

## **American Battlefield Trust Joins Forces with Ancestry® and Fold3® to Help Researchers Uncover Stories of Valor in Their Family Trees**

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**Washington, D.C.** – Ancestry® and Fold3® have been helping people understand their ancestors and the individuals who fought for causes large and small for decades. Now, they are joining forces with the American Battlefield Trust so that users can find the veterans in their family’s past and learn about their combat experience’s impact on the generations who followed.



“The American Battlefield Trust is thrilled to work with Ancestry® and Fold3® to help enrich the research being conducted by genealogists, both professional and amateur, around the world,” said Trust President Jim Lighthizer. “Our organizations are committed to offering opportunities to make the past relevant to modern audiences, and together we can now offer a deeper experience than ever before.”

Brian Hansen, Senior Vice President & General Manager, Emerging Businesses, added, “The historical information contributed by the Trust will contextualize the military service records that Ancestry users uncover when exploring the billions of historical records in our networks. This is an

exciting step in our ongoing quest to create meaningful connections to the past generations.”

The integration has begun with data centered on the Civil War, and will expand with subsequent datasets related to the Revolutionary War and War of 1812. Learn more at [www.fold3.com/projectregiment](http://www.fold3.com/projectregiment).

“The Civil War may be the defining narrative in our nation’s history,” said Anne Mitchell with Ancestry. “But it isn’t just a single story — it’s more than three million! Each participant has their own story, one that impacted family, community and all the generations that came after them. Stitched together, these individual stories define who we became as a nation.”

The Trust will build upon the Ancestry® and Fold3® focus on the “who” of a given family tree, adding context as to the “where.” As the nation’s leading heritage land preservation organization, the Trust has protected more than 52,000 acres of battlefield land in 24 states. Its robust website, [www.battlefields.org](http://www.battlefields.org), offers information about hundreds of important battles fought during America’s first century.

When an Ancestry® or Fold3® user discovered that an ancestor fought in the Civil War, previously they just learned the regiment to which that person was assigned. Now, they will be connected with Trust content integrating information about the places that individual fought.

“It’s one thing to know your ancestor went to war,” said Larry Swiader, the Trust’s chief digital officer, “But something very different to know the battlefields on which they fought — and be able to walk in their footsteps. We want more people to experience the powerful connection of

standing in the exact positions defended by their ancestors a century or more ago.”

To showcase the storytelling potential present in this effort, Ancestry has begun supplying a regular column in the Trust’s award-winning membership magazine, *Hallowed Ground*. Both organizations are also extending special offerings to existing members who join the other entity’s ranks.

#### **About the American Battlefield Trust**

The American Battlefield Trust is dedicated to preserving America’s hallowed battlegrounds and educating the public about what happened there and why it matters today. The nonprofit, nonpartisan organization has protected more than 52,000 acres associated with the American Revolution, War of 1812, and Civil War. Learn more at [www.battlefields.org](http://www.battlefields.org).

#### **About Ancestry®**

Ancestry®, the global leader in family history and consumer genomics, empowers journeys of personal discovery to enrich lives. With our unparalleled collection of 24 billion records and over 16 million people in our growing DNA network, customers can discover their family story and gain actionable insights about their health and wellness. For over 30 years, we’ve built trusted relationships with millions of people who have chosen us as the platform for discovering, preserving and sharing the most important information about themselves and their families.

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### **American Battlefield Trust Closes In on "Completion" of Kentucky's Perryville Battlefield**

Nonprofit declares victory on 128 acres, immediately begins campaign to protect 51 more

Mary Koik, ABT

April 3, 2020

**(Perryville, Ky.)** – The American Battlefield Trust has announced the permanent protection of 128 acres of hallowed ground at Perryville, filling a critical “hole in the donut” and making substantial strides in the preservation of the largest Civil War battle in Kentucky. This immensely significant property has remained largely unchanged since the time of the battle in October 1862. To date, the Trust has helped protect 1,150 acres at Perryville, making it one of the best-preserved battlefields in America.



*Buddy Secor*

“You have to walk a field in order to really understand it,” marveled actor and battlefield preservationist Steve Zahn in a video filmed while touring the Perryville Battlefield with the Trust, “This property is such an important piece of the puzzle.” With the addition of these acres, the group has now saved 90–95 percent of the battlefield

at Perryville, an almost unprecedented level of completeness in the history of battlefield preservation.

