

THE CHARGER



CLEVELAND CIVIL WAR ROUNDTABLE

APRIL 2018

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Website : clevelandcivilwarroundtable.com

E-mail: m.wells@csuohio.edu or w.keating@csuohio.edu

Editors: Dennis Keating, Michael Wells

Newsletter Design: Catherine Wells

Message From the President

Springtime greetings to all members and friends of the our Roundtable! As the season changes and the weather warms, I am reminded that my year as your president is ending soon. That being said, I look forward to my last two meetings, each of which will feature engaging speakers and exciting announcements about our coming year.

This month, the Roundtable presents Mark Smith, who will give a fascinating talk about the Battle of Wise's Forks, which occurred on March 7-10, 1865, just south of Kinston, North Carolina. After Sherman captured Savannah, the culmination of his march to the sea, he was ordered by Grant to embark his army on ships to reinforce the Army of the Potomac and the Army of the James in Virginia, where Grant was bogged down in the Siege of Petersburg against Robert E. Lee. Sherman persuaded Grant however that he should march north through the Carolinas instead, destroying everything of military value along the way, similar to his march to sea through Georgia. Sherman was particularly interested in targeting South Carolina, the first state to secede from the Union, for the effect it would have on Southern morale. Sherman's army turned north toward Columbia, South Carolina in late January 1865 with 60,000 battle hardened veteran troops. Not since the days of Julius Caesar, Mr. Smith contends, has the world seen such an army. The destruction it wrought in South Carolina, particularly, spread panic among all who laid before it. After the looting and burning of Columbia on February 18, Sherman's army continued north.

The citizens of North Carolina shook with fear. Those to their south had been mercilessly harassed, some to the point of death, and their property and belongings destroyed. Capt. George W. Pepper, an officer in Sherman's army, wrote that some of his soldiers engaged in the "wanton destruction of property which they could not use or carry away. Pianos cut to pieces with axes, elegant sofas broken and fragments scattered about the grounds, paintings and engravings pierced with bayonets or slashed with swords, rosewood center tables and chairs broken to pieces and burned for fuel....This robbery and wanton waste were specially trying to the people, not only because contrary to right and the laws of war, but because it completed their utter and almost hopeless impoverishment. means possible. Their first encounter with Sherman's forces took place at Wise's Forks.

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The depth of their losses and present want can hardly be overstated." Desperate to save their people and property, the Confederate forces resolved to beat back Sherman's marauding forces by all means possible. Their first encounter with Sherman's forces took place at Wise's Forks.

Please make your plans to join us, to learn what became of these armies when they met.

Hans Kuenzi

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North Carolina in the Civil War

By Dennis Keating

North Carolina initially voted narrowly against secession, with voters from mountainous western North Carolina especially against it. However, after President Lincoln's call to suppress the rebellion after the attack on Ft. Sumter and Virginia's secession, a second vote on May 20, 1861 resulted in North Carolina's secession.

North Carolina contributed more troops (almost 140,000) to the Confederacy than any other state. 48 Confederate generals were from North Carolina. Many notable Confederate generals were North Carolinians, including: Braxton Bragg, Daniel Harvey Hill, Robert Hoke and killed in action – Leonidas Polk (in the Atlanta campaign), Lewis Armistead and Dorsey Pender (both at Gettysburg) and J. Johnston Pettigrew (commander of the left wing of the July 3rd charge at Gettysburg and killed in the retreat), and Stephen Dodson Ramseur (at Cedar Creek). Bragg, Hill and Polk were among the most contentious of Confederate generals.

In addition to Bentonville, the Confederacy's last major stand before Joe Johnston's surrender to Sherman in April, 1865, other major battles were fought in North Carolina, including:

Roanoke Island (February 7-8, 1862): Ambrose Burnside launched the first amphibious assault of the Civil War, landing his troops from Fort Monroe and tightening the Union blockade of Atlantic ports.

New Berne (March 14, 1862): Burnside captured this inland Confederate post, which the Confederates failed to retake during the war.

Fort Fisher (December, 1864 and January 13-15, 1865): Ben Butler failed to take this defense of the port of Wilmington and was relieved of command by Grant. With Alfred Terry commanding the infantry and David Dixon Porter commanding the fleet, Fort Fisher fell to the Union the month after Butler's failure. Confederate General W.H.C. Whiting, mortally wounded in the battle, before his death attributed the loss of the fort "solely to the incompetency, the imbecility, and the pusillanimity of Braxton Bragg", commanding at Wilmington.

