

THE CHARGER



CLEVELAND CIVIL WAR ROUNDTABLE

APRIL 2017

VOL. 38 #9

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Message from The President — **PLAY BALL!**

As a lifelong baseball fan, I know it's that time of year to get out the bat, dust off the mitt and anxiously await Opening Day because, as we all know, *this* will be the year!

It is our Civil War ancestors whom we must thank for the popularity of our national pastime. They brought it from New York and Boston, where it was somewhat of a gentleman's game, derived from the British game of Rounders, learned to play in the fields of army camps and in the prisons during the War, and took the love of the game home with them. Contrary to popular myth, baseball was not invented by Gen. Abner Doubleday, but is now thought to owe its modern form to Alexander J. Cartwright, Jr. from New York City who developed the rules in the 1840's. (Interestingly, neither confirmed nor denied the story.)

Except for some seasoned players, they had little equipment. Tree branches, fences, singletons from wagons, anything they had were used as bats. Balls were made from string wound around a walnut and covered with horsehide. Gloves were not used until the Twentieth Century.

Baseball was perfect for army life: It needed little equipment. It was easy to learn. A man could make the team based on his ability, not his rank, and both officers and men played together. Baseball was played largely between late fall and early spring and was an excellent way of both relieving boredom and giving the troops some much needed exercise, especially in the prisons. Large concentrations of men allowed for the formation of teams. Baseball kept morale up and the camaraderie of the ballfield turned into support and teamwork on the battlefield.

Baseball was played by both sides. When the Blue and Gray lines were close, the men from one side would sometimes be able to see the game played by their opponents and would cheer a good play or a score. One Ohio soldier wrote home that although the sounds of fire could be heard nearby, their company continued their game of "bat ball".

Thousands of people came out to watch the games. In 1862 a game between the 165th NY Infantry (Zouaves) and the New York Regular All-Stars drew a crowd of reportedly 40,000. News of the games were often given front page coverage in the papers along with the War news. In 1864 the 11th Mississippi POWs played a baseball game at Johnson's Island. I attended a re-enactment of that event at Johnson's Island in August, 2014. (see William Vodrey's article on the game in the September, 2014 *Charger*).

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Pres. Message cont.

Abraham Lincoln was a baseball fan even before he was elected. There is a wonderful political cartoon of him after the 1860 Election in which he is holding the ball after retiring the side (Breckenridge, Bell and Douglas). After he became president, he had a field made on the White House lawn. A story is told that he was once late for a war council, saying, "They will just have to wait. It is almost my turn at bat."

We have only one photo showing a baseball game during the War. It was taken at Fort Pulaski, Georgia and the team shown playing ball in the background is the original New York Yankees of the 48th Volunteers.

I hope you'll take a moment this summer while enjoying a baseball game to reflect on its history and to remember that this most enjoyable national pastime was brought into its own during our country's darkest days. Play ball!

Jean



Roundtable Book Sale

At our March meeting we offered over 500 Civil War books for sale to members. These books came from the libraries of two local deceased Civil War buffs and were anonymously donated to the Roundtable by their families who wanted to see these books enjoyed by people who shared their family member's keen interest in Civil War history. The combined collection included many choice titles by a broad range of outstanding historians.

We sold a lot of books, raising over \$200 for the Roundtable's treasury while still leaving us with a healthy supply of books to seed future raffles, quizzes and book sales. Our thanks to President Jean Rhodes and Treasurer Dan Ursu for facilitating the sale, to the many people who helped setting up and tearing down the sale tables and, of course to Roundtable members who contributed to the ongoing education and preservation efforts of the Roundtable while filling out their home libraries.

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Destiny Personified by David A. Carrino

This history brief was presented at the March 2017 meeting of the Cleveland Civil War Roundtable. The following longer version of the history brief contains additional information that was not included in the version that was presented at the meeting.

Destiny is defined as "the events that will necessarily happen to a particular person in the future" and is also defined as "the hidden power believed to control what will happen in the future." For many people living in the United States prior to 1865, destiny was shackled in chains and consigned to chattel servitude. Bondage was the only destiny that these people realistically foresaw for themselves. However, history has shown that sometimes what appears to be an immutable destiny is not necessarily fixed in the cosmos. In the classic movie *Casablanca* when Victor Laszlo was taken into custody by the police and was being led away to be imprisoned, Rick Blaine said to Laszlo, "It seems that destiny has taken a hand." For some who were victims of what was euphemistically called the peculiar institution, destiny did take a hand. One such person is Allen Allensworth, and because destiny took a hand on behalf of Allensworth, he was able to make important contributions to American society. As one person wrote about Allensworth, "Born into slavery and sold many times to different owners, the future looked bleak for the young Allen. But life had some specific plans for the gutsy, hard-working, and brave (Allensworth)."



Allen Allensworth was born in Louisville, Kentucky on April 7, 1842 to Phyllis and Levi Allensworth. He was the youngest of 13 children, and as the child of a slave, Allen became a slave from the moment of his birth. When Allensworth was a child, he was assigned to his owner's son, who started to teach Allensworth to read even though this was illegal. After this was discovered, Allensworth was placed with another family, who were Quakers. This family continued to allow Allensworth to learn how to read, and when his previous owner learned of this, Allensworth was sold to a plantation in Henderson, Kentucky over 100 miles down the Ohio River. His new owner was careful to prevent Allensworth from becoming educated, and Allensworth was whipped if he tried to do so. The cruel treatment that Allensworth received from this owner motivated him to try to escape, which he attempted twice without success. After the second attempt, Allensworth was sold again and eventually came to be owned by a man named Fred Scruggs in Jefferson, Louisiana. Scruggs owned race horses, and he trained young Allensworth to exercise the horses and also as a jockey.

Early during the Civil War Scruggs took his horses and Allensworth to Louisville for some races. During their stay in Louisville Allensworth came in contact with men of the 44th Illinois Volunteer Infantry Regiment, and he asked them to help him escape. This was accomplished when the men of the regiment let Allensworth wear some of their clothing and march away with them. Allensworth reputedly covered his face with dried mud to make his skin appear more pale. After his escape Allensworth served for some time as a nursing aide, but in 1863 he joined the navy and served for the remainder of the Civil War as a steward and a clerk on gunboats.

After the war Allensworth was reunited with members of his family. Beginning in 1868 he and his brother operated two restaurants, which they later sold at a profit. Allen used the money from the sale of the restaurants to further his education. He also became involved with a Baptist church in Louisville and in 1871 was ordained a preacher. He later attended Roger Williams University in Nashville, Tennessee to study theology. It was there that he met his wife, Josephine Leavell, who was a pianist, organist, and music teacher

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They were married in 1877, and they went on to have two daughters. Allensworth also studied public speaking in Philadelphia. With his background in theology and speaking, Allensworth became well known as a preacher and lecturer. In addition, he devoted himself to educating others because of his ardent belief that knowledge was the key to blacks becoming successful in society.

By 1880 Allensworth had become prominent as a minister and educator, and in 1882 a black soldier informed Allensworth of a problem in the U.S. Army, which this soldier thought Allensworth could help alleviate. Although there were black units in the army, these units did not have black chaplains. The soldier urged Allensworth to fill this void, because he felt that Allensworth's background as a minister and educator made him an ideal candidate. After much perseverance Allensworth, at the age of 44, was finally appointed in 1886 by President Grover Cleveland to be chaplain of the 24th Infantry Regiment, which was one of the units in the Buffalo Soldiers. Allensworth served in this capacity for 20 years and retired from this position in 1906. By the time he retired from the army Allensworth had been promoted to lieutenant colonel, the first African-American to attain this rank.

During his time as chaplain, Allensworth's wife and daughters travelled with him to the various places where he was stationed, which included Fort Apache in Arizona, Camp Reynolds in California, and Fort Missoula in Montana. While Allensworth was stationed at Fort Bayard, New Mexico, he drew on his background and experience as an educator to design and implement a program for the teaching of soldiers and their children. This innovative program entailed a course of study in which students were separated into different grade levels based on age. This was of particular importance for the children, because Allensworth's course of study was designed so that children who left the post and entered civilian schools could be assimilated seamlessly into the grades of their respective ages and continue their education. Allensworth codified his program in a booklet titled *Outline of Course of Study, and the Rules Governing Post Schools of Ft. Bayard, N.M.* Allensworth's education program was so successful that it was adapted for use throughout the army, and his development of this program of age-graded education was a seminal contribution to the educational system in the U.S.

After Allensworth retired from the army, he undertook the most ambitious venture of his life. He and his family settled in Los Angeles, and Allensworth began a lecture tour to inspire blacks to become self-sufficient through education, industriousness, and thriftiness. While on his tour Allensworth met a man named William Payne, who convinced Allensworth to put his ideas into action by establishing a community for blacks to live free from the racism and discrimination that permeated post-Civil War America. On June 30, 1908 Allensworth, Payne, and three other men formed the California Colony and Home Promoting Association, which had the goal of founding a town which was to be wholly created and governed by blacks. Land that was located 150 miles northwest of Los Angeles was purchased from the Pacific Farming Company, a private firm which had been formed to assist in the development of rural areas. This land was chosen because it was fertile, and within it was a station on the railroad line connecting Los Angeles and San Francisco. In addition to land, it was necessary to secure water, and this was accomplished by striking a deal with the Pacific Farming Company. The future town was named Allensworth.

At first the town was a great success. People moved into the town, structures were built, and municipal facilities, such as a school and a library, were put in place. By 1913 Allensworth was a thriving community with the promise of growing even larger. However, events began to turn against the town. In 1914 the railroad company built a spur around the town that allowed trains to bypass Allensworth, which caused the town to become isolated. The railroad company's decision to do this resulted from a conflict between the town and the railroad company regarding hiring practices for the town's station, because the company refused to hire blacks to work at the station. Another problem for the town arose when the Pacific Farming Company reneged on its promise to supply water to the town. The incident that most adversely impacted the town of Allensworth was the death under mysterious circumstances of the person after whom the town was named. Allen Allensworth died on September 14, 1914 at the age of 72 after he was struck by a motorcycle in Monrovia, California, which is near Los Angeles.