The preservation of these 128 critical acres was made possible by the unwavering support of Trust members in addition to generous matching grants from the American Battlefield Protection Program and a generous gift from the HTR Foundation. This land witnessed the first attack of the day on October 8, 1862, as Confederate Maj. Gen. Benjamin Cheatham's three brigades began their advance toward the Union position, which extended to the prominent hill known as "Open Knob." Over the course of five hours, characterized by back-and-forth and increasingly bloody attacks and counterattacks, the Confederates were running out of ammunition, while the Union continued to exact a high toll that led to their ultimate victory.

But, as Trust President Jim Lighthizer noted, "Even with this thrilling preservation success, there is still important work to be done before the battlefield at Perryville can be considered fully protected. I am immensely proud of all that the Trust and its partners have accomplished, and know that yet more success lies ahead."



*Don Sniadowski*

Almost immediately upon taking ownership of the above property, the Trust began actively raising funds to purchase a 51-acre parcel elsewhere on the battlefield, itself largely surrounded by already protected land. The combined purchase price for this land and an important six-acre property at Stones River, Tenn., is \$1.165 million. But thanks to a combination of federal and state matching grants, the Trust anticipates needing to raise only \$277,500 in private donations — a \$5.82-to-\$1 match! More information about this opportunity is available at [www.battlefields.org/WesternGiants20](http://www.battlefields.org/WesternGiants20).

The American Battlefield Trust is dedicated to preserving America's hallowed battlegrounds and educating the public about what happened there and why it matters today. The nonprofit, nonpartisan organization has protected more than 52,000 acres associated with the Revolutionary War, War of 1812 and Civil War. Learn more at [www.battlefields.org](http://www.battlefields.org).

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**The Complex Legacy of  
Appomattox**



*Library of Congress*

Hugh Howard. June 2015 History.net

**The surrender at Appomattox Court House has been remembered—and misremembered—from the day the Army of Northern Virginia laid down its arms.**

**On April 16, 1950**, historian Douglas Southall Freeman addressed 20,000 spectators in Appomattox, Va. His audience crowded the little village where, fourscore and five years earlier, two generals had met to end the war. As a warm breeze fluttered the flags near the speaker’s podium—including many “Stars and Bars” battle flags—Freeman recounted the Army of Northern Virginia’s final days.

The nine-month siege of Petersburg had ended in early April 1865. During General Robert E. Lee’s last week in uniform, Freeman pointed out, the Virginian had pursued a strategy “to form a junction with the army of General Joseph E. Johnston in North Carolina.” Wherever Lee turned, however, his scouts brought him word: “there’s a blue line ahead of us.”

The author of a Pulitzer Prize-winning two-volume biography of the South’s greatest commander, Freeman was regarded as the preeminent authority on Lee in 1950. His

account of the Confederacy’s last days was also buttressed by the passion of a partisan: His father, Walker Burford Freeman, had stood with Lee at Appomattox at age 22, and his memoirs included his own account of the waning hours of Lee’s army. Walker recalled that on April 8—hungry, exhausted and without a tent to shelter in—he had climbed a hill close to Appomattox Court House. The sight of countless Federal campfires, seen from atop that hill, made him realize “maybe even General Lee couldn’t get out of that trap.”

Douglas Freeman delivered his speech near the Wilmer McLean House, where Lee had surrendered to General Ulysses S. Grant. The centerpiece of the Appomattox Court House National Historical Park, the McLean House looked new in 1950—and indeed the paint was barely dry on a meticulous reconstruction engineered by the National Park Service. Congress had appropriated the funds for the site to commemorate the reuniting of the country, and Freeman duly addressed the gathering as a “reunion of brothers.” The event marked the official opening of the McLean House to the public.

In the audience that day were two individuals with a special interest in Freeman’s remarks: retired Brig. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant III, a veteran of both world wars; and 25-year-old Robert E. Lee IV, who would wield the scissors in the ceremony’s closing moments, cutting a red-white-and-blue ribbon.

The National Park Service continued its work in Appomattox after 1950, restoring many other buildings to their wartime appearance. Still, the surrounding landscape looked much different than it had in the 1860s. Instead of cultivated fields, much of the area was now forested, for example, making it hard for visitors to imagine

exactly where the soldiers had been positioned during the war's final hours.

