

## 120 ~ For Whom the Bell Tolled

In Blog 23 (A Church Comes to Blawenburg - September, 2019), there was brief mention of the 1860 donation to purchase a bell for the Reformed Dutch Church of Blawenburg by wealthy financier Paul Tulane. In this blog, we look at the life of Paul Tulane and his relationship to Blawenburg, the Princeton area, and beyond.

### Who was Paul Tulane?



*May 10, 1801—March 27, 1887*

Paul Tulane began and ended his life in the Princeton/Montgomery Township area. He was born in 1801 on his family's farm in the Cherry Valley section, which straddles both municipalities. The farm of over 100 acres was on the Montgomery side of Cherry Valley Road near Great Road. The family was French, and their original surname was Tulasne. This name was hard for English speakers to pronounce, so Paul's father, Louis Tulasne, did what many immigrants did when they came to America. He Anglicized his surname to Tulane a generation before Paul was born.

Louis Tulane was a French merchant based in Saint-Domingue, a French colony on the western side of the island of Hispaniola in the Caribbean. In the late 1700s, Hispaniola produced 60% of the world's coffee and 40% of its sugar using enslaved African labor. The Black population of Saint-Domingue numbered over 500,000 in a country of 556,000 residents.

In 1791, the enslaved people rebelled against French domination, starting the Haitian Revolution. This war continued until 1804, when the rebels declared victory. They named the new nation Haiti, the first Black republic. Many of the colonists fled to various places, New Orleans being a popular destination. Seeing how the war was going, Louis

Tulane left Hispaniola and returned to his farm near Princeton, where Paul Tulane was born.

Paul Tulane went to private schools around the Princeton area, including Somerville Academy. When he turned 15, he took a job in a retail store in Princeton for three years. In 1818, he went with his brother and cousin to tour the South. Tulane found opportunity in New Orleans, where in 1822 he started Paul Tulane and Company, a retail dry goods and clothing business. He became a Southern sympathizer and funder of Southern causes. He sincerely believed that our nation would crumble without slave labor.

By 1828, through business and real estate investments, Tulane had acquired \$150,000, which was only the beginning of a vast fortune he would build over the next 40 years. It is estimated that his net worth was five to seven million dollars at the time of his death in 1887. That would be about 176 million dollars.

When Tulane retired in 1857, he moved to Princeton to devote his time and resources to philanthropy. He purchased an “in-town” home at 83 Stockton Street and made it his primary residence. Tulane still owned his family farm and visited it as a country retreat.

Tulane’s in-town home was over 10,000 square feet on 4.7 acres. After Tulane’s ownership, the house was owned by an Episcopalian priest and was known as the Walter Lowrie House. In 1968, Princeton University bought the property, and it still serves as the President’s home.



*The former in-town home of Paul Tulane*

### **A Bell Donation to the Reformed Dutch Church of Blawenburg, 1860**

One beneficiary of Tulane's largesse was the Reformed Dutch Church of Blawenburg. He allegedly said he wanted to donate money for a bell that he could hear at his country home, which was about one mile south of the church.



*The church purchased the bell from the Meneely Bell Foundry in West Troy, New York, in 1860. This prominent foundry made over 65,000 bells from 1816 until it closed in 1951.*

The Princeton Standard newspaper, in its September 19, 1860 edition, reported on Paul Tulane's donation to purchase the bell.

“We understand that our townsman, Paul Tulane, Esq. has generously presented the pastor of the Reformed Dutch Church of Blawenburgh with the sum of money with which to purchase a fine bell for their house of worship. He deserves to receive a volume of thanks from the appreciating people of that region, and more especially, as the contribution is additional to one which had already been made, to aid their church enlargement. The bell will cost about \$300.”

The period when Tulane donated the bell was known as the Third Great Awakening. It was a time of religious activism that ran from 1850 to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Perhaps fueled by the impending civil war, in 1860, so many people attended the Reformed Dutch Church of Blawenburg that there was a need to put an addition on the church. Fourteen feet were added to the front of the church where the pulpit was. Perhaps the addition inspired Tulane to make his donation. The bell is no longer rung at Blawenburg Church; nevertheless, it is still referred to as the Tulane Bell.

### **Renaming Universities**

There are several legends involving Paul Tulane that have been circulating for many years. One says that in his philanthropic retirement, Paul Tulane offered Princeton University a large sum of money, some say \$300,000. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics' Consumer Price Index, this would be around \$10 million today. If that money were invested, its value today would be much higher. The rumored deal was that he wanted the university to change its name to his, making it Tulane University. Princeton rejected Tulane's offer.

Undaunted, Tulane headed back to New Orleans an area he loved and lived in. In 1882, he donated \$1,000,000 to the University of Louisiana. This money transformed the university, making it a major educational institution in the South. While some think the gift was made with the same deal Princeton rejected, the story from the South says Tulane initially rejected the offer to use his name. He ultimately ceded to the University of Louisiana's wishes, and the name was changed to Tulane University. His generosity didn't end there. He continued to give money to the university for the rest of his life and included Tulane University in his estate. According to the consumer price index, the value of his donation today would be \$320,000,000, a growth of over 3,000%.

While the truth of the Princeton University story has not been verified, it continues to circulate to this day, over 140 years later. Tales like this often beget other tales that linger long past a person's lifetime.

### **The Legend of Paul Tulane's Burial Site**

Tulane's final resting place is in Princeton Cemetery, and a tale about the position of his monument continues to be told. His monument features a statue of Tulane facing northwest with his back to Princeton University on the east. Some say this placement was a deliberate snub to the University for its rejecting his magnanimous offer. Others say that Tulane is facing the direction of his country farm that meant so much to him. It's anyone's guess which story is true, but the position of the monument is enough to keep this tale alive!



*The Tulane monument at Princeton Cemetery*

Tulane made a fortune in retail sales and real estate. He also generously gave his money for many causes. While many would not agree with his position on slavery, he is part of our American history that helps us understand how our past led to where we are today.

### **Also of Interest**

1. Paul Tulane supported the Southern cause in the Civil War. He was in Princeton when the war began and wanted to travel safely south to his interests in New Orleans. In 1861, he arranged safe passage with NJ Governor Charles Olden. Some accounts say Tulane generously helped finance the Confederacy (the Confederate States of America).
2. Sylvia Dubois was a former slave turned domestic servant at Paul Tulane's farm home. She was a legend in the Blawenburg area. Born on Sourland Mountain, she endured years of abuse but was feisty, nevertheless. She was over 100 years old when she died on Sourland Mountain in the blizzard of 1888.
3. The former Tulane house near Princeton University is the home of the current President of Princeton University. The original home of the President from 1756 to 1878 is the Maclean House and is still at 73 Nassau Street.
4. Today, Tulane University has 75 majors and minors and 12,400+ students. They are known as The Green Wave and sometimes called Tulanians.
5. Paul Tulane sometimes has the title Esq. (Esquire) after his name. It is not clear whether he actually received a law degree; however, the Tulane Law School is named after him.

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### **SOURCES**

#### **Information**

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## **Pictures**

Paul Tulane portrait—A. H. Ritchie, public domain,  
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Paul Tulane home, Princeton—Dan Ewert

Blawenburg Church Bell—Rev. Jeff Knol

Tulane Princeton Cemetery monument—public domain

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