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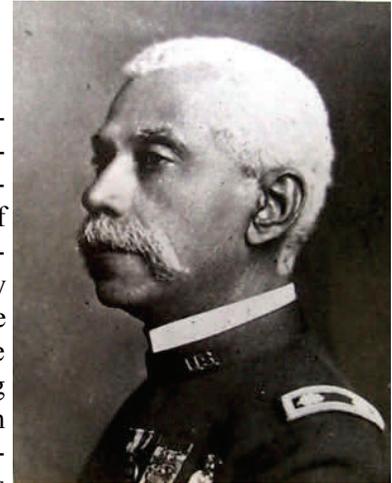
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Destiny cont.

The two young white men who were riding the motorcycle claimed that Allensworth caused the accident, although there was never a satisfactory resolution of culpability. Whatever were the truths about the accident, Allen Allensworth was gone, and without his guidance and determination, the town of Allensworth was left without its driving force. Allensworth, California struggled on for several more decades, but by 1972 the population had shrunk to very few. In the next few years a movement began to save the town, and by 1976 the state of California had purchased the land and made the site of the town a state park, which is still operating. Some might question the wisdom of preserving something that in the end was a failure, but as one person wrote about the town of Allensworth, "The fact that Allensworth ultimately failed is not the most important fact about the venture. What mattered then is that the attempt was made. And what matters now is that all Americans finally discover the depths of character and vision of those who, through their attempt to build a colony, tried to provide an opportunity for men and women to transcend race-based limits, and thus control their own destinies."



Allen Allensworth was born into slavery, but he rose out of slavery to become a free man and then to make important contributions to our country. Maybe it was simply not Allensworth's destiny to live his life in bondage, contributing only to his master's horse races and remaining forever unknown to future generations. Maybe this was not the life that destiny had in mind for Allen Allensworth. Maybe the life that destiny had preordained for Allen Allensworth was to be an army chaplain and an innovator in education and to found a town that bore his name. In the movie *Forrest Gump*, Lieutenant Dan became enraged at Forrest when Lieutenant Dan felt that Forrest had denied him his destiny. Lieutenant Dan shouted at Forrest, "We all have a destiny. Nothing just happens; it's all part of a plan." Forrest's mother showed that she had an opposing point of view when just before she died she told Forrest, "I happened to believe you make your own destiny." Later in the movie, after Forrest's mother and wife had died, Forrest stood over his wife's grave and said, "I don't know if Momma was right, or if it's Lieutenant Dan. I don't know if we each have a destiny, or if we're all just floating around accidental-like on a breeze, but I think maybe it's both." Perhaps, as Lieutenant Dan believed, it was destiny that brought Allen Allensworth from obscurity in slavery to a place in history. Or maybe, as Forrest stated, it was some combination of destiny and happenstance. But I have to say that I agree with Forrest's mother. I do not believe that some overarching hidden power deserves credit for Allen Allensworth's greatness and accomplishments and for his place in history. The credit for all of this belongs solely to Allen Allensworth. The ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus said, "Character is destiny." This quote accurately expresses the reason that Allen Allensworth has a place in history, because Allen Allensworth possessed the exceptional character to make his own destiny.

Civil War Cavalry Raids

By Dennis Keating

After writing last month about the 1865 Wilson cavalry raid and having previously written about Grierson's 1863 raid for *The Charger*, I became curious about how many other significant cavalry raids occurred during the Civil War. Sure enough, military historian Robert W. Black wrote *Cavalry Raids of the Civil War* (Stackpole Books, 2004).

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. Black profiles ten Confederate cavalry raids. The best known are:

Jeb Stuart's 1862 Chickahominy raid around McClellan's army in the Peninsula campaign and his post-Antietam/Sharpsburg raid on Chambersburg that fall;

Earl Van Dorn's 1863 raid on Holley Springs, Mississippi that destroyed U.S. Grant's supply base;

Joe Wheeler's 1863 raid that destroyed William Rosecrans' supply wagon train for his besieged army in Chattanooga;

Wade Hampton's 1864 cattle raid that captured a herd of almost 2,500 cattle to feed Robert E. Lee's besieged army at Petersburg;

Nathan Bedford Forrest appears in many engagements (including his defense of Selma, Alabama against Wilson's raid) but his own raids are not featured by Black*.

Black profiles fourteen Union raids, including those of Grierson and Wilson. Among the others were:

Three were commanded by George Stoneman (1863, 1864, and 1865). The last in 1865 through Southwest Virginia and Western North Carolina was memorialized by The Band: *The Night They Drove Old Dixie Down*, whose opening stanza is:

“Virgil Caine is the name

And I served on the Danville train

‘Till Stoneman's cavalry came

And tore up the tracks again

Judson Kilpatrick-Ulric Dahlgren's 1864 raid on Richmond that led to Dahlgren's death and the controversial captured order for the raiders to supposedly capture or kill Confederate leaders (see John Fazio's book);

Phil Sheridan's 1864 raid on Richmond that led to the death of Jeb Stuart at Yellow Tavern;

David Hunter's 1864 Shenandoah Valley raid that included the burning of the Virginia Military Institute (VMI) in Lexington.

Notable Confederate raid omissions by Black are John Hunt Morgan's 1863 raid that ended in Ohio, William Quantrill's 1863 raid on Lawrence, Kansas (a massacre), and *Nathan Bedford Forrest's 1864 raid into West Tennessee and Kentucky that included the massacre of black Union soldiers at Fort Pillow.

The pre-eminent Civil War cavalry historian is Columbus attorney and blogger (Rantings of a Civil War Historian) Eric J. Wittenberg who has spoken to us. His many books include ones on Dahlgren and Sheridan.

Book Review by Dennis Keating

Robert O'Harrow, Jr. 2016. *The Quartermaster: Montgomery C. Meigs, Lincoln's General, Master Builder of the Union Army*. Simon & Schuster (hardcover, 304 pages).

One of the most amazing figures of the Civil War was Montgomery Meigs, the quartermaster of the Union army and one of the critical architects of its victory. His life is recounted by Washington *Post* investigative reporter Robert O'Harrow, Jr.

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Meigs was born in 1816 in Augusta, Georgia where his father was beginning his medical career. However, because slavery literally made his mother ill, they returned to Philadelphia, where Meigs enrolled at the University of Pennsylvania (where I got my law degree) at the age of 15. He then entered West Point in 1832 and graduated high in his class and was assigned to the Corps of Engineers.

While working on improving navigation on the Mississippi River, his superior and roommate was Robert E. Lee. During the Mexican War, Meigs was assigned to build fortifications near Detroit to defend against a possible British invasion. Postwar, Meigs was assigned to Washington City. There, he made his mark with the planning and construction of an aqueduct from Great Falls to finally provide a decent water supply for the capital city. His next major engineering achievement under the direction of Secretary of War Jefferson Davis was to oversee the extension of the U.S. Capitol, which he modeled on the Roman Pantheon and the Greek Parthenon. His vision produced the Dome over the capitol and the Statue of Freedom atop it. Even as he worked tirelessly on these signature projects, he and his wife lost two of their sons to disease.

On the eve of the Civil War, Meigs was sent South to the Dry Tortugas, Florida by pro-Southern Secretary of War John Floyd, whom he detested and had criticized. This prepared him for his first wartime assignment - a secret commission by President Lincoln and Secretary of State Seward to reinforce Fort Pickens in Pensacola Bay (held by the Union throughout the war).

Upon his return, Lincoln insisted that Meigs, a captain just promoted to colonel, become Quartermaster General which was accomplished in June, 1862. Meigs took over a department amidst the chaos of the massive increase in the size of the army and navy, incompetence, and corruption. Efficient and honest, Meigs was able to create the machinery for obtaining the vast supplies needed and at fair prices to the government. Among his many organizational accomplishments were funding the western gunboats that were critical to Union victories in the West, outfitting the fleet assembled to carry George McClellan's expedition to the Peninsula, assembling the supply depots that served the Union so well (including that at City Point for U.S. Grant's Overland campaign), and providing the supplies that greeted William Tecumseh Sherman's army when it arrived in Savannah to complete its March to the Sea. Meigs' only brush with combat came on July 12, 1864 when he organized several thousand clerks and invalids to help defend Washington City against the approaching forces of Jubal Early.

Another major project overseen by Meigs was the creation of national cemeteries for the Union dead. Embittered by Lee's decision to fight for the Confederacy, Meigs decided in 1864 to create one at the home of the Lees in Arlington, Virginia, which had been seized by the Union. Meigs during and after the war oversaw the creation of the cemetery and was buried there when he died in 1891 (his tomb's epitaph is: "Soldier, Engineer, Architect, Scientist, Patriot"). Also buried there is his wife and his son John, killed in an encounter in the Shenandoah Valley in October, 1864. Meigs always believed that he had been executed after being captured.

Following the demobilization of most of the Union armed forces, Meigs continued as Quartermaster General until his retirement in 1882. He then became architect and engineer of the Pension Building, one of his greatest achievements. Meigs followed a design from the Italian Renaissance. It used more than 15 million bricks, had an innovative air conditioning system, and is adorned with a long sculptured frieze of figures from the Civil War Union forces. It is claimed that either Army commander Sherman or his successor Phil Sheridan when asked to comment about "Meigs' Old Red Barn" said that the only thing wrong with the damn building was that it was fireproof. It is now the National Building Museum (www.nbm.org) located at 401 F Street (and 5th), NW, the site of presidential inaugural balls and many exhibitions, and a must visit by any Civil War buff who goes to Washington, D.C.