Wilmington (February 12-22, 1865): In the face of Porter's gunboats and John Schofield's XXIII Corps (including Ohioan Jacob Cox's division), Confederates abandoned their last remaining open Atlantic port February, 21-22, 1865.

Albemarle (October 28, 1864): the sinking of the Confederate ironclad ram by the daring expedition led by Will Cushing. The *Albemarle* had played a key role in the Confederate recapture of Plymouth on April 20, 1864. Cushing sunk the ironclad with a torpedo launch and then made an heroic escape.

Monroe's Crossroads (March 10, 1865): The surprise attack by Wade Hampton's and Joe Wheeler's Confederate cavalry led to Union cavalry commander Judson Kilpatrick's "shirt-tail skedaddle" leaving his Southern



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Southern paramour behind.

Stoneman's Raid: In March-May, 1865, George Stoneman led a major Union cavalry raid from Knoxville, Tennessee through southwestern Virginia and western North Carolina. His division included the 12th Ohio cavalry, which was organized in Cleveland.

North Carolina was the focus of native Charles Frazier's 1997 novel and 2003 movie *Cold Mountain* (located in the Pisgah National Forest in western North Carolina).

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Jamie Malanowski. *Commander Will Cushing: Daredevil Hero of the Civil War* (2014)

Charles McGrath. "The Civil War, Without All the Sepia Tint" *New York Times* (December 21, 2003)[*Cold Mountain* film review]

Joe A. Mobley. *Confederate Generals of North Carolina: Tar Heels in Command* (2011)

The History that the Victors Chose Not to Write by David A. Carrino

This history brief was presented at the March 2018 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.

There is a well-known axiom that all is fair in love and war, or, as the expression appears in its earliest known form, "The rules of fair play do not apply in love and war." This expression is used to justify that in love and in war, it is acceptable to resort to anything in order to achieve the ultimate goal. Since our organization is the Cleveland Civil War Roundtable, which focuses its interest on a war, this is not the appropriate forum to discuss whether or not this axiom applies to love. On the other hand, there is more than enough evidence to prove that this axiom applies to war, and a great deal of such evidence can be found in the Civil War. Far too often, the axiom that all is fair in war has been used to justify cruelty, and there are many examples of cruelty in the Civil War. Perhaps the most well-known is the treatment of Union prisoners at Andersonville. But the Confederates were not alone in their cruel treatment of enemy prisoners. It is not as widely known that Confederate prisoners of war in Union prisons were also subjected to cruel treatment. The cruelty that both sides inflicted on prisoners is disturbing for the most basic, primal, and biological of reasons. Of all the species that exist on planet Earth, the one that displays the

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the worst cruelty is *Homo sapiens*. This is because cruelty in other species arises from instinct, but for humans, cruelty very often arises by choice.

The prevailing perception, which has been influenced primarily by Andersonville, is that Union prisoners of war were treated far worse than Confederate prisoners. But the numbers tell a different story. One criterion that is useful in assessing the treatment of prisoners of war is the death rate of prisoners as a percentage of the total number of prisoners. Accurate numbers are likely impossible to obtain, and there is a disparity in the numbers depending on the source. But in general the numbers from different sources do not differ by much. The total number of prisoners of war that died in Union prisons was almost 26,000 and in Confederate prisons was just over 30,000. Expressed as death rate, slightly more than 15% of the total number of prisoners in Southern prisons died. In Northern prisons, about 12% of the total number of prisoners died. In other words, the overall death rates in Union and Confederate prisons differ by only three percentage points.

