

CHARLES F. TUTTLE AND THE THIMBLES



The following are edited excerpts from a booklet published by John Kirby of Pawson Park, Branford, Connecticut, in 2003.

Charles F. Tuttle was born in New Haven on April 25, 1831, died on September 30, 1899, and was buried in Grove Street Cemetery.

INTRODUCTION

The Thimble Islands are located on Long Island Sound off the shore of Stony Creek in the Town of Branford, Connecticut.

Their history is unique and entwined with extraordinary legends and lore. Their past includes a cast of characters involving Indians, pirates, midgets, acrobats, millionaires, quarry workers and more. Over the years these tales have been embellished to the delight of the summer visitor and the skepticism of the locals.

One story that seems to be still untold is the true adventure of Charles F. Tuttle. It is fully documented in the New Haven Daily Palladium in 1857 and is presented in this summary of John Kirby's booklet.

Charles F. Tuttle was born in New Haven on April 25, 1831. The first of this Tuttle branch of the family arrived on these shores in 1635. The New Haven home of his father, Julius, burned when Charles was an infant. Charles was in a cradle at the time, and in the fright and hurry he was forgotten. Several Yale students entered the burning building and rescued him and took him back to the old North College where they cared for him until he was returned to his distracted family.

Charles entered the John E. Lovell School and finished his education at The Gunnery in Washington, Connecticut. In 1848, the Tuttle grocery business was established on Broadway. After two brothers ran the business, they were succeeded by Charles in 1856. Charles Tuttle married Mary C. Sperry in 1857, and they had one child, Charles Allen Tuttle, in 1858.

Until as noted in this text, the following material is presented precisely as it appeared in the New Haven Daily Palladium. The tale of the adventures involving The Thimbles continues upward and onward!

The Committee

The Balloon

A meeting of citizens was held last evening, at the office of Samuel C. Blackman, Esq., to take the matter of a Balloon Ascension into consideration, and devise ways and means for its accomplishment. N. C. Hall was appointed Chairman, and P. A. Pinkerman Secretary. On motion, the following gentlemen were appointed a Committee to collect the necessary amount, which is estimated at about \$600. P. A. Pinkerman, J. B. Hotchkiss, F. W. J. Sizer, Charles Ruckoldt, W. R. Kinley, H. A. Duntze,

W. E. Baldwin, J. H. Coley, D. Botsford, N. C. Mix. N. C. Hall was appointed Treasurer. The Committee will enter upon the discharge of their duties immediately, and we trust that the necessary amount will be raised without delay. The ascension will probably take place from the Public Green and the aeronauts do not wish a cent of the money paid to them unless they can give satisfaction to the public. Let all give their mite.

[The following are advertisements which appeared in the New Haven Daily Palladium.]

The Committee respectfully announces to the citizens and vicinity, that they have engaged the celebrated American Aeronaut, Mr. S. A. KING, of Philadelphia, who will ascend from the PUBLIC SQUARE, on TUESDAY, August 11th, 1857, in his magnificent Balloon, QUEEN OF THE AIR. The inflation will commence at 11 o'clock. The Ascension will take place between 1 and 3 o'clock p.m., previous to which a number of PILOT BALLOONS will be sent up. Mr. King will be assisted in his preparations, by Mr. JAMES ALLEN, of Providence, the New England Aeronaut. Mr. King will probably be accompanied in his ascension by gentlemen belonging to New Haven. As soon as the Balloon is fully inflated, the Car will be attached, and the voyagers will take their seats, when Mr. King will sever the last restraining cord, and soar upwards into the boundless realms of space. When at the height of 10,000 feet, Mr. King will let go a PARACHUTE containing a live animal. The New Haven Brass Band has been engaged for the occasion? Should the weather prove unfavorable, the Ascension will be postponed until the next fair day.

Per order the Committee

G R A N DBALLOON ASCENSION, FROM NEW HAVEN
TUESDAY, August 11th, 1857. The Ascension

[The following are reports of the Balloon Ascension as they appeared in the New Haven Daily Palladium.]