Recent scholarship on Appomattox—the place as well as the events that unfolded there—suggests just how problematic memory can be. For example, the significance of Appomattox, as seen in Douglas Southall Freeman's eyes, was colored by emotional “truths,” and also by regional subjectivity and selectivity. Looking back today at the facts and the ways in which events would be interpreted long after the war ended makes it clear that the past is hardly a fixed destination.

## 1865

A “sick headache” kept Grant awake the night of April 7–8. The pain hung over him like a miasma despite all the remedies he tried, including applying mustard plasters to his neck and immersing his feet in hot water.

It didn't help Grant's migraine any knowing that Robert E. Lee had so far refused to accept the inevitable. The Union commander had dispatched a short note to Lee late in the afternoon of the 7th: “The results of the last week must convince you of the hopelessness of further resistance. I...regard as my duty to shift from myself the responsibility of any further effusion of blood by asking of you the surrender of...the army of Northern Virginia.” While Lee rejected Grant's assessment that the Confederate army's situation was hopeless, he didn't rule out negotiation. The Southern commander wrote back, “I reciprocate your desire to avoid the useless effusion of blood, & therefore before considering your proposition, ask the terms you will offer on condition of its surrender.”

On Saturday morning Grant wrote again, stating his sole condition: “The men and officers [of the Army of Northern Virginia]

surrendered shall be disqualified from taking up arms again against the Government of the United States.” Lee's soldiers would not be imprisoned; once paroled, they could go home to restart their lives.

Lee responded with another deflection. Though he affirmed his willingness to continue the conversation about “the restoration of peace,” he refused to give up, writing, “I do not think the emergency has arisen to call for the surrender of this Army.”

Lt. Col. Horace Porter, Grant's aide-de-camp, recorded his commander's reaction to that message: “The general shook his head, expressive of his disappointment, and remarked, ‘It looks as if Lee still means to fight; I will reply in the morning.’” Still suffering from his migraine, the exhausted Grant—in full uniform save for his jacket and boots—lay down on a sofa in the farmhouse where he was headquartered. But he could not sleep.

## ‘Not Yet’

For Lee, these were the worst days of his military career. After his retreat from Petersburg and Richmond's fall, he heard that a worshipful mob of freedmen had greeted President Abraham Lincoln as he toured the former Southern capital. Then on April 6, Lee lost 8,000 men at Sailor's Creek, most of them taken prisoner. Among them was his eldest son, Maj. Gen. George Washington Custis Lee. As he watched the throng of Confederates retreating at sunset that evening, their commander was overheard wondering aloud, “My God, has the army dissolved?” His force now consisted of just two corps, and as it marched southward the once proud Army of Northern Virginia grew ever smaller. At

every country crossing demoralized soldiers turned toward home.

The next morning, after a long night in the saddle, Lee was resting in the shade of a pine tree when Brig. Gen. William Pendleton rode up. Pendleton told Lee that he and several other officers had reached the hard conclusion that “in their opinion, the struggle had reached a point where further resistance was hopeless.”

Lee still resisted the notion even with members of his inner circle. When he had read Grant’s first note recommending surrender, he passed it wordlessly to the man he called his “Old War Horse,” Lt. Gen. James Longstreet. Handing it back, Longstreet spoke for both of them: “Not yet.” They both still cherished a flickering hope that they could consolidate with the Army of Tennessee and other forces under General Johnston.

Capitulation was alien to Lee’s character. The Confederate army lurching toward Appomattox numbered perhaps 30,000 effectives, little different from the number he had led after the Battle of Antietam three years earlier. The general clung to the belief that what remained of his army might somehow break through the Union armies closing in on him.

### **Palm Sunday**

Lee’s message of April 9 banished Grant’s headache. As he remembered years later, “The instant I saw the contents of the note I was cured.”

Through Saturday night into Sunday morning the Federal infantry had outmarched Lee’s weary soldiers, and Maj. Gen. Philip Sheridan’s forces captured Confederate supply trains at nearby

Appomattox Station. Fighting early on the morning of the 9th went badly for the Southerners. At that point Lee, like Walker Freeman, came to the realization that no good escape route remained. He initiated an exchange of messages, carried by couriers under flags of truce. Lee’s words were: “I now request an interview in accordance with the offer contained in your letter of yesterday.” Once a cease-fire was agreed to, both commanders rode toward the tiny village of Appomattox Court House.

Lee arrived first, riding his prized horse Traveller and accompanied by Colonel Charles Marshall and an orderly. Marshall inquired of resident Wilmer McLean—who in one of history’s oddest coincidences had also inhabited a plantation on Virginia’s Bull Run battlefield, site of the war’s first major clash in July 1861—whether he knew of a suitable meeting place. McLean told him his own parlor might make a good venue.