It is also useful to examine the numbers for individual prisons. Based solely on death rate, Andersonville, with a death rate of 29%, was the worst prison of the Civil War. Three of the most notorious Northern prisons were Camp Douglas in Chicago, Elmira Prison in Elmira, New York, and Rock Island Prison, which, technically, was in Illinois, but was on an island in the Mississippi River between Davenport, Iowa and Moline, Illinois. Camp Douglas has the distinction of being the place where the Union confined a Confederate prisoner named Henry Stanley, who is famous for the quote, "Dr. Livingstone, I presume?" Rock Island has the literary distinction of being the place of confinement of Ashley Wilkes, the fictional character in the novel *Gone with the Wind*. (The prison where Ashley Wilkes was confined is not mentioned in the movie, but it is mentioned in the book.) The death rate at Rock Island was almost 17%. (In the novel *Gone with the Wind*, Margaret Mitchell indicated that the death rate at Rock Island was 75%, which is a gross exaggeration.) For Camp Douglas, there is some uncertainty about the death rate due to misconduct with regard to the burying of bodies of dead prisoners. The Camp Douglas death rate has been reported to be between 17% and 23%, but the 17% number is likely the most accurate one. At Elmira, which the Confederate prisoners called Hellmira, the death rate was just over 24%, which is only somewhat lower than Andersonville's 29%. However, there was a much higher number of prisoner deaths at Andersonville compared to Elmira, nearly 13,000 and almost 3,000, respectively. The only reason that the total number of prisoner deaths at Elmira was much lower than at Andersonville, despite their similar death rates, is that over the course of the war, Elmira confined less than a third of the total number of prisoners that were confined at Andersonville.

Another useful way to assess prisoner of war camps is by examining the living conditions at the prisons. It is well-known that the living conditions at Andersonville were beyond deplorable. However,



Rock Island Prisoners

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the living conditions at Northern prisons were likewise horrific. As at Andersonville, overcrowding in Union prisons was rampant, with some prisons confining as many as twice the number of prisoners that they were designed to hold. This situation was made worse in mid-1863 when prisoner paroles and exchanges were suspended due primarily to the Confederacy's refusal to exchange black prisoners. By late 1863, the Lincoln administration was under pressure from the public to resolve the prisoner exchange impasse, but the administration's attempt to do so worsened the situation. To address the problem, the Lincoln administration appointed Benjamin Butler as a special agent for prisoner exchange with the responsibility of negotiating with his counterpart in the Confederacy to resolve any specific issues so that prisoner exchanges could be resumed. The naming of Butler was just another impediment to the resumption of prisoner exchanges, because Butler, due to his harsh treatment of the residents of New Orleans during his time as military governor there, had been proclaimed by Jefferson Davis "an outlaw and common enemy of mankind." A Richmond newspaper denounced the appointment of Butler as an attempt by the U.S. "to interpose the obnoxious Beast in the way of a solution of this vexed problem." Because of the failure to resume prisoner exchanges, overcrowding in the prisons was not alleviated, and prisoners on both sides were forced to remain in the appalling living conditions of the prisoner of war camps.

In addition to overcrowding, the living conditions for Confederate prisoners in Union prisons included rations that were of poor quality and low amount. This situation was exacerbated in the spring of 1864 when the U.S. War Department, in response to poor treatment of Union prisoners in Confederate prisons, reduced the rations for Confederate prisoners. On May 3, 1864 William Hoffman, Commissary General of Prisoners for the Union army, sent a letter to Secretary of War Edwin Stanton. In that letter Hoffman described the appalling condition of recently paroled Union prisoners whom Hoffman had personally seen as they were returning to Union lines. Hoffman further stated in his letter to Stanton, "I would very respectfully urge that retaliatory measures be at once instituted." On May 19, 1864 Hoffman proposed reducing the rations for Confederate prisoners, even though these rations, at Hoffman's suggestion, had already been reduced on April 20, 1864. After input from, among others, Chief of Staff Henry Halleck to alleviate the effect of Hoffman's "retaliatory measures" on sick and wounded prisoners, Edwin Stanton approved this second reduction in rations for Confederate prisoners. In addition to the inadequate food, the drinking water at Union prisons, like the drinking water at Andersonville, was contaminated. One such example was Elmira Prison, for which the drinking water came from a pond within the camp, but this pond was also used as a latrine.

William Hoffman



Elmira Prison



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Similar to Andersonville, the prisoners in Northern prisons lived in filth, and poor drainage led to persistent standing water in the camps, which was a source of disease. For instance, a Union officer named Henry Lazelle, who was sent by William Hoffman to inspect a prisoner of war camp, wrote in his lengthy report, "The spaces between the clusters of quarters are heaped with the vilest accumulations of filth which has remained there for months, breeding sickness and pestilence. All the refuse of the prisoners' food, clothing and the general dirt of a camp is gathered here and no care has been taken for its removal." The prisoners in Union prisons had woefully inadequate clothing and living quarters, which left them exposed to the elements. For example, in his directive regarding Rock Island Prison, Union Quartermaster General Montgomery Meigs stipulated that "the barracks...should be put up in the roughest and cheapest manner, mere shanties, with no fine work about them." Because of the northern climate, this meant that the prisoners were forced to endure winter without sufficiently warm housing or clothing. Prisoners at most Union prisons faced sub-freezing temperatures with flimsy quarters, ragged clothing, and insufficient firewood. Moreover, medical facilities in Union prisons were inadequate, both with regard to the number of beds and doctors and also with respect to the quality of treatment. A Northern physician commented about prisoners released from Elmira, "The condition of these men was pitiable in the extreme and evinces criminal neglect and inhumanity."