BALLOON ASCENSION

Yesterday was one of the most splendid days that occur at this season of the year. The Balloon Queen of the Air, was taken to the Public Square, nearly in front of Center Church, about 9 o'clock, where the process of inflation commenced. The Gas Company had provided an excellent article of gas specially for this purpose, and by means of pipes above ground and a long

tube of oiled cotton cloth the inflation commenced about 11 o'clock. People began to gather, and at 1 o'clock the large ring, in the center of which was the Balloon, was surrounded and crowds upon crowds pressed on the Green. The National Blues, Governor's Foot Guards, and City Guard, together with the New Haven Brass Band, now made their appearance. The military were at once posted on-guard and the Band struck up some of their liveliest tunes. The gas flowed into the Balloon freely, so much so that it was shut off for near an hour, lest Mr. King should be obliged to ascend before the advertised time. About half past 3 o'clock, all things being in readiness, the Aeronaut began fixing his car, which was a basket of wicker work about the size and shape of a crockery crate. The instruments, ballast, provisions, parachute, and rabbit having been deposited therein, Messrs. P. A. Pinkerman and C. F. Tuttle, together with Mr. King, took their seats and the cords, which had been previously loosed from the sand-bag weights were let go by those assisting and the Balloon rose gracefully and beautifully toward the heavens. It took an easterly direction and when nearly over Saltonstall Lake, the Parachute and rabbit were let fall. They descended gradually and lodged in a tree top, near the lake, whence they were taken by some persons and carried to a neighboring store unharmed. About this time conflicting currents of air swung the car about like a pendulum, and the subject of alighting or sailing on became one of interest. Their course lay east, and would inevitably take them lengthwise the Sound, and in the direction of Montauk Point. They could not cross over the water to Long Island, for want of a current direct enough, and they concluded to descend, and that immediately, with the hope of striking the main land, or some one of the Thimble Islands. The car descended rapidly, but one of the passengers remarked, Mr. King, we dont seem to go down much, whereupon the Aeronaut opened wide the valve and they went down swiftly. When 500 feet from the surface of the water Mr. King told the passengers to hold on as she would strike suddenly and smartly, the words were scarcely out of his mouth when the whole party were submerged several feet, below the surface of the Sound, and a mile or so from shore. They instantly came up, but the passengers lost their caps, and the whole party were thoroughly drenched. This unexpected bath gave a new phase to affairs, and they scud before the wind rapidly for the islands. A number of boats came off, but assistance was declined as the balloon might be lost by an indiscretion of the boatmen or the inmates of the car. After passing several inlands and a distance of one or two miles the grapnel [anchor] was thrown overboard and the ropes length landed the balloon and car upon the beach of a small island, called Governor's Island. Several [sic] boats

from Stony Creek put off, and the party were brought over to Douglass, where some gentlemen from New York tendered the drenched men some dry clothing. Mr. Kinley and his companion who started with a team from this city, had arrived there before this time and themselves put off in a boat to the aerial navigators. After partaking of the hospitalities of the house the party started for this city and arrived about midnight much to the joy of their friends who congratulated them on their safe return.

FURTHER PARTICULARS.

From a lengthy conversation with Mr. Pinkerman this forenoon, we have been able to obtain the following amount [sic] of the aerial voyage: Mr. P. at no moment felt an apprehension of danger, and least of all after he began his ascension. The perfect coolness of Mr. King throughout he said was calculated to allay all anxiety in the minds of the voyagers. After the balloon had been properly balanced, Mr. King said Let us try once more how she floats. Now let go and away the air ship sailed with an upward and an onward flight, majestic and beautiful. To us the ascent seemed uncommonly rapid, like the start of a frightened bird; yet the balloon kept her upright position, and moved away as if under perfect control, taking the direction above described. Mr. Pinkerman says that the higher we ascended the more beautiful the sight. The out-spread plains seemed gradually to condense, or be drawn together and to form a landscape picture, so small as to be measured at a single glance, yet it was only seen in grand outline, or the more minute objects on the plain were undistinguishable. Saltonstall Lake, which is about four miles long, appeared to be only 150 rods in length and not over twenty feet wide. The mountains seemed to sink down to a level with the plains, inasmuch as the former presented no obstruction to the views beyond them. The rabbit was kept up longer than he would have been but for the current of air which it was feared would carry him into the harbor. He was dropped in the parachute near the lake, and found in a tree as described. Although it is supposed the balloon attained an altitude of about two miles, yet the voyagers did not, as they expected, experience any sensation of cold. They tried their voices in a song: but did not notice an peculiar reverberation in the atmosphere. They observed a thunder storm in the distant north east, and heard the rattling peal of heavens loud artillery, though far above it. They also distinctly heard a railroad whistle, which caused Tuttle to throw down a challenge saying Blow away, old fellow,—you cant