General Lee walked into McLean’s parlor and sat down, placing his hat and gauntlets on a marble-topped table in front of him. Then he waited. After 39 years—at West Point, in the U.S. Army and, for the last four, in service to the CSA—his military career was approaching its end. Half an hour later, the man who was responsible walked through the door and shook hands with him.

Both Grant and Lee wore full beards, but there the resemblance ended. Lee, known for his courtly demeanor, had donned a fresh dress uniform with a gold silk sash and ceremonial sword. Grant was dressed for the field, wearing a mud-splattered soldier’s blouse of blue flannel. His trouser legs were stuffed into ordinary boots, and he wore neither spurs nor sword.

“I met you once before, General Lee,” Grant began, “while we were serving in Mexico.” Lee—who admitted meeting Grant but apparently hadn’t recognized him—was 16 years older than his opposite number. During the Mexican War, Grant had been an infantry lieutenant, while Captain Lee was a fast-rising aide on General Winfield Scott’s staff. They spoke briefly of other matters before Lee asked that Grant commit to paper the proposed surrender terms. In fewer than 200 words, the Union general elaborated only slightly on his previous proposal. The Southern soldiers would stack their rifles and artillery, then sign parole agreements promising not to take up arms against the U.S. government. Officers would be allowed to keep their private horses, side arms and baggage.

Lee then asked whether the troops might also be permitted to retain their horses. Recognizing this would be essential during the spring plowing, Grant agreed to that condition as well. “This will have the best possible effect upon the men,” Lee said, adding, “It will be very gratifying and will do much toward conciliating our people.” In an hour and a half, they had reached an understanding.

Grant reportedly treated his opponent with dignity throughout the proceedings. His terms served to advance the cause of reconciliation, displaying generosity in victory, as Lincoln had instructed him to do at a recent conference at City Point, Va. The terms also honored the president’s own words, spoken during his Second Inaugural Address barely a month before: “With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive...to bind up the nation’s wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan, to do all which may achieve and

cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations.”

Though some Confederates were still fighting—Joe Johnston in North Carolina, Richard Taylor in Alabama and Edmund Kirby Smith in Texas—the remainder of the Southerners would soon follow Lee’s lead. For practical purposes, the war ended that day at Appomattox.

Simultaneously, however, the remembering—and the misremembering—commenced.

### **Now You See It, Now You Don’t**

By the time newspaper reporters got to Appomattox, within days of the surrender, they found the “surrender room” empty of not just people but furnishings. John Dennett, a reporter for *The Nation*, noted of his own visit to the McLean House that “tables, chairs, vases, fans, pens, books, everything small and great that could be removed from the room [had been] eagerly bought, or appropriated without purchase, by enthusiastic visitors.”

General Sheridan had paid \$20 in gold for the table where Grant wrote the terms of surrender. Sheridan then gave it to Brev. Maj. Gen. George Armstrong Custer as a compliment to Mrs. Custer, and bystanders recalled seeing the yellow-haired officer riding out of town with it slung over his shoulder. Maj. Gen. Edward O.C. Ord is said to have paid \$40 for the parlor table at which Lee sat. Grant’s and Lee’s chairs went to different buyers, as did a stoneware inkstand and a pair of candlesticks.

No one photographed the famous surrender parlor at the time, but numerous artist’s impressions of the surrender meeting soon rolled off the presses—including one

illustration that was promoted by Wilmer McLean. Speculations in sugar had kept McLean prosperous during the conflict, but he found himself facing hard times after the war. Hoping that selling a surrender picture could mend his fortunes, he wrote to Lee asking "...If you will grant me, two, or three sittings, for one of the first Artists of N.Y. to get a life like likeness of yourself." Even after Lee declined, McLean persisted in his plan, borrowing money to commission and print an illustration. As it turned out, not only did "Room in the McLean House at Appomattox C.H." fail to provide the bonanza that McLean had envisioned, but he failed to recoup his investment.

McLean's print—reproduced by engravers Major & Knapp of New York—more closely resembled the event than most others. While he managed to get the architectural particulars of his own house correct, McLean confused the cast of characters. Lee and Grant are pictured with Lee's aides and Union Generals Sheridan, Ord, Meade and Custer—though Meade and Custer were some distance away at the time. And the wrong clerk is shown writing out the terms of surrender.

