How A Kent County Senator Saved
Andrew Johnson's Presidency

by Gene Johnstone

IT WAS A COLD WINTER MORNING AROUND 3 A.M. ON MARCH 6, 1868, WHEN A
knock at the door awakened General George Vickers at his home in
Chesterstown. The sleepy resident asked from a second story window as to who was
there? The response was, “We are a committee of the Maryland Legislature, sent here
for the purpose of notifying you of your election as United States Senator, and to request
your immediate attendance at Washington.”

What a surprise for the new Senator! He hastily dressed himself and admitted
the Committee. After a prayer of both Protestants and Catholics, Vickers accompa-
nied the Committee on its immediate return to Baltimore on an ice boat, break-
ing the frozen water in the Chesapeake Bay as they went. In Baltimore, Vickers
was placed on a special Baltimore and Ohio train that took him to Washington
just in time to be sworn in. When Vickers presented his credentials, Senator
Summer of Massachusetts made an unsuccessful attempt to have Vickers’ admitt-
ance held up by the Judiciary Committee. After this ineffective effort, General
George Vickers was sworn in and he took his seat in the United States Senate.

On May 16, 1868, the test vote on President Andrew Johnson’s guilt as charged
in the Impeachment Articles was taken. A two-thirds vote—36—was required to
convict. Thirty-five Senators were for conviction and nineteen for acquittal. A
change of just one vote would have carried conviction. The vote was taken alpha-
betically. The atmosphere was at fever heat as the names were called. The ‘Vs’
were naturally at the end of the roll call, and the battle was to turn on Vickers’
vote. It came without hesitation or apology: “Not guilty.”

The result of acquittal was entered. This vote is now considered just and fortu-
nate by temperate historians.

And so, through the vote of Senator George Vickers, a Marylander from
Kent County—who declared he would not vote guilty because it was a national
disgrace and calamity to impeach the president—the course of American history
was determined.

The names appearing on the Senate trial document of President Andrew
Johnson, one hundred and thirty-one years ago, made history. And among the
greatest of them was Senator George Vickers of Maryland, a Kent County native
who loved both his family and his country.

Information for this article was taken from a scrapbook compiled by Jane Vickers
Brooks Sprinkle (Mrs. John H.). Jane is a great granddaughter of George Vickers and is
an active member of the Historical Society of Kent County.

If You Don’t Ask, You’ll Never Receive ...

Consider being a donor to Geddes-Piper House of:

- a large wooden library table, or a pair of such, equaling 10 to 12 feet in
  length for the Board and library use

or ... appropriate to the period of the house, but not necessarily old:

- silver trays, 24” x 15” approximately
- rugs and/or runners any size needed to protect new finish on old pine floors
- blue and white decorative porcelain
- appropriate artifacts from earlier times suitable for display on shelves or
  mantels
- ironstone ware, preferably white, for display in our colonial (basement)
  kitchen
- tall brass candlesticks

George Vickers’ house stood on High Street where the 1903 Elementary
School was erected. Vickers’ home was the grandest of Kent County’s Italianate
houses. It had a four-square plan plus a small service wing and was surmounted
by a belvedere. This location is now the site of Kent’s County Administrative
Offices in the rehabilitated 1903 Elementary School. The area has been
designated “Vickers Park” by the Chesterstown Beautification Committee.
Sketch from Martenet’s Map of Kent County, 1860.