In a report specifically about Camp Douglas, Henry Bellows, the president of the U.S. Sanitary Commission, made an assessment of the camp after he personally inspected it. Bellows' assessment, which is dated June 30, 1862, perhaps best summarized the situation at Union prisons in general, and his assessment reads like something that could have been written about Andersonville. Bellows wrote, "The amount of standing water, of unpoliced grounds, of foul sinks, of unventilated and crowded barracks, of general disorder, of soil reeking with miasmatic accretions, of rotten bones and the emptyings of camp-kettles is enough to drive a sanitarian to despair....The absolute abandonment of the spot seems the only judicious course. I do not believe that any amount of drainage would purge that soil loaded with accumulated filth, or those barracks fetid with two stories of vermin and animal exhalations. Nothing but fire can cleanse them." This assessment of Camp Douglas was in a letter that Bellows sent to William Hoffman. Bellows felt that the condition of Camp Douglas was so poor that he recommended a new prison camp be built in a place with better drainage, and that the new camp be constructed with barracks that had better ventilation. In response to Bellows' report, Hoffman sent a letter to Montgomery Meigs. In that letter Hoffman mentioned Bellows' assessment of Camp Douglas and stated, "I do not agree with him as to its fearful condition." Meigs refused to authorize Bellows' extensive recommendations, calling them "expensive" and "extravagant," and approved only modest repairs, in particular repairs to the leaky barracks.

In spite of Henry Bellows' grim assessment regarding the land where Camp Douglas once stood, that location is now a residential area. In contrast, Andersonville became a National Historic Site in the U.S. National Park Service, and a reconstruction of the prison stands on that site. Unlike Andersonville, nothing of Camp Douglas remains standing, not even a reconstruction of all or part of the prison. At one time a small plaque stood near the site of Camp Douglas, and this was the only tangible evidence to document that the prison once stood there. That plaque was not put up by a government agency, but by a private citizen named Ernie Griffin. Griffin, who has since died, was not sympathetic to the cause of the Confederacy, but was an African-American who was interested in history and whose grandfather was a member of a Colored Infantry Regiment. After Griffin's death the plaque was removed. Similarly, nothing remains of Rock Island Prison, which was completely demolished after the Civil War, and no reconstruction of the prison was done to commemorate the suffering of the Confederate prisoners who were confined there. The site where Elmira Prison once stood is now a residential area, although there are small stone markers to indicate the location of the prison. Recently some reconstruction of the prison was completed by a non-profit organization, most notably a prisoner

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barracks, and the grounds now operate as a museum and education site for the general public, but this commemoration of the suffering of Confederate prisoners at Elmira did not come about until over 150 years after the last prisoners left the camp.

An important question is why wretched conditions existed in both Northern prisons and Southern prisons. Certainly there is not simply one reason, and there is controversy about the reasons. But if a single reason were to be offered, it would be different for each side. For the South, a shortage of supplies, such as food, was a primary reason for the despicable conditions in the South's prisoner of war camps, although there is no question that the Confederacy could have made the conditions better. For the North, a principal reason for the dreadful conditions in its prisons seems to be negligence, and there is reason to believe that a motivation for the poor treatment of Confederate prisoners was retaliation for the mistreatment of Union prisoners. Both sides were plagued by problems in dealing with contractors who sold food and other supplies, such as lumber, for the prisons. For the North, one significant issue with contractors was their tardiness in providing supplies and services for the prisons and the government's failure to seriously address this problem. For the South, a significant issue with contractors was their unwillingness to sell their goods to the government for Confederate currency rather than to sell goods to private entities for greenbacks or gold. In addition, for both sides, a significant reason for the appalling treatment of prisoners of war was a lack of preparation for dealing with large numbers of prisoners, perhaps due to the fact that both sides anticipated a short war. As stated in the book *Portals to Hell: Military Prisons of the Civil War* by Lonnie R. Speer, "The truth is, the care and feeding of prisoners is, and always has been, the last concern—the least of any government's worries—at the beginning of any war. In the Civil War, the situation was worsened by the general contention, of both sides, that it would be of short duration and permanent facilities for POWs would not be necessary." This lack of preparation became an even more serious problem when prisoner exchanges were suspended in mid-1863. Some of the Northern prisons, such as Elmira, Camp Douglas, and Rock Island, had conditions that were so deplorable that each of these prisons has been referred to as the Andersonville of the North. Based on available information, it is an exaggeration to equate any Union prisoner of war camp with Andersonville. Nevertheless, the expression "Andersonville of the North" is useful in that it makes clear that Northern prisons did not operate at standards that can in any way be considered acceptable with regard to the treatment of prisoners.