A few illustrators were truer to the facts. Alfred Waud, whose wartime illustrations appeared regularly in *Harper's Weekly*, had been standing outside the McLean House on that Palm Sunday, and watched Lee emerge and gesture to his orderly to bridle his horse. Waud sketched the scene as Lee left, trailed by Colonel Marshall and watched by a crowd of faceless Union soldiers. A polished version of Waud's drawing would be widely reproduced.

Another vignette comes down to us through first-person accounts. Some observers claimed that as Lee was leaving, Grant—standing on the porch—lifted his hat in a

salute. And that Lee did the same before riding away.

Did that actually happen? It's hard to say. The anecdote was often repeated, and over time came to symbolize a reconciliation between North and South in a larger sense. But some writers altered the story, claiming that Lee had surrendered to Grant under an apple tree or that during their meeting he had tendered his sword to Grant, who then refused it. Neither of those tales is true.

The view of Appomattox as showcasing Yankee magnanimity and Confederate honor no doubt served the "Lost Cause" reading of the conflict. The myth of the Lost Cause began taking shape soon after the war ended, via the book *The Lost Cause: A New Southern History of the War of the Confederates*, by Edward Pollard, editor of the *Richmond Examiner*. Pollard rushed his book to press in 1865 and 1866. Essential throughout his narrative was Pollard's view of Grant as a man of "course [*sic*], heavy obstinacy...[with] no spark of military genius." He saw Lee as a "genius," describing his battlefield strategies as "masterly."

In subsequent generations, Lost Cause historians continued to shape their version of the war, explaining Lee's defeat as a consequence of the North's vastly superior resources of men and materiel. In one memoir published in 1878, Lee's adjutant Colonel Walter Taylor asserted that the Southern commander was outnumbered 6-to-1. Yet a close examination of manpower during the Appomattox Campaign points to the fact that, although Lee was as usual outnumbered, the disparity wasn't as significant as some early writers had claimed. Recent calculations by historian Chris Calkins suggest that when the Appomattox Campaign began in late March



Confederate strength amounted to some 58,000 men, while the Union count was roughly 76,000.

The Lost Cause view also held that Lee was nearly infallible, and his troops were unfailingly devoted. By 1865, however, Lee had doubts of both his own leadership and his men's selflessness. On April 20, 1865, he reported to Jefferson Davis that in the preceding months "the troops were...not marked by the boldness and decision which formerly characterized them. Except in particular instances, they were feeble; and want of confidence seemed to possess officers and men." That Lee's men fought less boldly than they once had, he allowed, was only part of the problem. His army, he told Davis, had "begun to disintegrate, and straggling in the ranks increased up to the surrender."

Whatever the shifting palette of interpretation and recollection over time, the meeting of Grant and Lee at Appomattox clearly established a common expectation, hope for the future and—above all—for reunification. Lee, who could have opted to continue the conflict as a guerrilla war, as one of his officers had suggested, rejected that idea, saying that his men "would become mere bands of marauders" and the result would be "a state of affairs it would take the country years to recover from." Grant put it more simply on the evening of April 9, telling his men, "The war is over; the rebels are our countrymen again."

In recent years, a reexamination of documents and data pertaining to the war's end has discredited some aspects of the Lost Cause view that Douglas Southall Freeman accepted. But if he were alive today, Freeman might well have approved of the more complex reading of the Confederacy's end that the current generation of historians

puts forward. Though he was a Virginian just like his father, he was also a journalist, trained to report on facts. In fact, he edited the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* for 34 years. We can only wonder what he would say about documents exhumed by the likes of Virginia-born historian Charles Dew, a descendant of Confederate soldiers and the proud recipient, on his 14th birthday, of Freeman's *Lee and His Lieutenants*. To his surprise, Dew unearthed secession documents giving the lie to Lost Cause arguments that "paint the Civil War as a mighty struggle over differing concepts of constitutional liberty." Dew closed his 2002 book *Apostles of Disunion* with the assertion that a close reading of these documents "[lays] to rest, once and for all, any notion that slavery had nothing to do with the coming of the Civil War. To put it quite simply, slavery and race were absolutely critical elements in the coming of the war."

In 1950 Freeman told his audience that the Civil War was a "brother's war"—which amounted to an implicit denial of slavery as its principal cause. In light of what we now know, his viewpoint seems less than complete.