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Ulysses S. Grant in Georgetown, Ohio – The Indispensable Man’s Boyhood Home By Dan Ursu

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If you believe, as I and many others do, that the Civil War would not have been won by the North but for U.S. Grant, then a visit to his boyhood home in our own State of Ohio at Georgetown, about ten miles north of the Ohio River and 40 miles east of Cincinnati, will be inspiring, informative and worthwhile.

I made the trip on March 11, 2017 in conjunction with renowned Civil War historian Ed Bearss’ presentation to the *U.S. Grant Homestead Association* “Grant in the Wilderness” in Georgetown’s historic “Gaslight Theater”. This venue has become virtually a Mr. Bearss annual pilgrimage to Georgetown this time of year.

On a sunshiny but brisk winter day sans snow, the small town was certainly evocative of what it must have been like during Grant’s childhood. In his Memoirs Grant states “I was born on the 27th of April, 1822, at Point Pleasant, Clermont County, Ohio. In the fall of 1823 we moved to Georgetown, the county seat of Brown, the adjoining county east. This place remained my home until the age of seventeen, when in 1839, I went to West point.”

Smartly preserved, the two story red brick home itself sits a few blocks from the town square at a slightly lower elevation relative to the square. It is open to the Public. As told by Ulysses, his father Jesse R. Grant “carried on the manufacture of leather and worked at the trade himself” at the tannery, a stout, white structure that is now a private residence across the street; easily visible but not open to the public.

Quite apparent from the visit: Ulysses himself did not enjoy tannery work at his father’s business. Paradoxically scholars assert that his work at the family business created a lifelong aversion to bloodshed – ironic in light of his future role in command of Union Armies at many of the most violent battles of the Civil War. He was labeled by some of the press and other critics of the time as a “butcher”.

On view in Grant’s home are the original quarters and bedroom where the family slept, as well as a later addition in which Ulysses had his own bedroom. His father Jesse was in Grant’s words “from my earliest recollection, in comfortable circumstances, considering the times” and the home is furnished and decorated with period objects reflective of that standing. A visitor can easily imagine sitting in one of the rooms in the early 1800’s on the south side of the home and looking through windows at the scene of the tannery’s prosperous business activity unfolding across the street.

Two other themes of Grant’s early life stood out as part of visiting the home. First, U.S. Grant as a boy thoroughly enjoyed horses and became an expert equestrian - that being one of the only distinguishing features during a mostly lackluster academic career at West Point. In wartime, his personal mount figured prominently in at least two battles. At Belmont, Grant was courageously the last man at the end of an organized retreat as his troops evacuated down steep banks to the Mississippi River onto awaiting steamboats. Grant skillfully maneuvered his sliding horse bottom down on the bank and onto a single, narrow wooden plank - and then at a trot into the waiting vessel – all within firing range of Confederate General Polk and his troops. On another occasion, during an intense rain storm at the start of the Battle of Shiloh, muddy footing unfortunately caused his mount to collapse and fall heavily on Grant’s foot.

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Grant cont.

The injury necessitated that the General be on crutches for the remainder of the battle.

Second, young Grant also enjoyed the nearby Ohio River, escaping there for recreation whenever he could elude his duties at the Tannery. He also must have observed the many commercial vessels using this all important transportation artery of the time. I have been involved in many a discussion at our Roundtable on Grant's prowess in amphibious operations and his strategic understanding of the use of rivers to his military advantage. This advanced level of skill was exceptional and unique for a Non Naval military officer of the time. One cannot discount that his frequent boyhood trips to the Ohio River might well have subconsciously embedded this later war talent into his psyche.

A statue of U.S. Grant proudly overlooks the town Square where the North's most important General and future 18th President must have passed on foot innumerable times. The statue is modest but impressive, much like the man himself.

Most of what can be seen in the Georgetown area related to U.S. Grant is nurtured by the previously mentioned *U.S. Grant Homestead Association*. The organization can be further explored online at www.usgrantboyhoodhome.org. If you visit Georgetown, check ahead as times vary when Grant's home is open.

Sources:

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Civil War: A Narrative, Vol. I “Fort Sumter to Perryville”; 1958; by Shelby Foote; Vintage Books a Division of Random House New York

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Grant: As Military Commander; 1970; by Sir James Marshall-Cornwall; 1995 Edition Barnes & Noble, Inc.

William H. Seward and Civil War Diplomacy

By William F.B. Vodrey

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Remarks to the Cleveland Civil War Roundtable

March 8, 2017 in Cleveland, Ohio



Exterior general view of front & right side. Library of Congress Digital collections

Abraham Lincoln, elected President of the United States in November 1860, soon found his country facing the mortal threat of secession. He turned to the top men of the Republican Party, his celebrated “team of rivals,” in forming his Cabinet. First among equals was William Henry Seward, who just about everyone expected to have been the GOP nominee that year and who, at least initially, perhaps still thought of himself as the rightful occupant of the White House and the better man to be leading the nation. In time he became one of Lincoln's most trusted advisors, recognizing the prairie lawyer's wisdom and political skills; in time they also came to be close friends.

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A recent biographer, Walter Stahr, wrote that William Seward

was a well-educated and sophisticated diplomat; but his hair was unruly, his clothes untidy, and his manner casual. Charles Francis Adams Jr. [the U.S. minister, or ambassador, to the Court of St. James's], who knew him well, once described him as "small, rusty in aspect, dressed in a coat and trousers apparently made twenty years ago, and by a bad tailor at that" . . . He was a famous host, gathering diplomats, soldiers, politicians, actors, and their wives around his Washington table for fine food and wine. With Seward, in the words of Henry Adams, who also knew him well, "the political had become personal," so that "no one could tell which was the mask and which the features."¹



Henry Adams went on,

with his big nose and his wire hair and grizzled eyebrows and miserable dress [I] listened to him rolling out his grand, broad ideas that would inspire a cow with statesmanship if [only] she understood our language.²

Seward liked a good cigar, and wine with meals, or brandy after, sometimes to excess. He was a voracious reader, loved politics, and was tirelessly ambitious. As one biographer wrote, "It would be too much to say that he sought political advancement solely for the purpose of serving his country's welfare." Still, his commitment to the American cause was absolutely firm. In 1844, Seward wrote that the "Union exists, because it is inevitable, and must endure, because it is indispensable." In these views he would find a strong ally in Abraham Lincoln.³

Beginnings

William Henry Seward was born on May 16, 1801, in the village of Florida, N.Y., about 60 miles northwest of New York City. His father, Samuel Seward, was a doctor, merchant, farmer and judge. President Thomas Jefferson appointed Dr. Seward village postmaster, a post he held on a bipartisan basis for 30 years. He was a harsh and demanding man, and sometimes ordered young Seward to recite memorized speeches to neighbors. The doctor's wife, Mary Jennings Seward, was kinder; Seward recalled his mother as a "model of hospitality, charity, and self-forgetfulness." Young Seward was the third child in what became a family of five, with two older brothers, Benjamin Jennings and Edwin Polydore; a younger sister, Louisa Cornelia, and another brother, the youngest, George Washington Seward. The children were known within the family by their middle names, so young Seward was called Henry or Harry.⁴

Seward was, one biographer wrote, "a bright young boy, eager for school and books...[and] apparently the sort of precocious boy who annoys other children." At the age of nine, Seward was sent to Farmers' Hall Academy, a boarding school in nearby Goshen, N.Y., where he struggled with Latin but eventually excelled. In September 1816, at age 15, he left home to attend Union College in Schenectady, the first in his family to go to college. He was more likely to run away from home to go to school rather than the other way around, a former family slave recalled.⁵

Seward's family had seven slaves at the time of the 1820 census, whom Seward later remembered as "vivacious and loquacious." Dr. Seward was the only man in the village who allowed his slaves' children to attend school, and Seward later remembered that his parents "never uttered an expression that could tend to make me think that the Negro was inferior to the white person."⁶

At Union College, Seward "worked hard but also enjoyed himself," Stahr wrote. He was one of the smarter students and got very good grades; when the college was only the fifth in the country to establish a chapter

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of Phi Beta Kappa, Seward was one of its earliest members. After quarreling with his skinflint father over money and taking an impromptu trip south with a friend in late January 1819, Seward ended up on the faculty of a new school in Eatonton, Ga. Soon, however, he arranged for a substitute from Union College and returned to New York, graduating in 1820. He was selected as one of the commencement speakers, arguing in his short address for the permanence of the Federal Union and the gradual emancipation of the slaves. He hoped that all Americans would soon “worship the same God and revere the same laws whether on the banks of the Hudson... the Mobile or the Missouri.”⁷

After graduation, Seward studied law and became interested in state politics. He found himself identifying with the Bucktails, the New York branch of the Jacksonians, supporting Martin Van Buren and opposing Gov. DeWitt Clinton, particularly blasting Clinton’s ambitious Erie Canal as an impractical boondoggle. The young Seward, book-smart but no economic prognosticator, argued that the canal was “an impossibility [that] would financially ruin the state.” History proved him quite wrong. He joined a law firm in Goshen and was admitted to the New York bar in late 1822, missing only a single question on the bar exam.⁸

He decided that he didn’t like Goshen, though, writing to his father that he had “a disgust which is too violent to be suppressed [for a place whose inhabitants were] a low mean and groveling race.” He decided to set up a practice in Auburn, 150 miles west of the state capital, Albany. Auburn was the seat of Cayuga County, with a growing population and a vibrant economy with many small businesses. Like his future boss and most other small-town lawyers, then and now, Seward was a generalist, handling all kinds of cases, civil and criminal. He also dated widely, mentioning so many local ladies in letters to his friend, David Berdan, that Berdan complained he’d lost track of who was who.⁹

One of those whom Seward courted in Auburn was Frances Adeline Miller, the daughter of Judge Elijah Miller. Frances and Seward’s sister Cornelia had both attended the Troy Female Seminary. Known as “Fanny,” she was about an inch taller than Seward, who was about five feet eight. She was said by an admirer to be

very beautiful; [with] black eyes; dark hair; and a fine figure. She is very modest, and very intelligent; has read a great deal, and talks politics almost as well as her husband – not from choice, but only when... others choose to....

