Port Tobacco Times

Elijah Wells, Jr. and G.W. Hodges established the *Port Tobacco Times* [LCCN: sn83016329] in 1844 to supply the residents of Charles County, Maryland with a weekly newspaper that supported the Democratic Party. In 1845 its name became the *Port Tobacco Times and Charles County Advertiser* [LCCN: sn89060060]. Elijah Wells came from Annapolis where he had learned printing as an apprentice under Jeremiah Hughes, publisher of the *Maryland Republican* [LCCN: sn84020493]. After Wells’ death in 1877, his son Solomon O. Wells ran the paper before turning it over to a cousin, Charles F. Daley in 1880. Daley’s partner was F. Marcellus Cox, who announced in 1889 that Daley was leaving Port Tobacco to pursue opportunities elsewhere.

Southern Maryland’s residents were decidedly pro-Confederate in their sympathies, thus at the start of the Civil War, Federal authorities moved quickly to secure Charles County by stationing troops in Port Tobacco, the county seat, and other strategic locations. On October 3, 1861 Wells had to assure alarmed readers that the *Times* had not been seized by Union soldiers. He had merely allowed the soldiers to use his printing equipment to issue a newspaper for the troops stationed nearby. After the war, the *Port Tobacco Times* documented the continuing economic decline of the county. Depressed land values and falling prices for tobacco were topics of concern. Politics remained a subject of great interest and Port Tobacco had two newspapers representing opposing political parties. In 1885 Adrian Posey, editor of the *Maryland Independent* [LCCN: sn85025407] and F. Marcellus Cox, of the *Times* narrowly averted a duel over comments published during an election. In most of the country, dueling had fallen out of fashion, but in conservative Charles County the old ways persisted.

The news in Charles County turned more positive when the Popes Creek Branch of the Pennsylvania Railroad arrived in 1873, which led to the rise of new commercial centers such as La Plata. However, the railroad bypassed the historic town of Port Tobacco, and some county residents began agitating for a new seat of local government. *Times* editor F.M. Cox led a petition drive against the proposed move of the county seat from Port Tobacco in 1890. His cause prevailed in that referendum, but a disastrous courthouse fire in 1892 led to another special election in 1895 when voters decided in favor of La Plata. This move spelled the doom of the *Port Tobacco Times*, which merged with the *Crescent* [LCCN: sn88065730] of La Plata to form the *Times-Crescent* [LCCN: sn85000004] in 1898. Meanwhile Port Tobacco virtually disappeared – the once thriving town reduced to just a handful of houses. Recent archaeological investigations have located the site of the *Port Tobacco Times* printing office on Chapel Point Road.

Sources:

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