do anything in the way of travel so you've a right to make a great noise. The aeronauts soon lost sight of the Green, and of the people on it. The dense foliage obscured much of the city. Yet they could keep its geography pretty well by tracing Mill river, which appeared like a satin ribbon unrolled on a green lawn. All these views were enchanting. After passing Saltonstall Lake, the voyagers were making sharp observations in regard to their course, and were in doubt where they should land. They thought of passing over to Long Island, but being doubtful of the wind, and apprehending that they might be carried into the Atlantic, as they could distinctly see Montauk Point, they concluded to descend upon the narrow point of land called Indian Neck, between Double Beach and Branford Point. The valve of the balloon was now opened and the balloon began to descend rapidly. King ordered the ballast to be thrown out, and still the descent was quite swift, faster than the sand which surrounded them when pouring out of the bags. Soon persons could be distinguished, and Pinkerman threw out some bouquets to the ladies at Branford Point, but they struck the water. Mr. King now asked for a knife; Mr. Pinkerman took out his own, and King said be ready to cut away the grapnel, (or anchor) for I mean it shall hold to that rock. In a moment more, King said Put up your knife its [sic] no use boys we've got to strike the water. Mr. Pinkerman had just time to shut his knife and put it in his pocket, when he found himself, he thinks, TWENTY feet under water! As the basket came up, Pinkerman found himself thrown into Tuttle's lap, and saw his own cap floating on the water two hundred yards behind, while all hands were rushing through the water at a rapid rate. They braced their backs against the top edge of the basket, and their feet at the bottom, and thus kept themselves from falling out; for had one been thrown out, the balloon would doubtless have risen with the other two, and they might have been lost. Mr. Pinkerman had borrowed a splendid opera glass of Mr. P. Roessler, Optician, and he sought to save it, and was successful. He kept it under his feet in the water at the bottom of the basket, until he could reach it with his hands. Four or five boats now put out from the shore to render assistance; but Mr. King asked them to be ready to aid, yet to wait for orders. He then said to his passengers, I am going for that rock, prepare for one bump more. They struck Governors rock which they had previously aimed at from the air, and made fast. Although the blow against it was severe, no one was bruised. This rock was but little larger than the balloon itself. Mr. Robbins and Mr. Oaks of New York city, who were boarding at the Douglas[s] House, Stony [sic] Creek, now came to the aeronauts and offered the hospitalities of the House, and every possible assistance. They also took them to their own wardrobes

and furnished them with an entire change of clothing. Others & rendered much assistance. Messrs. Robbins and Oaks, then invited the aeronauts to appear in the presence of the ladies of the house, who were all impatient to gaze upon the gallant wanderers of the skies. Of course they went, and became lions indeed, though not those whose roar would frighten the dear creatures. They informed the voyagers that they kept a daily bulletin at the house, on which all the events of the day were recorded and on which programmes of performances were announced and among the pleasant things written on that morning was this, that the balloon would come down at Stoney [sic] Creek and land on Governors Rock; just where it did land! They all agreed that the circumstance was a remarkable one and the bulletin board the best kind of a newspaper, because it would tell what was to be as well as what had been. Messrs. W. R. Kinley and S. Gilbert, who started in a wagon for the voyagers, found them as soon as they had landed; and in a boat with Major Lafarge, J. Woodruff of Broadway, David Thomas and George McLane, brought the balloon ashore to the wagon, in which in due time they all rode back to New Haven. The balloon left the Green at precisely 23 minutes of four o'clock, and struck the water in its descent at precisely 25 minutes after four making the time of the flight forty-eight minutes. Mr. P. said the time appeared to him but about five minutes. It is evident that the voyagers were in some peril while in the water; and they fortunately escaped all injury, and say they would like to make another trial at some future time. The number of people witnessing the ascension from the Green and vicinity, is variously estimated as numbering from twenty to forty thousand.