Although initially hesitant in taking a wife due to his still-unsettled finances as he established his law practice, Seward wrote to his father that he had become strongly attached to Miss Miller. He respected her and noted that she had good financial prospects, being one of the judge’s only two daughters. In time Seward proposed to Frances, who accepted, and got the blessing of her father. Raised a Presbyterian, Seward became an Episcopalian, and he and his young bride married in October 1824 in St. Peter’s Episcopal Church in Auburn. His father-in-law the judge, a widower, insisted that Seward move into the family’s large house with Frances and him, and Seward agreed. Children began to arrive not too long after: Augustus, born in 1826, and Frederick, born four years later. In time they would have five children. Fanny was beset by ill-health all her life, and Seward’s frequent absences did not help their marriage.¹⁰

Entering Politics

Confident that his wife would be well cared-for by her family, Seward traveled extensively for both his law practice and politics. He found, as he wrote, that “politics was the most important and engrossing business of the country.” New York politics were quite fractured in those days; an Auburn newspaper in 1827 noted the rise and fall of such parties as “Masonic and Anti-Masonic, Republican, Bucktail, and Clintonian, Adamites, Jacksonians, and Federalists, People’s Men, Van Burenites, etc. etc.” Seward was active in church and community affairs, and became a colonel of the local militia, eventually rising to the rank of brigadier general in the state militia.¹¹

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By early 1824, Seward's political views began to shift. He wrote that, "with all his sins Clinton has talents great and expanded," while "Van Buren's genius has sunk into cunning and chicanery." He saw that the Bucktail machine did not always act in the public interest, and threw in his lot with the People's Men, which favored the selection of presidential electors by direct popular vote rather than by the state legislature. He supported Clinton for Governor of New York and John Quincy Adams for President in 1824, both of whom won. He was among the town leaders who welcomed the 67-year-old Marquis de Lafayette to Auburn in the summer of 1825 during the French aristocrat and Revolutionary War hero's triumphal national tour. A local newspaper wrote that the "ear was almost deafened" by the large and enthusiastic crowd in Auburn. Seward became convinced, as were many other New Yorkers, that the Masons of the state were a secretive, corrupt political cabal – widely suspected but never proved to have been behind the 1826 disappearance and likely murder of William Morgan, a renegade Mason who had published their secrets. The young Seward was nominated for Congress in September 1828 by Auburn Antimasons while he was out of town, but he soon withdrew when it became clear that he couldn't win.¹²

In 1823 or so, Seward had met a man who would shape his political career for decades to come. Thurlow Weed, editor of the Antimasonic *Albany Evening Journal*, became a close friend and a resolute political ally. From the beginning, Weed saw in Seward, he wrote, someone of "stern integrity, earnest patriotism, and unswerving fidelity [with] a rare capacity for intellectual labor." Seward, in turn, praised Weed as "my first[,] last and best of friends."¹³

In November 1830, at age 29, Seward was elected as an Antimasonic candidate to the New York State Senate, praised by a nonpartisan newspaper as "a high-minded honorable man, and a right down clever fellow, and withal, the smartest lawyer in Cayuga County." Among his colleagues was an ambitious Buffalo lawyer named Millard Fillmore. Seward helped pass legislation abolishing debtors' prisons, and blasted President Andrew Jackson for killing the Second Bank of the United States. He supported Jackson in the South Carolina nullification crisis, however, when the President declared, "Do not be deceived by names... disunion by armed force is treason."¹⁴

By 1833, Antimasonry having run its course in New York, Seward and Weed both joined the new Whig Party. The Whigs were progressive reformists who generally opposed Jackson and supported Federal and state government action to build the nation and spur the economy. The next year, Seward, with some adroit political help from Weed, secured the Whig nomination for governor, but was defeated at the polls. He assured Weed that "my cheerfulness is beyond the reach of this calamity" and, now out of public office, turned back to his law practice. He traveled extensively with his wife, including to Harper's Ferry, where he realized anew what he called "the curse of slavery," finding Virginia "much decayed" by it.¹⁵

Governor of New York

In early 1836, Seward stepped away from his law practice, which had become "irksome," to become a land agent. Weed and a new journalistic ally, Horace Greeley, helped Seward get the Whig nomination for governor in 1838. He did not please New York abolitionists with his careful responses to a questionnaire they sent him, and privately wrote to Weed that he thought he would lose the election over it. But win he did, running strongly across the state and winning a two-year term as Governor of New York. He told a friend, "God bless Thurlow Weed! I owe this result to him." On January 1, 1839, at age 37, he was sworn in. A celebratory party afterwards at the Kane Mansion, the fine Albany house which Seward had rented, was so crowded with well-wishers that his son Augustus could only enter by the kitchen window.¹⁶

As governor, Seward strongly favored state aid for public education, which, he wrote, "banishes the distinctions, old as time, of rich and poor, master and slave. It banishes ignorance and lays axe to the root of crime." Reversing his youthful views, he favored expansion of the Erie Canal and the start of several other canals. He proposed reforms to state courts, prisons and a restructuring of state agencies. Unlike many New York Whigs, he welcomed immigrants and opposed religious discrimination, which in those days meant anti-Catholicism. The *Daily National Intelligencer* in Washington praised Seward's policies

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for showing “liberal and enlarged views.” He dealt with the tidal wave of patronage requests, referring many of them to Weed. His wife Frances was not especially pleased to be the Governor’s wife, writing to her sister of visitors “who came here to drink champagne and cover the carpet with mud, tobacco spit and lamp oil.” Such, she ruefully remarked, were the “beauties of democracy.”¹⁷

Gov. Seward also took his first tentative steps into the politically risky questions of slavery and abolitionism. He refused an official request from Virginia for the return of three escaped slaves jailed in New York City, citing technical defects in the official paperwork sent north, and wrote that “there is no law of this state which recognizes slavery [and] no statute which admits that one man can be the property of another, or... can be stolen from another.” He advocated and signed into law a bill granting any person accused of being a fugitive slave the right to a jury trial, requiring the state’s district attorneys to intercede on their behalf, and empowering the governor to appoint agents to negotiate the rescue of freed blacks wrongly carried south again.¹⁸

Seward, Stahr wrote, “was not an abolitionist – he favored a gradual and voluntary end of slavery rather than immediate abolition – but he was prepared to take risks for freedom, such as sheltering fugitive slaves in his Auburn home.” He sold a small house to Harriet Tubman on easy terms, and did not complain when she missed even her nominal payments. Frederick Douglass thanked him for his financial support of Douglass’s abolitionist newspaper. But Seward was not always consistent in his racial views throughout his life. Before the war, he defended a black murder suspect, telling the jury that the defendant had been made in “the image of our Maker,” but later, during Reconstruction, said to a friend that “the North had nothing to do with the [Southern] Negroes,” and that he personally had “no more concern for them than... for the Hottentots.” He did not comment on the Black Codes once Southern states began passing them.¹⁹

In New York, Gov. Seward preferred to take the high road as a candidate and as an officeholder, and let Weed attend to the grubby details of politics, including allegedly bringing in out-of-state Whigs to cast votes – sometimes repeated votes. Weed was the man to pass around campaign cash where it could do the most good. In November 1840, Seward was reelected with a margin of about 5,000 votes, just half what he garnered two years earlier. Some thought that his “attempts to conciliate the Catholics” were to blame for the dropoff in his support, but Seward refused to back away, saying he would not “act... in opposition to any portion of my fellow citizens, on the ground of the difference of their nationality or of their religion.”²⁰

Democrats made inroads in the state legislature and Seward foresaw that he might not be able to win a third term; he also needed to earn more money and that meant returning to his law practice. He decided not to run again. This turned out to be a good move, as the Democrats won big in the election of 1842. He attended the inauguration of the new governor, unusual in those days, and people there were said to have “stood in open-mouthed surprise” at the sight of a Whig governor congratulating and speaking cordially with his Democratic successor. Although he had not accomplished all he had set out to do, Stahr wrote, Seward had proved that “the Whig Party could be a party of the future, looking to extend political rights and economic prosperity to the people of [New York] and the nation.”²¹

Out of Office

Seward resumed his law practice, intent on providing for his growing family and paying off the substantial bills he had accumulated while entertaining and keeping up appearances as governor. His practice was primarily civil litigation, including contract, libel, railroad and patent cases, but also some criminal cases, including a celebrated murder trial in 1846, in which he defended an insane black man, William Freeman, losing at trial but prevailing on appeal. He also represented an Ohio man, John Van Zandt, accused of helping fugitives slaves escape. His cases took him all the way up to the Supreme Court of the United

States and brought him into contact with Daniel Webster, Samuel F.B. Morse, John Quincy Adams and Salmon P. Chase, among others. His legal work, wrote one biographer,

took him all over the country, letting him make and cement friendships, and giving him a more thorough understanding of the whole nation than almost any other politician of his generation.²²