But we live in times far removed from Reconstruction and Freeman's era of a segregated South. In the wake of the Civil War, notions of a virtuous cause and a perfectible hero were perhaps reassuring. Today we are learning to embrace complexities more willingly.

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**Libbie Custer's Literary Love  
Affair With Her Late Husband**



*Dressed in mourning clothes and veil, Elizabeth Custer, better known as "Libbie," poses for an 1886 image. She dressed in mourning attire to honor her husband until her death in 1933. (Courtesy of the National Parks Service)*

Cecily N. Zander History.net

**For nearly six decades after Little Big Horn, George Custer's widow burnished the general's reputation and wrote movingly of reconciliation with former foes**

**Elizabeth Bacon Custer outlived her husband, Lt. Col. George Armstrong Custer, by 57 years.** In the nearly six decades between the annihilation of her husband and five companies of the 7th Cavalry on the Little Big Horn River in Montana and her own death, Libbie wrote three memoirs. The most famous of these, *Boots and Saddles*, describes the couple's experiences in Dakota Territory and the years leading up to the 1876 summer campaign against the Sioux that ended in arguably the most famous blunder in American military history. Two other memoirs (*Tenting on the Plains* and *Following the Guidon*, respectively) treat the immediate postwar period in Texas, where Custer performed Reconstruction duty, and the events of the 1868 Washita Campaign, in

which Custer served under Maj. Gen. Philip H. Sheridan. They are almost unmatched in their detail about many elements of the U.S. Army's experience in the aftermath of the Civil War, and, more broadly, about the meaning of that war for the future of the American West. For the most part, historians have dismissed the books as filled with nothing but saintly depictions of an army officer who fell from great heights after the Civil War and died trying to reclaim his military fame. Critics of George Custer's vanity and impetuosity especially deride the work of his wife, who smoothed the edges off a prickly subject and countered depictions of the Civil War's "Boy General" as an officer who disobeyed orders and endangered his command. In consequence of Libbie's decades-long defense of her husband, she often has been categorized as one of the most prominent "professional widows" of the Civil War era.



*LaSalle Corbell Pickett*



*Mary Anna Jackson*



*Jessie Benton Fremont*

The label of professional widow followed several well-known women whose husbands participated in the Civil War. Without a doubt, LaSalle “Sallie” Corbell Pickett became the most prominent and problematical professional widow of the Civil War generation. Civil War scholars spent years unravelling the myth Sallie

created about her husband, Confederate Maj. Gen. George E. Pickett, and his ill-fated charge on the third day of the Battle of Gettysburg. Historian Gary W. Gallagher’s investigation into Sallie’s publishing record revealed that large sections of the widow’s work were plagiarized. In other cases, Gallagher noted, Sallie completely fabricated correspondence that later became the basis for popular historical fiction—in the form of author Michael Sharra’s *The Killer Angels*—as well as informing filmmaker Ken Burns’ documentary series on the Civil War.

Sallie’s efforts to burnish her husband’s reputation and shift blame for the failure of Pickett’s Charge proved useful to advocates of the Confederacy’s “Lost Cause” mythologization of the war—supporting a narrative that Pickett’s Charge and the fight at Gettysburg had been the high-water mark of the Confederate struggle for independence.

In a study dedicated to prominent husband and wife duos from the Civil War era, historians Carol K. Bleser and Lesley J. Gordon assert that Libbie Custer conformed to the stereotype of a professional widow, gaining “a measure of her own independence by promoting a man and creating a myth.” The authors include Libbie alongside Sallie Pickett, Mary Anna Jackson (widow of Confederate Lt. Gen. Thomas J. “Stonewall” Jackson), and Jesse Benton Frémont (widow of Union general and 1856 presidential candidate John C. Frémont). In many ways, Libbie is the odd woman out among the other widows named by Bleser and Gordon.

Unlike Sallie Pickett, Libbie did not fabricate evidence about her husband and his military career. Neither did Libbie, unlike Jesse Frémont, write under her husband’s

name, and Libbie's memoirs, in contrast to Mary Anna Jackson's, were not designed to provide an embellished biographical sketch of her husband. Libbie hoped her writing would provide a depiction of the couple's life and experiences on the American frontier. George is a central figure in the three books, to be sure, but he is by no means their sole subject.