The axiom that all is fair in war is widely known. Another well-known axiom that applies to war is that history is written by the victors. While the source of this axiom is not known with certainty, this expression is quite often true with regard to how the events of a war are recorded for posterity. After the Civil War, a Southerner expressed this sentiment in a more acrimonious way when he said about Northern versions of the war's events that "the spoiler is now busily and rapidly taking from us, by the pen, the truth of history more precious to us than all the spoils of war which were ever captured by his sword." Biased writing of history frequently involves more than simply a less-than-objective narrative of the war. One technique that has been used to skew the recording of a war's events was, interestingly, put into song in the musical *Wicked*. This technique involves clever wording to color the history that the victors write. In the musical *Wicked*, the Wizard cynically sings to the Wicked Witch, "Where I'm from, we believe all sorts of things that aren't true. We call it – 'history.' / A man's called a traitor – or liberator. / A rich man's a thief – or philanthropist. / Is one a crusader – or ruthless invader? / It's all in which label is able to persist. / There are precious few at ease with moral ambiguities. / So we act as though they don't exist." While not relevant to prisoner of war camps, it can be argued that the Civil War provides an example of the first of the Wizard's pairs of contradictory terms, traitor or liberator, as they are applied to a prominent player in the Civil War

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Robert E. Lee, in contrast to fellow Virginian George Washington. Both of these men were the principal military leaders in a rebellion against the government, but history has labeled the one whose side lost a traitor and labeled the one whose side won a liberator. Had the outcomes been the reverse for the rebellions in which these two men participated, perhaps the victors who wrote the history of the wars in which Lee and Washington fought would have used the opposite term to define them. More relevant to prison camps, Henry Wirz, the commandant of Andersonville, who, by any objective reckoning deserved punishment for war crimes, was vilified in an 1865 Northern publication as "The Demon of Andersonville." In fact, Wirz suffered more than vilification. Wirz lost his life for the atrocities at Andersonville. On the other hand, William Hoffman, the Commissary General of Prisoners for the Union army, was lauded by the U.S. government, because he saved the government \$1.8 million by, among other measures, reducing rations for Confederate prisoners, failing to provide prisoners adequate clothing and housing, and mandating the construction of inadequate hospital facilities at prisoner of war camps. Hoffman saw his wartime efforts characterized by his superiors as "faithful, meritorious, and distinguished." Thus, a person on the losing side who was responsible for many prisoner deaths was labeled by the victors a "demon," and a person on the winning side who was responsible for many prisoner deaths was labeled by the victors "meritorious" and "distinguished."

Clever wording is not the only technique that is used to color the account of a war. It is also often true that the victors, in their desire to make themselves appear noble and their cause just, neglect to publicize certain events that occurred in a war, or at least do not publicize these events with the same fervor as they do for other events of the war, or, in the words of the Wizard in *Wicked*, act as though certain moral ambiguities don't exist. Regarding the atrocities in Union prisoner of war camps, these were largely allowed to escape scrutiny in the aftermath of the Civil War, because the victors directed the attention of the nation on atrocities in Confederate prisons. The conditions that existed in Union prisons were for the most part not publicized, but the atrocities that took place at Andersonville and other Confederate prisons were widely reported in the aftermath of the Civil War [during the time when attention was focused on military tribunals and punishments for Confederate war crimes](#). While a number of accounts of personal experiences in Union prisons were written by Confederate prisoners of war shortly after the conflict, it was not until decades after the war that thorough accounts of Northern prisons were published, which brought a comparable level of scrutiny to Union prisons as had been focused on Confederate prisons in the immediate aftermath of the Civil War. It is true that several years after the Civil War accounts of the war from the perspective of the South were published by former Confederates, and these accounts were by no means objective narratives, but this does not change the fact that [Confederate prisoners in Union prisons, like Union prisoners in Confederate prisons, were treated inhumanely](#).