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In 1848, still active in Whig circles, Seward had hopes of being nominated for either of the top two spots that year, but the convention nominated Zachary Taylor for President and Seward's fellow New Yorker Millard Fillmore for Vice President. Seward spoke throughout New York on behalf of the Whig ticket and also traveled to Massachusetts, Delaware and Pennsylvania. He gave ten speeches in Ohio, including in Cleveland, where he predicted that slavery would one day be abolished. At Tremont Temple in Boston in late September, Seward was followed on stage by a young Illinois Congressman by the name of Abraham Lincoln, who spoke, one paper wrote, in a "humorous strain of Western eloquence." Taylor and Fillmore won, and Whigs made gains everywhere Seward campaigned – except Ohio.²³

United States Senator from New York

The Whig triumph in New York meant that the legislature would pick a Whig for the U.S. Senate, and Seward won the seat with ease. Horace Greeley wrote in his *New York Tribune* that "probably no man ever yet appeared for the first time in [the Senate] so widely known and so warmly appreciated as William H. Seward." Less enthused was the *Mississippi Free Trader & Natchez Gazette*, which fumed,

if there be one man in the whole Empire State more obnoxious to the people of the South than ex-Gov. Seward, I have yet to hear his name and whereabouts... a notorious intriguer, and an avowed enemy to everything Southern, his appearance in the United States Senate at this particular juncture is much to be deplored...²⁴

On March 5, 1849, Seward was sworn in, joining such distinguished colleagues as Henry Clay (who sat next to him in the Senate chamber), John C. Calhoun, Daniel Webster, Thomas Hart Benton, Sam Houston, Jefferson Davis and Stephen Douglas. Webster, Seward wrote in a letter home, "always speaks well," but Douglas spoke "quite too much." Although Seward tried to cooperate with Vice President Fillmore as to Federal patronage in New York, he soon became frustrated by Fillmore's intransigence. The Seward family settled into a rented house on F Street in Washington, and the senator's second son Frederick, who had just graduated from college, became his private secretary. It was very different from Auburn; slave auctions were held weekly at Deatur House, not far from their home and the White House.²⁵

A major issue in Seward's early years in the Senate was the admission of California and what would become known as the Compromise of 1850. In a March 11, 1850 speech, Seward backed President Taylor in supporting the admission of California as a free state, as it had petitioned, since it was already populous and had abundant natural resources, but said he would vote to admit it as a slave state, if that is what its people wanted. He rejected Calhoun's argument that the Constitution was a mere compact among the states, arguing instead that it "devotes the domain to union, to justice, to defense, to welfare, and to liberty." Fatefully and controversially, he said,

there is a higher law than the Constitution, which regulates our authority over the domain, and devotes it to the same noble purposes. The territory is a part... of the common heritage of mankind, bestowed upon them by the Creator of the universe....

The Union was perpetual, Seward insisted, no matter what Calhoun and other Southerners argued, and in time "slavery must give way, and will give way, to the salutary instructions of economy, and to the ripening influences of humanity," and Congress should help it do so. The Northern press praised the speech, but Southerners pounced on the "higher law" remark. The *New Orleans Picayune*, for instance, called Seward an "unscrupulous demagogue" and charged that he would ignore the Constitution "merely for the sake of developing a moral principle." Despite Weed's misgivings, Seward saw that the speech was reprinted and widely distributed.²⁶

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Seward backed Winfield Scott for President in 1852, but to no avail, and Franklin Pierce was elected. Back in the Senate, Seward backed construction of a transcontinental railroad. He continued his law practice, arguing several more cases before the Supreme Court, including one case in which he persuaded the court for the first time to extend Federal jurisdiction to the Great Lakes. With his eye on his political future, Seward arranged for the publication of his official papers to date - in no fewer than three volumes. He spoke forcefully against the Kansas-Nebraska Act, receiving a letter of praise from William Herndon of Springfield, Ill., who wrote that his law partner and "your friend" Lincoln "thinks your speech most excellent." The Act passed, much to Seward's disappointment, in part due to a split in the Whig Party: Southern Whigs backed it and most Northern Whigs opposed it. This helped spur the creation of the Republican Party, what Henry Wilson, a Whig senator from Massachusetts, called "one great party [for] all the friends of freedom."²⁷

Seward was initially skeptical, even hostile, to the idea of a new party. His reelection to the Senate depended on a strong and united Whig Party in New York, he thought, not chancing control of the Empire State's legislature on a new and untested political coalition. He also thought a national Whig Party more likely to win the Presidency in 1856 than a northern, sectional party, even one committed to freedom for all. Despite the growing strength of the Know Nothing Party, which loathed Seward for his pro-Catholic policies as governor, he was reelected in 1854 to a second term in the U.S. Senate by the New York legislature, overcoming a divided field of a dozen other candidates. Still in Washington, he heard the news of the Albany vote from a reporter, and said calmly, "It is all right, just as I expected," and took an extra pinch of snuff. Within months he denounced the Fugitive Slave Act as "unnecessary, unwise, inhuman and derogatory from the Constitution." *The New York Times* wrote that Seward was now "recognized throughout the Union, by all parties and all sections, as embodying more distinctly than any other living man the anti-slavery sentiment of the northern states."²⁸

The senator from New York now clearly was looking towards the White House. He edited his life and works down to a single volume, priced to move at just one dollar, and had his speeches printed and distributed, more than thirty of them from 1850-56. His political base was consolidated further when New York Whigs and Republicans merged their parties in July 1855. Seward considered running for the Republican nomination for President in 1856, but yielded to Weed's advice that the time was not yet right. Weed, one observer suggested, thought "that it was better that [John C.] Fremont should be sacrificed than Seward," and sure enough, Fremont, the first Republican presidential nominee, lost that fall to James Buchanan.²⁹

Seward was in dire financial straits during the Panic of 1857, especially when the Illinois Central Railroad, in which he had heavily invested, went bankrupt, but he got through the crisis. Back in the Senate, he was one of the few Republicans to support a bill to expand the Army; his son Augustus, a West Point graduate, was serving. In early March 1858, he denounced the *Dred Scott* decision, saying that the U.S. Supreme Court "forgot its own dignity [and] forgot that judicial usurpation is more odious and intolerable than any other among the manifold practices of tyranny." He opposed the purchase of Cuba, knowing it would likely become a slave state, and backed homestead legislation to settle the American West. He supported Sen. Stephen Douglas, whom he had befriended, in allowing the people of Kansas to decide for themselves whether they would have a free or slave state. That spring, when his friend Sen. Jefferson Davis of Mississippi was confined to his darkened room for seven weeks with an eye infection, Seward visited him every day and amused him with stories. That fall, he gave a political speech in Rochester, N.Y., and said that the country now had

two radically different political systems, one resting on the basis of... slave labor, the other on the basis of voluntary labor of freemen... [a] collision results... It is an irrepressible conflict between opposing and enduring forces, and it means that the United States must and will, sooner or later, become entirely either a slave-holding nation, or entirely a free-labor nation.³⁰

The speech drew much attention. Most Republicans praised it, although Gideon Welles, his future Cabinet colleague, wrote that it showed that Seward was "an imperialist rather than a republican statesman." The *New York Herald* said that Seward had revealed himself to be a "repulsive abolitionist." From Springfield, Herndon wrote to Seward, noting similarities between Seward's speech and Lincoln's earlier "House Divided" speech, which had been little-noticed outside of Illinois.

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Seward wrote back that he regretted that Lincoln had not been elected to the Senate: “He is just the man we need here, and Illinois just the state for which such a man is wanted.”³¹

Seward was laying the groundwork for his presidential candidacy, securing the support of Pennsylvania kingmaker Simon Cameron and others. He also took an eight-month foreign trip, meeting Queen Victoria and the elite of British political circles in London, and traveling on to France, Italy, Egypt, Jerusalem, Austria, Brussels, Holland and Belgium. He met Lafayette again, and Pope Pius IX, who thanked him for his aid to American Catholics.³²

Back in Washington, however, he found the battle lines even more starkly drawn after John Brown’s raid on Harper’s Ferry. Some Southerners, already seeing Seward as the likely Republican standard-bearer, threatened to secede if he were elected. He decided to give a reassuring speech in late February 1860. He condemned Brown’s raid as “an act of sedition and treason,” and said that slavery should be left alone in the states where it already existed. The Republican policy, he insisted, was to save “the territories of the United States... by constitutional and lawful means, from being homes for slavery and polygamy.” He scolded those who threatened secession, saying that the Union was “inseparable and indivisible,” a “wonderful machine” upheld by the best wishes and support of all Americans. The speech received considerable press attention, as had that of Lincoln, two days earlier at the Cooper Union.³³

The Election of 1860

As the Republican National Convention drew nigh, virtually everyone thought the nomination was Seward’s for the taking, perhaps even on the first ballot. Thurlow Weed, backed by what one newspaper called “oceans of money,” was committed to the cause. Four states including Illinois had favorite-son candidates, however, and the whiff of corruption that clung to Seward due to his close association with Weed offended many good-government Republicans, as did those who thought he just couldn’t win in November because he was so widely-seen as a radical whom moderate or conservative voters would not support. Thaddeus Stevens, among others, thought that Seward’s pro-Catholic views would lose him Pennsylvania; Horace Greeley, no longer friendly, thought Seward likely to lose New Jersey, Indiana and Iowa, too.³⁴

Even once the convention convened at the Wigwam in Chicago on May 16, 1860, Seward’s friends and supporters thought he was almost certain to win the nomination. As was the custom in those days, Seward did not go to the convention, but remained at home in Auburn, kept up to date by regular telegrams. Seward led on the first ballot, but he couldn’t clinch the deal on the second, and on the third, the convention nominated Lincoln. A friend later remembered that, when Seward got the news, “A deadly paleness overspread his countenance for an instant, succeeded instantly by a flush, and then all was calm as a summer morning.” Seward discussed the votes briefly and then said, “Well, Mr. Lincoln will be elected and has some of the qualities to make a good president.” His daughter Fanny wrote, “His friends feel much distress – he alone has a smile [and] takes it with philosophical and unselfish coolness.”³⁵

