, for her to follow and meet him, and forever leave these parts. The arrangements of the pair, however, failed to mature as intended, and the meeting, which was to have taken place this morning, was not had. The place set for the meeting is known to the family of the absent man, but they would not give it out for publication, as they do not care to give all facts connected with the case, adding that the public should be satisfied with a bare statement of facts without going into detail.

It will be remembered that Mr. Richey spent ten days at Manhattan Beach, N. Y., with his wife, and her brother and sister, and while there bought a large bill of goods for his stores here, which has since been canceled, and that he left for home, complaining of not feeling well. His wife wanted to return with him, but he would not hear to it, and returned to Washington alone. It is now evident that he never intended to return to Woodstock, and that he had been preparing his business for months to this end. He accumulated all the money he could, allowing his bills to run, and placing the daily receipts of the store on deposit. This he took with him. Since the appointment of the receiver by the Circuit Court, indebtedness amounting to \$5,000 to \$6,000 has been reported, but is believed that he intended to leave enough here to settle everything outstanding, dollar for dollar.

Mrs. Zera E. Richey, the wife of the fugitive, is at her home here, and takes her affliction in the best manner possible. She says she wants nothing suppressed, and the public must have all. She is one of the most beloved and polished ladies in the valley, is a prominent church worker in the Methodist Episcopal Church South, president of the Winchester District Woman's Missionary Society, president of the local Epworth League and a factor in Sunday school work."

Although the term "mid-life crisis" had yet to be coined, the story is timeless.