That concludes the New Haven Daily Palladium report of the August 1857 Balloon Ascension by Messrs. Charles F. Tuttle and P. A. Pinkerman. What follows is further information about Charles A. Tuttle's Association with The Thimble Islands.

Although his August, 1857 arrival on Governors Island was by air and by a dunking in the sea, the fascination of Charles F. Tuttle for that island and for the Thimbles was in no way diminished. After passing through several different owners earlier in the century, on June 17, 1868, Tuttle and Albert B. Mallory, a paper manufacturer, bought Governors Island from Mr. & Mrs. Albert Denslow. Although hard to prove, it is possible that the island was named after the Hon. James Blackstone (1793-1889). Although he wasn't governor of Connecticut, he was very active in state and local politics. He was a representative in the General Assembly and a State Senator. In Branford, he was an assessor and a first selectman. These facts plus the knowledge that ones father was often called the Governor seem to add weight to the likelihood of how the island got its name. After about a year and

a half, Charles Tuttle and Albert Mallory sold the larger part of Governors Island on Jan. 17, 1870 to Jonathan Foote and Charles Cooper of North Branford for \$1,000 and kept Little Governors Island. They retained the right to use the well and spring on the larger island. Sometime in the 1870s, Charles Tuttle built a house on Little Governors. In July of 1877, Albert Mallory sold his half of the island to Charles Tuttle who now owned all of it. Charles Tuttle obviously enjoyed his island, and in 1880, he and two other men bought the larger Rogers Island. Mrs. Tuttle and their son spent much of their summers on the island, and Mr. Tuttle was there as much as possible. He had a large farm in Cheshire and business responsibilities in New Haven. The Granite Island Company had opened a granite quarry on Rogers Island in 1862. Such an endeavor required housing, so several buildings and even a boarding house were erected. Much of the granite was shaped into cobblestones, but a vein of beautiful pink granite provided limited stone for architectural purposes. The quarry was not successful financially and was abandoned. In 1880, Charles Tuttle, Victor King and John Humphreys purchased Rogers Island. Humphreys moved away the following year and sold his interest to the other two. In 1888, King sold his share to Charles Tuttle, who now owned all of Rogers Island. For several years, parts or all of Rogers Island would be rented out to various groups. In 1894, or perhaps earlier, Samuel H. Kirby, a New Haven jeweler, leased the entire [Rogers] island from Charles Tuttle. Two more cottages were built. Kirby often entertained his friends and business associates on the island. The Kirby family continued to enjoy the island and the Thimbles through the remainder of the century.

THE END OF AN ERA

Near the end of September, 1899, Charles F. Tuttle was stricken with paralysis while alighting from his carriage at his place of business. Although it was thought that he was improving, he took a sudden turn for the worse, and he died on September 30, 1899. He was 68 years old and had been in the grocery and wholesale liquor business for more than 45 years. He was buried in the Grove Street Cemetery. His obituary mentioned his balloon flight. His estate was found to be considerably in excess of what was anticipated by his friends. In the aggregate it amounted to about \$180,000. He owned \$103,128 in Real Estate. Rogers Island was valued at \$4,000 and the easterly side of Governors Island with cottage was put at \$1,500. The Tuttle farm in Cheshire was \$4,500, and his New Haven home on

College Street near Wall was listed at \$14,000. Several houses and buildings plus land accounted for the remainder. The stock in the liquor store was valued at \$2,112 and consisted of whiskey, rum, gin, imported brandy, California brandy, cherry brandy, cider brandy, blackberry brandy, California wine, sherry wine, Madeira wine, champagne wine, claret wine, and port wine. Tuttle's estate listed \$31,599 in various stocks and bonds. He also owned 2/64 of the schooner W. Wallace and 1/64 of the Lucinda Sutton. Mr. Tuttle's widow and son presumably spent time on Little Governors Island until Oct. 24, 1906 when it was sold to George H. Rhyndance, superintendent of the wood case department of the New Haven Clock Company. Mr. Tuttle's estate continued to lease Rogers Island to the Kirby family. On Jan. 18, 1902, the Tuttle estate sold Rogers Island, now also known as Kirby Island, to Captain John J. Phelps of Hackensack, New Jersey. The Tuttle estate sold Little Governors Island in 1906. This was the end of the Tuttle era in the Thimbles. It had been an era which had commenced in the air!