Lincoln’s men had outmaneuvered Seward’s, and had, it seems likely, brought along Cameron - and the Pennsylvania Republican delegation - by promising him a Cabinet post. Seward gamely endorsed Lincoln and his running mate, Hannibal Hamlin of Maine, writing for the *Auburn Daily Advertiser*, “No truer or firmer defenders of the Republican faith could have been found in the Union than the distinguished and esteemed citizens on whom the honors of the nomination [have] fallen.” Despite his initial despair in Chicago, Weed called on Lincoln in Springfield, and came away impressed. Seward campaigned for the ticket, giving dozens of speeches in New York, New England and the Midwest, including Cleveland. He met Lincoln and gave a speech praising the nominee to a hometown crowd in Springfield. As he predicted, Lincoln was elected in November, carrying almost all of the Northern states, including New York.³⁶

It was customary in those days to name a political heavyweight of the President’s own party as Secretary of State, the senior Cabinet post. Jefferson, Madison, Monroe, John Quincy Adams, Van Buren and Buchanan had all served as Secretary of State

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before going to the White House – although none have *since* Buchanan (perhaps he ruined it for all the others with their eyes on the White House since?). President-elect Lincoln soon offered the State portfolio to Seward, who was initially hesitant. With the help of Weed and his Senate colleague Hamlin, however, and despite some misgivings about men such as Chase, Welles and Montgomery Blair, all former Democrats known to be unfriendly towards him, Seward was eventually convinced to take the top Cabinet post, and wrote to Lincoln on Dec. 22, 1860 to accept.³⁷

As “secession fever” gripped the South, and hoping to avert a war, Seward favored some form of conciliation with the South, and gave speeches in the Senate to that end. He took his cue from Lincoln, however, who adamantly opposed any concession that would permit the spread of slavery into the Western territories. Seward backed a Peace Convention, which failed. Some of Seward’s supporters considered his efforts to preserve the Union in the interval between the election and inauguration to be a betrayal of his anti-slavery ideals; an Auburn friend defended him, however, saying that Seward was “the same true son of freedom now as then.” With one state after another seceding and war looming as ever more likely, predictions of a short, genteel conflict were not uncommon. Leroy P. Walker, soon to become the first Confederate Secretary of War, promised “to wipe up with my pocket-handkerchief all the blood that be shed.”³⁸

Seward met with Lincoln not long after the President-elect slipped into Washington on February 23, 1861, and accompanied him for a visit to President Buchanan in the White House. The pair later went to the House and Senate, and spoke together often in the days before the inauguration. Seward famously helped edit the inaugural address. He briefly tried to back out on his nomination as Secretary of State just before the inauguration, perhaps because the rest of the Cabinet was not to his liking or due to his concern that Lincoln would not always take his advice, but Lincoln persuaded him to stay. Seward was confirmed by the Senate on March 5; his son Frederick was confirmed as Assistant Secretary of State later that day.³⁹

Secretary of State

Lincoln had told Seward, “I shall have to depend upon you for taking care of these matters of foreign affairs, of which I know so little, and with which I reckon you are familiar.” Seward was indeed well-traveled and well-read, far more so than the President. Stahr wrote,

Once the Civil War started, he skillfully managed the nation’s foreign affairs, avoiding the foreign intervention that would have ensured that the Confederacy would become a separate nation. Seward’s role was not limited to foreign policy: he was involved in almost every aspect of the war, an indispensable friend and advisor to Lincoln, who more than once refused to part with his controversial secretary. Many viewed Seward as the real power in the administration. During the first few months of the war, he was responsible for domestic security, and he was quoted as boasting that he could arrange any man’s arrest just by ringing a little bell.⁴⁰

The Civil War, wrote diplomatic historians Lynn M. Case and Warren F. Spencer,

raised a wide range of issues involving international law and practice: recognition of belligerence and independence, neutral rights, blockade, embargo, privateering, search and seizure, exequaturs for consuls, protection of foreign persons and property... intervention, mediation, belligerent ships in neutral ports, neutral construction of belligerent ships, neutral supplies of contraband goods [and more].⁴¹

Seward had to deal with all of it. His office was in the old State Department building, by that point more than 40 years old. Just two stories tall and with 30 rooms, it stood at the corner of Fifteenth Street and Pennsylvania Avenue, housing a staff of only 50 or so.⁴²

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Diplomacy moved at a much slower pace back then. Although there had been a crude and short-lived transatlantic cable in 1858, there was none throughout the Civil War, and telegraph service between America and Europe was not restored until 1866. News crossed the Atlantic no faster than the fastest ship, which took about 15 to 20 days to cross the ocean at the time of the war.⁴³

Europe was the focus of American diplomacy at the time. Case and Spencer wrote,

Looking on from afar, the conservatives in Europe, monarchical and aristocratic in principle, saw in a Northern defeat the decline of republicanism, egalitarianism, and radicalism. They sympathized with the aristocratic Southern society and condoned slavery as its bulwark... On the other hand, the radical liberals in England... and the liberal Orleanists [and] Bonapartists, and republicans in France... looked upon the North as the hope of liberal governments... the champion of human rights, the emancipator of slaves, and the crusader for American nationalism against parochial separatism.⁴⁴

Incredibly, in a speech to the New England Society in January 1861, two months before the Lincoln Administration even took office, Seward publicly broached the possibility of a war with France, Great Britain or even Spain in order to unite North and South – not that the U.S. would necessarily provoke it, but that it would be useful in uniting the country. Once in office, he made similar indiscreet remarks to visiting European diplomats, rattling those abroad concerned with what one called Seward’s “foreign war panacea” for America’s troubles.⁴⁵

On April 1 – April Fool’s Day – Seward submitted his now-notorious memo to his boss, titled “Some Thoughts for the President’s Consideration,” suggesting a bellicose policy towards the European powers and offering to take a leading role in formulating and carrying out that policy. Lincoln let him down gently, writing,

... if this must be done, I must do it. When a general line of policy is adopted, I apprehend there is no danger of its being changed without good reason, or continuing to be a subject of unnecessary debate; still upon points arising in the progress I wish, and I suppose I am entitled to have, the advice of all the Cabinet.⁴⁶

Seward probably was still smarting from seeing the Republican nomination slip out of his hands, and he seems to have looked down on Lincoln at first, but in time came to admire him as a leader and value him as a friend. “The President is the best of us,” he wrote to his wife in 1861, but “he needs constant and assiduous cooperation.” Always a canny politician, he agreed with Lincoln’s go-slow approach to emancipation in the early days of the war, even though his wife, a more fervent abolitionist than he ever was, urged stronger and quicker action.⁴⁷

Lincoln has sometimes been criticized for ordering a blockade when, under the law of war at the time, a blockade was not something a country did to its own ports – rather, it closed them. A blockade implied recognition of Confederate sovereignty, something Lincoln was usually at pains not to do. Welles pointed this out to the President, but Seward prevailed on the issue. He had consulted with Lord Lyons, the British ambassador, who confidentially told him that either a closure of ports or the collection of customs duties from warships offshore might force Her Majesty’s Government to grant diplomatic recognition to the Confederate States in order to protect British trade rights. A blockade of Southern ports and coastline was thus, under the circumstances, the least bad option for the U.S. Government in early 1861. Lord Lyons and Seward met often and seemed to have generally worked well together.⁴⁸

Three days after the fall of Ft. Sumter – which Seward had initially favored evacuating, to avert a war - Lincoln issued a call for 75,000 troops to put down the rebellion. In the Cabinet, Secretary of the Navy Welles and Secretary of State Seward were almost immediately at cross-purposes. Seward convinced Lincoln that Ft. Pickens, at Pensacola, Fla., must be kept in Federal

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hands. Lincoln issued orders for the steam frigate USS *Powhatan* to sail to defend the fort – but didn't tell Welles, who had other duties in mind for it. Lincoln faced a steep learning curve as commander-in-chief, and after an embarrassing back-and-forth with Seward and several naval subordinates, reaffirmed Welles's control over the fleet. Ft. Pickens was saved *and* Seward kept his nose out of naval affairs thereafter. Patronage was also an ongoing source of tension between Seward and his Cabinet colleagues.⁴⁹

Great Britain and France got the lion's share of Seward's attention overseas. Lord Palmerston, the British Prime Minister, had previously served as Foreign Secretary, and Lord Russell had previously been Prime Minister, so Her Majesty's Government was led by an experienced pair of diplomats. Palmerston had met Seward before the war and considered him a "vapouring, blustering, ignorant man" who might provoke Great Britain or invade Canada just to provide a distraction from the Confederacy's rebellion. The British recognized Southern belligerency by royal proclamation on May 14, 1861, only realistically acknowledging, as they saw it, that there were already widespread military hostilities between the governments in Washington and Richmond. But Palmerston and Russell insisted that the United Kingdom remain neutral in the conflict, and held off on actually recognizing Southern independence. In time, especially after the Emancipation Proclamation took effect, they came to see that the British electorate would not tolerate any overt intervention in favor of a Southern slaveholding republic.⁵⁰

The French foreign minister at the outbreak of the American Civil War was Edouard Thouvenel, who worked closely with the Emperor Napoleon III, nephew of the first great French emperor. The key French concerns in 1861 were that the U.S. not lose its place as a military and political counterweight to Great Britain, that an independent Confederacy not try to expand into Mexico or otherwise interfere with French interests in Central and South America, and that France not lose an important source of raw cotton and a market for its own goods. Britain had similar cotton interests; 83 percent of the cotton that was woven in British textile mills came from the South.⁵¹