The treatment of Confederate prisoners provides evidence that no side in a war, any war, has a monopoly on cruelty. In reality, cruelty has always been and always will be an inseparable component of war. Union General William Tecumseh Sherman expressed this quite well when he wrote, "War is cruelty, and you cannot refine it." In spite of this, there are justifiable limits to cruelty in war, and treatment of prisoners is one aspect of war that lies outside these limits. The available evidence indicates that Andersonville was the worst prisoner of war camp in the Civil War, so if anyone deserved punishment for prisoner of war atrocities, it was anyone who was responsible for what happened at Andersonville. But were those who were responsible for Andersonville the only ones who deserved to be punished? Civil War enthusiasts are intrigued by discussions of Civil War-related questions, which is why the Roundtable holds an annual debate. With that in mind, here are some questions that involve Civil War prisons. Henry Wirz was one of only a handful of people who were executed because of war crimes that were committed during the Civil War, and every person who was punished for war crimes was a Confederate.

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But were there any members of the Union army who deserved punishment for war crimes, in particular atrocities at prisoner of war camps? Or do the victors win not only the privilege of writing history, but also the privilege of setting the standards for guilt and innocence regarding wartime atrocities? And do the victors also win the privilege of applying these standards differently to themselves and to the enemy?

It is important to acknowledge that both sides in the Civil War failed to treat prisoners of war in accordance with proper rules for treatment of prisoners or, for that matter, in accordance with an acceptable code of humanity. The reason why it is important to acknowledge that both sides were guilty is expressed in a statement from an unlikely source. This statement refers specifically to atrocities that were committed in a different war than the Civil War and were so unspeakably horrible that no other wartime atrocities should ever be compared to them. Nevertheless, the statement eloquently expresses why it is important to acknowledge wartime atrocities, particularly if 'our side' was guilty, because failure to acknowledge atrocities that 'our side' committed is the first step in allowing such behavior to become an acceptable part of our moral code. The statement was made by Rod Serling in an episode of the television program *The Twilight Zone*, and the quote has been altered in this history brief by replacing the original names in the quote with names that make the quote more pertinent to the Civil War. The altered quote is as follows. "All the Andersonvilles must remain standing. The Andersonvilles, the Elmiras, the Rock Islands, the Camp Douglasses – all of them. They must remain standing because they are a monument to a moment in time when some men decided to turn the Earth into a graveyard. Into it they shoveled all of their reason, their logic, their knowledge, but worst of all, their conscience. And the moment we forget this, the moment we cease to be haunted by its remembrance, then we become the gravediggers."

Removal of Confederate Statues

by Dennis Keating

I highly recommend the newly published book by New Orleans Mayor Mitch Landrieu entitled *In the Shadow of Statues: A White Southerner Confronts History*. He eloquently deals with his decision to remove several statues (e.g., Robert E. Lee) from public spaces in his city and beyond that confronting the racism legacy of the Lost Cause. You can view his discussing this at C-Span's Book TV broadcast on

April 1.



TAKE NOTE

Stand Watie and the Cherokee Nation in the Civil War:

<http://www.historynet.com/stand-waties-war-the-last-confederate-general.htm>



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JOIN US FOR OUR NEXT MEETING

April 11, 2018

Program: "Prepare for Sherman's Coming – The Battle of Wise's Forks"

Speaker: Mark Smith

Speaker: Drinks @ 6 pm, Dinner @ 6:40 Judson Manor

East 107th St & Chester

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Lee's Daughters (part 6 of 6) by David A. Carrino