Yet Shirley A. Leckie, the most prominent biographer to tackle Libbie Custer, helped perpetuate the idea that George Custer's widow wrote for the sole purpose of mythologizing her husband. Leckie contends that Libbie wanted her husband to serve as a model for young men, who could read her memoirs and be inspired to emulate the moral rectitude and Christian bearing she attributed to her husband. It is possible to read the memoirs of Libbie Custer and reach the conclusions drawn by Leckie and other Custer critics. Looking beyond the work Libbie did to weave the Custer myth, however, reveals the voice of a perceptive observer and active participant in the events of the Civil War, Reconstruction, and Western expansion. Libbie Custer offers readers rare insight into the Civil War and its aftermath—providing glimpses of reunions between former foes, reflections on the meaning of the war, and a belief in the cause of reconciliation—that make her collected works well worth revisiting.

**Born to a prominent** local judge in Monroe, Mich., on April 8, 1842, young Elizabeth Clift Bacon experienced a privileged childhood, though not one without tragedy. Her mother, Eleanor Sophia Page, died before Libbie's 13th birthday. Libbie spent the next several years enrolled at the local seminary school, Boyd's, where she graduated in 1862 at the top of her class. One year earlier, her husband had graduated at the bottom of his West Point class. Libbie

and George met shortly after her graduation, but until Custer earned promotion to brigadier general of volunteers and distinguished himself in the Gettysburg Campaign, Libbie's father disapproved of the match between his daughter and the young professional officer. Daniel Bacon worried that Libbie would not adjust well to Army life and that marriage to an officer would be a step down in social standing for his daughter.



*Libbie Custer was at ease in both the field and the halls of power in Washington, D.C. Sketch artist James E. Taylor depicted her riding sidesaddle with the general near Winchester, Va., and presenting battle flags captured by George Custer's men to Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton.*



Whether or not Libbie found life in the Army difficult, her commitment to being by her husband's side never wavered after they exchanged vows on February 6, 1864. That summer and fall, while her husband participated in General Philip Sheridan's campaign in Virginia's Shenandoah Valley, Libbie stayed in Washington observing and absorbing the culture of the national capital. She met many of the war's most famous figures, including Abraham Lincoln, who recognized Libbie as the wife "of the man who goes into the cavalry charges with a whoop and a yell."

Lincoln told Libbie marriage might make Custer more cautious. Libbie assured the president that would not be the case. Given the boost Sheridan's success in the Shenandoah Valley provided to Lincoln's reelection campaign in 1864, the president doubtless felt a fondness for "Little Phil" and the cadre of hand-picked young cavalry officers who served alongside him. Sheridan's own fondness for Custer later helped George out of several scrapes with Army higher-ups, who benched the former boy general in 1867 after he led 75 men some 225 miles across Kansas, from Fort Wallace to Fort Harker, without orders—for the purpose of visiting Libbie.

Custer's Civil War exploits, especially those that occurred after his marriage to Libbie, elevated him to the status of a national hero. He appeared on the cover of *Harper's Weekly* in March 1864. Increasingly, Libbie shared her husband's spotlight, delighting in being recognized around Washington as General Custer's wife. When Civil War sketch artist James E. Taylor accompanied Sheridan's 1864 Shenandoah Valley expedition, he sketched Libbie on horseback alongside her husband and as a solo rider during one of her visits to Custer's headquarters near Winchester, Va. Taylor

also sketched Libbie with Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton at a Washington reception, where Stanton received Confederate flags captured by Custer's command in the Valley.



*The Custers at their Virginia 1865 winter quarters. Brother Tom Custer is on the general's right, while their father sits and reads at upper right. (Granger NYC)*

**Libbie emerged from the war** with a treasured memento that spoke to her husband's importance and her own association with his activities. Sheridan gave her the table from Wilbur McLean's parlor at Appomattox Court House upon which Lt. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant drafted the terms of the Army of Northern Virginia's surrender. The accompanying note to Libbie read: "There is scarcely an individual in our service who has contributed more to bring about this desirable result than your very gallant husband."

In 1912, Libbie loaned the table, which had spent much of its life in a fireproof warehouse in New York City, to the Museum of American History in Washington. Upon her death in 1936, the table officially joined the collections of the Smithsonian, in accordance with Libbie's will. Libbie often defended her right to own the table in the press, denying that her

husband had stolen the piece from the McLean House. In the December 5, 1885, issue of *Harper's Weekly*, she supplied her reminiscences of acquiring the table—and a copy of a letter from Sheridan that proved “an unassuming little stand, of the cheapest stained pine” indeed belonged to her. The letter also served to remind readers of the high esteem Sheridan held for her husband at the close of the Civil War.