The French did not want to act alone, become isolated or even be pitted against the British were they to more decisively side with the Union. Unsure of just how likely the Confederacy was to win the war, France repeatedly sought to learn British intentions. Thouvenel made it clear several times that his country was strongly inclined to follow the British lead. The British, in turn, played their cards close to the vest. Lord Russell, was, as Case and Spencer wryly noted, "rather cryptic and uncommunicative." The British Foreign Secretary simply wrote, "When the time comes, England will consult her own interests as to the reception she will give to [any Confederate] request."⁵²

Seward did his best to discourage the European great powers from receiving Confederate envoys, rightly concerned that that would be but one small step away from granting recognition, and from there to intervening in the war on the South's side. When the first Confederate mission of William L. Yancey, Pierre A. Rost and A. Dudley Mann crossed the Atlantic in early 1861, Seward sent an indirect warning through William Russell, American correspondent of *The Times* of London. Seward said,

The Southern commissioners who had been sent abroad could not be received by the government of any foreign power, officially or otherwise, even to hand in a document or to make a representation, without incurring the risk of breaking the relations with the United States.⁵³

In a June 8, 1861 letter to Thouvenel, the Secretary of State went even further:

France, we know, wishes us well, and she is of course careful for herself. Let her avoid giving any countenance to treason against this government. Foreign intervention would ultimately drive the whole people of the United States to unanimity, but the sympathies which have so long existed between the United States and France would, in that case, perhaps forever cease.⁵⁴

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Seward also let it be known, through a hot-blooded anonymous editorial in the *New York Herald*, that the U.S. would take “decisive measures against any foreign government which gave aid and comfort to the insurgent states.” Nevertheless, both the British and the French met – completely unofficially, of course – with Confederate envoys.⁵⁵

When Emperor Napoleon offered mediation of the conflict in June 1861, Seward rejected the offer out of hand, noting the irony that the more autocratic nations of Europe, most notably Russia, Austria and Prussia, were the first to “express their sincere sympathies with the Union,” while putative democracies such as France and the United Kingdom were leaning towards the South. Four warships of the Russian navy even visited New York City during the war, drawing appreciative crowds.⁵⁶

British shipbuilding was an ongoing concern for Seward. The U.S. Minister to London, Charles Francis Adams, warned the British that ships being built and fitted out in their ports were certainly destined to fly the Confederate flag and attack U.S. shipping, violating British neutrality. He was kept regularly updated by U.S. Consul to Liverpool Thomas Haines Dudley, who developed a very effective spy network. Dudley did excellent work in keeping an eye on British shipbuilding for the Confederacy, gathering the evidence that later led to the United States’s diplomatic victory in the arbitration of the *Alabama* Claims. If one of the powerful Laird rams were to help break the blockade, Adams wrote to Lord Russell, “It would be superfluous for me to point out to your lordship that this is war.” Jefferson Davis, in turn, bristled at British attempts to curb his shipbuilding on their shores, writing that its neutrality was merely “a cover for treacherous, malignant hostility” and objecting to Great Britain’s “persistent persecution of the Confederate States at the... bidding of officers of the United States.” When all was said and done, the rams never saw combat in the war.⁵⁷

Lincoln told Seward that, “after ending our war successfully we would be so powerful that we could call upon [Great Britain] to account for all the embarrassments she had inflicted upon us.” In December 1861 he accepted Seward’s proposal to resolve the *Trent* crisis, which might easily have led to war with Great Britain. The President released the Confederate envoys seized by Capt. Wilkes of the USS *San Jacinto*, without authorization, from the British steamer *Trent* just off the coast of Cuba, but, in a long statement written by Seward, denied any official wrongdoing by the United States. The envoys and their dispatches had been, the Secretary reasoned, *de facto* contraband which could be lawfully seized in wartime. The crisis passed, thanks in large part to Seward’s adroit diplomacy.⁵⁸

After the rocky early days of the Lincoln Administration, Seward still came in for recurring criticism at the point of Welles’s private but acid pen. After the Secretary of State lost his temper in an August 1864 Cabinet meeting, Welles wrote that Seward “flew into a violent rage and traversed the room,” showing a “painful exhibition of want of common intelligence as to his duties” and such “utter ignorance... that one would scarcely credit it as possible.” But Lincoln still stood by him. Welles wrote on October 1, 1864, with perhaps equal measures of irritation and envy, that Seward

spends more or less of every day with the President and worms from him all the information he possesses and can be induced to impart. A disposition to constantly intermeddle with other Departments, to pry into them and often to control and sometimes counteract them, has manifested itself throughout....⁵⁹

Lincoln came to rely on Seward to keep the State Department running, signed diplomatic letters written by the Secretary and extensively used his drafts for the foreign affairs sections of his annual messages to Congress, touching on diplomatic relations as far afield as Nicaragua, Prussia, Morocco and Chile. On Seward’s advice, the President declined an offer from the King of Siam of a stock of breeding elephants (an incident popularized by the Broadway musical *The King and I*). Lincoln stood by Seward even when his critics in Congress and elsewhere demanded Seward be forced from the Cabinet for being too radical, not radical enough, too powerful or just too slippery. Seward reciprocated his loyalty, worked hard on his behalf, and even came to enjoy Lincoln’s company. They loved talking politics together and swapping stories. Lincoln often dropped by the Seward home at night, sometimes bringing John Hay with him. The President and Secretary sometimes rode together, and Seward

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was vastly amused when the coachman on one of their very bumpy carriage rides cursed his horse so profanely and vehemently that the President called out, "Driver, my friend, are you an Episcopalian?" Astonished, the driver replied, "No, Mr. President, I ain't much of anything; but if I go to church at all, I go to the Methodist Church." "Oh, excuse me," replied Lincoln, "I thought you must be an Episcopalian, for you swear just like Secretary Seward, and he's a churchwarden."⁶⁰

The situation in Mexico also drew the Secretary of State's attention. The French Emperor, Napoleon III, occupied Mexico City with 35,000 troops in 1863, "purportedly to collect a national debt," as Shelby Foote wrote. In May 1864, the French sent a puppet Emperor of Mexico, Maximilian, to rule the country. The U.S. backed the elected although weak government of Benito Juarez. Foote wrote,

This continued defiance of the Monroe Doctrine was hard for Lincoln to abide, but not so hard that he did not manage to do so, deferring action until he could afford to give it his full attention, preferably with a reunited country at his back; 'One war at a time' was as much his policy now as it had been on the occasion of his near confrontation with England over the *Trent* affair....⁶¹

An overaggressive naval officer again gave Seward headaches in October 1864, when Cmdr. Napoleon Collins of the USS *Wachusett* violated Brazilian neutrality by ramming and seizing the Confederate raider CSS *Florida* in Bahia harbor. Welles defended Collins against the criticism of the Secretary of State (as he had Wilkes over the *Trent* incident), Seward's and Welles's differing personalities and responsibilities again causing tension.⁶²

Seward proposed an immigration bill which Congress passed, leading to a substantial increase in immigration in 1864-65. He favored the establishment of a western intercontinental telegraph line via Alaska and the Bering Strait. After the Confederate raid on St. Albans, Vt., he quietly assured the British that the U.S. would not invade Canada, but pressed them to better enforce their own neutrality laws. He also kept up his politically-minded socializing, welcoming the noted Shakespearean actor Edwin Booth to his home in 1864. He continued working closely with the President. He went with Lincoln to Gettysburg in November 1863 and was there to hear the Address. When Jubal Early menaced Washington in July 1864, Seward accompanied Lincoln in touring the Federal city's fortifications, although, unlike the President, he did not later come under enemy fire himself.⁶³

The Confederates had not given up on seeking friends abroad. As Shelby Foote wrote,

...the securing of foreign recognition and assistance had long been the cherished hope of Confederate statesmen: especially Davis, who had uttered scarcely a public word through the [early] months of the war that did not look toward intervention by one or another of the European powers. However, as time wore on it became clearer that nothing was going to come of such efforts and expectations – Russia had been pro-Union from the start, and France, whatever her true desires might be, could not act without England, where the Liberals in power took their cue from voters who were predominantly anti-slavery and therefore... anti-Confederate – [and Davis], smarting under the snubs his unacknowledged envoys suffered, grew increasingly petulant... "Put not your faith in princes... and rest not your hopes on foreign nations [he told one Southern audience]. This war is ours; we must fight it out ourselves."⁶⁴

In August 1864, Confederate envoy James M. Mason, still not officially recognized by Her Majesty's Government as the diplomat of a foreign nation, "was told [by Davis] to consider his mission at an end," Mason wrote, and left London. His colleague John Slidell did little better in Paris, although he had easy access to Emperor Napoleon and Empress Eugenie, "both of whom were sympathetic to his cause, or so they kept assuring him, although nothing tangible... had so far proceeded from their concern." Slidell wrote to Confederate Secretary of State Judah P. Benjamin, "I find it very difficult to keep my temper amidst all this double

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... This is a rascally world, and it is most hard to say who can be trusted.”⁶⁵

Lincoln was reelected in November 1864, something in which Seward remained confident even as many other Republicans despaired. He and Weed did all they could to ensure that the President would carry New York State, and he did, but relatively narrowly, New York City being overwhelmingly Democratic. On Election Night, the Secretary made an impromptu speech to a jubilant crowd of well-wishers in Washington, praising Lincoln as

a true patriot, benevolent and loyal, honest and faithful [and who in time] would take his place with Washington, Jefferson and Adams, among the benefactors of his country....⁶⁶

In late December 1864, Confederate Secretary of State Judah P. Benjamin wrote to Mason and Slidell, asking them to sound out the British and French governments, respectively,

as to what effect a Confederate program for emancipation – “not suddenly and all at once, but so far as to insure abolition in a fair and reasonable time” – might have on their views with regard to recognition of the Confederacy and possible intervention in the war.⁶⁷