The Lee Family Deprived of Arlington

After the Civil War, the Lee family had two significant encounters with Arlington. The first occurred in June 1873, when Mrs. Lee visited the place that had been her home for 53 years, from the day she was born until she was forced to leave it in the face of an imminent occupation by an enemy military force. Mrs. Lee had written to a friend in 1868 of her desire to visit Arlington and acknowledged, "The longing I have to revisit it is almost more than I can endure." Other words that Mrs. Lee wrote prior to her visit make clear that the frail woman recognized both her need to visit Arlington and the dwindling time yet available for her to do so. "Life is waning away, and with the exception of my own immediate family, I am cut off from all I have ever known & loved in my youth & my dear old Arlington I cannot bear to think of that used as it is now & so little hope of my ever getting there again. I do not think I can die in peace until I have seen it once more." Three years after she had lost her husband to death and realizing that her already fragile health was declining even more, Mrs. Lee undertook a trip to Arlington. What she saw saddened her. Where once there had been scenic grounds and a lively home, instead her eyes fell upon row after row of graves and an empty, vandalized house. Mrs. Lee summarized her visit with the somber words, "I rode out to my dear old home but so changed it seemed but a dream of the past—I could not have realised it was Arlington but for the few old oaks they had spared & the trees planted by the Genl and myself which are raising their tall branches to the Heaven which seems to smile on the desecration around them." The conversion of Arlington estate into a



military cemetery was considered by many at that time to be a transformation of the land along the Potomac River into hallowed ground, but Mrs. Lee characterized this as "desecration" of her home. As sad as the visit was for Mrs. Lee, there was one benefit of seeing for herself what had become of Arlington. Mrs. Lee noted, "My visit produced one good effect. The change is so entire that I have not the yearning to go back there & shall be more content to resign all my right in it." Five months after her visit, Mary Anne Randolph Custis Lee died and was laid to rest 150 miles away from her Arlington home.



The other post-Civil War encounter between the Lee family and Arlington, which involved an attempt to reclaim their former home, began in earnest in 1874, after some earlier post-war efforts by the Lee family to recover Arlington. Upon the death of Mrs. Lee in 1873, her eldest son, Custis, inherited Arlington. Custis' younger brothers, Rooney and Rob, inherited two other properties of G.W.P. Custis, White House and Romancoke, respectively, and after the Civil War Rooney and Rob repaired each of them and lived in them. However, Custis' inheritance had been seized during the Civil War, illegally as it turned out, and became a U.S. military cemetery. The U.S. government's basis for the seizure was failure to pay taxes on the property. In 1862, after passage of an act by Congress that imposed a tax on property in "Insurrectionary Districts," the U.S. government demanded payment of property taxes for Arlington estate in the amount of \$92.07 (\$1,727 in 2017 dollars).

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Mrs. Lee sent a representative to make payment on her behalf, but the government mandated that payment must be made by the owner of the property, in this case Mrs. Lee, who at the time was living in Richmond and under no circumstances was about to enter Union territory after recently being caught behind enemy lines during McClellan's Peninsula campaign and escaping only because she was allowed to pass through the lines into Richmond. Since the U.S. government considered the taxes unpaid and the property in default, Arlington was seized, put up for auction, and purchased by the U.S. government. In 1864 Arlington began to be used for burial of Union dead,

and by the end of the Civil War there were thousands of graves on the land that had been the home of the Lee family. In addition, on May 5, 1863, three days after Stonewall Jackson's flank attack at Chancellorsville and five days before Jackson's death, Freedman's Village, a large camp for former slaves, was established on Arlington estate, and the camp was still occupied when Custis began his effort to recover Arlington.

In 1874 Custis petitioned Congress for compensation for Arlington, but Congress never acted on the matter. Three years later Custis took his case to court, this time seeking eviction of the U.S. government from the property. Several months passed before the case was heard, but after a six-day jury trial in U.S. Circuit Court, the jury found in favor of Custis on January 30, 1879. Regarding the requirement that the tax be paid in person, the presiding judge wrote, "The impolicy of such a provision of law is as obvious to me as is its unconstitutionality." The U.S. government appealed the ruling, and in 1882 the case was heard by the Supreme Court, which ruled 5 to 4 in favor of Custis, to whom title to Arlington estate was returned. By that time there were almost 20,000 graves in Arlington, and relocating that many graves would have required enormous effort and expense. Instead, the U.S. government sought to purchase Arlington from Custis, and an agreement was reached in March 1883. Custis was paid \$150,000 (almost \$3.5 million in 2017 dollars), and he shared this payment with his two surviving sisters, Mary and Mildred. While the monetary compensation for Arlington was certainly beneficial, it meant the irrevocable relinquishing of the Lee family's home. It had to be a bittersweet victory for the Lee family, who were told, in essence, that their home had been taken from them illegally, but, for all practical purposes, their home could never be returned to them. For the living members of the Lee family, Arlington was gone, and all that they had of their former home were, in the words that Lee had written to his wife on Christmas day of 1861, "the remembrances of the spot, & the memories of those that to us rendered it sacred."