Not surprisingly, given Lincoln’s reelection and the Confederacy’s many reverses by then, neither had an encouraging response. “It would have been at best a deathbed conversion, and as such would have lacked the validity of conviction and free will,” Foote wrote.⁶⁸

In early February 1865, the President and Secretary Seward met with the Confederate peace commissioners aboard the steamer *River Queen*, anchored near Fort Monroe at Hampton Roads, Va. Lincoln had three “indispensable” conditions for peace: “restoration of the national authority throughout all the states,” no “receding” on the slavery question, and “no cessation of hostilities short of the end of the war, and the disbanding of all forces hostile to the government.” As Foote wrote, “Lincoln considered himself bound by these terms as well, and had no intention of yielding on any of them, whatever else he might agree to.” When a Confederate commissioner objected that even King Charles I had negotiated with the rebels during the English Civil War, Lincoln dryly replied, “Upon questions of history I must refer you to Mr. Seward, for he is posted in such things. My only distinct recollection of the matter is that Charles lost his head.” When the conference ended fruitlessly, Seward sent a freed slave in a rowboat to the Confederate envoys’ ship, bearing a bottle of champagne with the Secretary’s compliments. He shouted across the water, “Keep the champagne, but return the Negro.”⁶⁹

Lincoln’s second term was soon to begin. Only Seward and Welles remained of Lincoln’s original Cabinet. When a tipsy Vice President Andrew Johnson embarrassed himself in the Senate chamber on Inauguration Day, March 4, 1865, by giving a rambling, disjointed speech, Seward remained “bland and serene as a summer’s day,” while the President “kept his head down... apparently engaged in profound study of his shoe tips.” Seward praised Lincoln’s Second Inaugural Address to a friend, saying, “A century from today that [speech] will be read as one of the most sublime utterances ever spoken by man....”⁷⁰

April 1865 and after

On April 5, 1865, Seward was thrown from his carriage when the horses spooked. He was seriously injured: his right shoulder dislocated, his nose, cheek and jaw badly bruised, and his jaw broken on both sides. He was carried, unconscious, to his home, and was soon in terrible pain and sometimes delirious. His doctors, led by family friend Dr. Tullio Verdi, swathed him in bandages and clamped his jaw into an iron frame to hold it immobile and allow it to heal. He could barely speak or eat. Verdi said that Seward’s condition, “considering his age, was perilous in the extreme.” The President visited him on his return from Richmond and City

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and City Point, Va. In Seward's bedroom, the President first

...sat gingerly on the bed, then sprawled across it, resting on an elbow, his face close to Seward's while he described much that had happened... [over] the course of the past two weeks. He stayed half an hour, by which time the New Yorker had fallen into a feverish sleep. Then [Lincoln] came out, gesturing for silence in the hall, and tiptoed down the stairs to the front door, where his carriage was waiting to take him back to the White House.

Tragically, he and Seward would never meet again.⁷¹

Seward was attacked in his sickbed on the night of April 14, 1865, slashed about the face and throat by John Wilkes Booth's co-conspirator Lewis Powell. Somewhat protected by the iron frame about his jaw, Seward rolled or fell off behind the bed, keeping Powell from completing his attack. Four other members of his household, including his son Frederick, were also injured by the assailant, slashed with his knife or beaten with his pistol. "'I'm mad, I'm mad,' the man said as he ran out into the night to vanish," as Foote wrote. Seward bore the scars to the end of his life. He was not initially told of the President's death, but, as one account has it, figured it out for himself, having seen through his window the flag at half-staff on the War Department building. He told an attendant, "If he had been alive he would have been the first to call on me; but he has not been here, nor has he sent to know how I am, and there's the flag at half-mast." Then he "lay in silence, the great tears coursing down his gashed cheeks, and the dreadful truth sinking into his mind."⁷²

On June 21, long in ill-health and worn out from caring for her wounded husband and son, Frances "Fanny" Seward died. She was just 59. The newspapers almost universally linked her death to the assassination attempt. Thurlow Weed wrote,

Infirm and feeble as she had been for years, while those she loved so devotedly were in danger, disease had no power over the wife and mother. But when the strain was off, her over-taxed powers, mental and physical, gave way.⁷³

Seward was gradually able to return to work, which he found the best tonic for his grief over the deaths of both his beloved wife and his friend the President. He said to his son Frederick, however,

I have always felt that Providence dealt hardly with me in not letting me die with Mr. Lincoln. My work was done, and I think I deserved some of the reward of dying there.⁷⁴

The Secretary of State had promised the French during the Civil War that the U.S. would remain neutral with respect to French adventurism in Mexico, but with the defeat of the Confederacy, the French worried that this policy might soon change. They were chagrined but not terribly surprised when, with President Andrew Johnson's approval, Gen. U.S. Grant sent Gen. Phil Sheridan with 50,000 troops to Texas, to persuade or force the French puppet Emperor Maximilian "to quit the territory of our sister republic." Two years after the war, under U.S. pressure, the French withdrew their troops from Mexico. Maximilian, with little support among his supposed subjects and abandoned by the relative handful of former Confederates who had headed south of the border after Appomattox, was captured, tried and convicted. Despite pleas for clemency from President Johnson and various European monarchs, he was executed on June 19, 1867.⁷⁵

Seward and Welles both continued to serve in Johnson's Cabinet to the end, although Seward was never to become as close to Johnson as he had been to Lincoln. He seems to have believed that Johnson was doing his best to follow Lincoln's policy towards the defeated South. He tried to moderate the new President's strident opposition to Radical Reconstruction, but usually failed.

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The Secretary accompanied Johnson on his politically-disastrous “swing around the circle” in late 1866, when Johnson was often heckled and just as often berated his audience and criticized his foes in the Senate by name. Loyal perhaps to a fault, Seward stood by Johnson throughout the impeachment process, believing that Johnson had not committed “high crimes and misdemeanors” and that the nation would be weakened if the President were removed. He and other New York political associates raised funds behind the scenes for lobbying Congress over the impeachment – and possibly for buying votes.⁷⁶

When Seward visited St. Thomas, Santa Cruz, Haiti and Cuba in late December 1865 and early January 1866, he became the first Secretary of State to leave the U.S. while in office. He dealt with the fallout of the Fenian raids into Canada, negotiated a dozen treaties, and saw to the beginning of the arbitration of the *Alabama* claims.⁷⁷

However, in his four years of post-Civil War service as Secretary of State, Seward is, of course, as Stahr wrote, best known for “negotiating the purchase of Alaska [from Russia] and securing its approval by a reluctant Congress, the accomplishment... of which he was justifiably most proud.” The Alaska purchase was not widely opposed at the time, and the phrase “Seward’s folly” did not appear until later.⁷⁸

Seward left Washington with the end of Johnson’s Presidency. He had served longer as Secretary of State than anyone else up to then, and has been surpassed only twice since: by Cordell Hull (1933-1944) and Dean Rusk (1961-1969). One contemporary story, probably apocryphal, told of Seward and Weed riding in a carriage through Central Park and passing a bust of Lincoln. Seward complained that, had Weed done his job properly at the Wigwam in 1860, it would be his bust and not Lincoln’s. Weed asked, “Yes, Henry, but wouldn’t you rather be riding in Central Park with me?”⁷⁹

Seward traveled widely in retirement, including to the West Coast on the new Transcontinental Railroad, the construction of which he had supported as a senator. He traveled by steamship to Oregon, Washington State, British Columbia and Alaska, and on another trip went to Japan, China and elsewhere in southeast Asia, then to India, Egypt and a grand tour of Europe. He also began to suffer from the progressive paralysis of his hands and arms, which eventually made it impossible for him to write. One later biographer speculated that Seward suffered in his last years from ALS or Lou Gehrig’s disease. A junior U.S. diplomat in London wrote at the time,

His hands are crippled past use, his face is scarred, and he eats with difficulty; but his mind and body are vigorous, his eyes are bright and blue, and he can walk with ease.⁸⁰

Back in Auburn, he enjoyed time with his family, worked on his memoirs, wrote about his globetrotting, and visited with old friends like Thurlow Weed and John Hay. On October 10, 1872, after a brief illness, Seward died in the small library of his home, a bust of Lincoln not far away. Asked by his daughter-in-law Jenny if he had anything to say to them, he said, “Nothing – only love one another.” He was 71 years old. His funeral was in the same small Episcopal church where he and Fanny had been married 48 years earlier, almost to the day, and he was buried beside her.⁸¹

What was his legacy? Henry Adams praised Seward as one who, as America’s foremost diplomat of the 1860s, “fought... a fight which will go down in history as one of the wonders of statesmanship.” Seward was not perfect – he was, as his biographer John M. Taylor wrote,

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complex [and] at various times... shrewd, diligent, devious, tenacious, and indiscreet.... When the situation required, Seward was [also] a master dissimulator.... Americans like their heroes to be unambiguous, and William Henry Seward steadfastly refused to oblige them.⁸²

However, as Stahr wrote, in “mastering his disappointment and... campaigning tirelessly for his rival” after the disappointment of the Republican National Convention in 1860, and then in so ably serving as Secretary of State for eight years, through the Civil War and the most tumultuous part of Reconstruction, Seward became “the indispensable man” of the Lincoln and Johnson administrations, and “somehow kept his sense of humor and hope through [even] the darkest days.” Other than those who actually lived in the White House, Stahr argued, Seward was “the foremost American statesman of the nineteenth century.”⁸³

And tonight, for all his faults, we honor him still.

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April 12, 2017

Program: What's All the Hoopla: Civil War Clothing by Heather Nichols

Drinks @ 6pm, Dinner @ 6:30 Judson Manor

East 107th St & Chester

BECAUSE YOU ASKED.....

In response to several requests, beginning in December, our meetings will begin at 6:30 p.m.
Please mark your calendars accordingly.

Jean



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