Among the memories that made Arlington "sacred" to Lee is that it was the birthplace of all four of his daughters. Lee loved his wife and his sons, but he treasured his daughters. This is evident in the words of deep affection that Lee wrote in many of his letters to his daughters. With all due respect to mothers (and mothers are due an enormous amount of respect), there is no bond like the bond between a father and a daughter. A Lee biographer wrote, "Neither Lee nor his daughters were aware of how possessive he was, or of how much they acquiesced in that possessiveness." This statement certainly applies to Annie, Agnes, and Mildred, although it may not apply as strongly to Mary, who chose to live so much of her life away from her family that she has been characterized as estranged from her family, and perhaps Mary's estrangement from her family

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resulted from a sense of her father's possessiveness. However, Mary eventually came to feel close to her family, although that happened only when Mary was near the end of her life. It was only during the last few years of her life, when Mary embraced her status as the last surviving child of Robert E. and Mrs. Lee, that Mary felt the closeness to her family that her younger sisters had felt throughout their lives. Nevertheless, Lee had great affection for all of his daughters. Unfortunately for them, Lee's decision to side with the Confederacy had a disastrous effect on his daughters. As such, Lee, in light of the way events played out, placed his allegiance to Virginia above his devotion to his daughters, although he had no way of knowing beforehand what the consequences of his decision would be for his daughters.

It is interesting to wonder how the Lee family's future would have been changed had Lee decided differently in April 1861. If Lee had chosen to wear blue rather than gray, then when Union forces crossed the Potomac to occupy Arlington, that action would have not only denied Confederate forces a militarily strong vantage point over the U.S. capital, but also secured Arlington for the Lee family after the war. Had Lee chosen to remain loyal to the Union, then when his former assistant, Montgomery Meigs, selected a location for a Union cemetery, it would not have been the Lee family's home, and more than 400,000 U.S. military and family members would now have their final resting places somewhere else. There would not have been a need for Lee's son, Custis, to go to the Supreme Court in order to obtain his inheritance, and the house that G.W.P. Custis built would have been preserved for his descendants. By no means were the Lee daughters the only Americans who suffered hardships and losses as a result of the Civil War, nor is it necessarily true that they suffered greater hardships or losses than anyone else. But the Lee daughters suffered a unique and highly publicized Civil War loss, Arlington, and the reason that they suffered this loss was also unique and highly publicized, specifically, the decision that their father made to serve the Confederacy. Moreover, while the loss of Arlington is frequently connected to Robert E. Lee, this loss is not as often associated with the Lee daughters. But this loss was as painful for them as it was for their father.



In one translation of a short story by Anton Chekhov, there is a passage which reads, "At the door of every contented, happy man somebody should stand with a little hammer, constantly tapping, to remind him that unhappy people exist, that however happy he may be, sooner or later life will show him its claws, some calamity will befall him – illness, poverty, loss – and nobody will hear or see." When the Lee daughters were living the happy lives of their youth, no one was tapping with a hammer on the door of Arlington House to remind them that a calamity awaited them in the future. Nevertheless, life's claws slashed Robert E. Lee, although he made himself a willing target of those claws due to the decision he made in the early morning hours of April 20, 1861. When life's claws struck Lee, those claws also struck the members of his family, including his daughters. Lee's personal losses that resulted from his decision are well-known. The same cannot be said of Lee's daughters, who, to paraphrase Anton Chekhov, were shown life's claws, but nobody heard or saw. Not many people nowadays have heard about the sacrifices that Lee's daughters were forced to make because of their father's decision. One of the usual pieces of information that is given regarding Arlington is that it at one time was the home of Robert E. Lee. But it was also the home of Mary, Annie, Agnes, and Mildred Lee, and when Arlington was lost to them, they lost not only their home, but also the future which they would have had with the home of their contented youth as the physical and psychological epicenter of their adult lives. Lee's story has been told many times, but his daughters are remembered mainly because they were the daughters of Robert E. Lee.

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However, Mary, Annie, Agnes, and Mildred are much more than just Lee's daughters. History needs to see Mary, Annie, Agnes, and Mildred not simply as Lee's daughters, but as the individuals they truly are.

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Mary Custis Lee



Anne Carter Lee



Eleanor Agnes Lee



Mildred Childe Lee