*The Custers dine al fresco in 1869 outside their field headquarters at Fort Hays in Kansas. (Courtesy of the National Parks Service)*

Libbie's three volumes of memoirs focus most closely on details about living in army camps and at military forts on the Great Plains, which she believed Americans knew little about. Though she dedicated no book to Civil War recollections, the conflict is not absent from the three memoirs. Why did Libbie largely ignore the most formative national event her generation experienced? Perhaps she thought she had little original to say on the subject, as compared with her insights about life with the professional army after the war. She also never undertook a defense of her husband's Civil War career comparable with that she offered regarding him as an Indian fighter. More than likely,

she reckoned his Civil War reputation did not need polishing.

**Despite the overall lack of Civil War content**, Mark Twain and his publishing partners at Webster's deemed Libbie's work worthy of inclusion in their "Shoulder Strap" memoir series. The series included the two-volume memoirs of Generals Grant, William T. Sherman, and Sheridan. Both Ellen McClellan and Almira Russell Hancock shepherded recollections begun by their husbands, Union Maj. Gens. George B. McClellan and Winfield Scott Hancock, to publication in the series. Samuel Wylie Crawford also contributed a volume on the coming of the war. Libbie's *Tenting on the Plains* stood as the only volume written by a woman and from the perspective of an Army wife, rather than from a general in command. Moreover, it alone deals exclusively with events after the war. Libbie emphasized her perspective on the events she experienced, which further weakens the case that she wrote as a professional widow attempting to absolve her husband for his perceived failures.

Libbie's memoirs offer deep insight into how she made sense of the consequences of the conflict and the subsequent reunion of the country. She manifested a strong impulse toward sectional reconciliation throughout her work. Libbie's recollections (all written within 25 years of the war's conclusion) emphasized two primary themes in relation to how the Civil War should be remembered. First and foremost, the war had been waged for the preservation of the Union—Libbie and George (an ardent Democrat who joined Andrew Johnson on the campaign trail during his "Swing Around the Circle" campaign) gave little thought to emancipation as a further outcome of the conflict. Second, in the immediate aftermath of the conflict,

reconciliation with former Confederates should be the paramount goal of Americans. Libbie did not present these themes didactically; rather, she used stories to illustrate her strong feelings about national reunion and forgiving former Confederates.

Early in the text of *Boots and Saddles*, Libbie recalled the journey made by the 7th Cavalry from Elizabethtown, Ky., to Fort Abraham Lincoln, Dakota Territory, in 1873. While delighted at the prospect of escaping Reconstruction duty, Libbie arrived at present-day Bismarck, N.D., to find that she would not be allowed to travel with her husband while he accompanied a surveying expedition to determine a route for the Northern Pacific Railroad. She recorded her return to her family home, and the slow days she spent waiting for missives from her husband. Despite her disappointment in being left behind, Libbie gladly recounted her husband's reunion with his old West Point comrade Thomas L. Rosser, a former major general in the Confederate Army who had taken a position as the chief engineer of the Northern Pacific.

Libbie told her readers of Custer and Rosser's long association, from their West Point days to their frequent encounters commanding troops in opposing armies on the battlefields of the Shenandoah Valley.

During the war, Libbie suggested, neither man felt any true animosity toward the other, even though Custer had captured all Rosser's supply wagons or routed his troops in battle. Libbie explained that even when one soldier got the better of the other, the letters that followed addressed a "dear friend." That the two former generals should fall back into such an easy friendship, reclining on a buffalo robe and spending "hours talking over the campaigns in Virginia" provided evidence of an easy

reconciliation. In present day Bismarck, Rosser Avenue remains a main thoroughfare. Libbie may have appreciated the fact that the street provides the northern boundary for Bismarck's first municipal park, which the city named in the memory of her husband in 1909. The cityscape thus embeds their reconciliation story into the modern memorial landscape.

**A number of famous Civil War personalities** appeared in Libbie's memoirs to make the case for reconciliation, especially in *Tenting on the Plains*, which presented the immediate aftermath of the Civil War to readers. Among the figures that Libbie drew on were William T. Sherman and former Confederate Lt. Gen. John Bell Hood. Libbie remembered meeting Hood while sharing a steamboat bound for New Orleans as she and her husband prepared to travel to Austin, Texas, and begin their Reconstruction service.

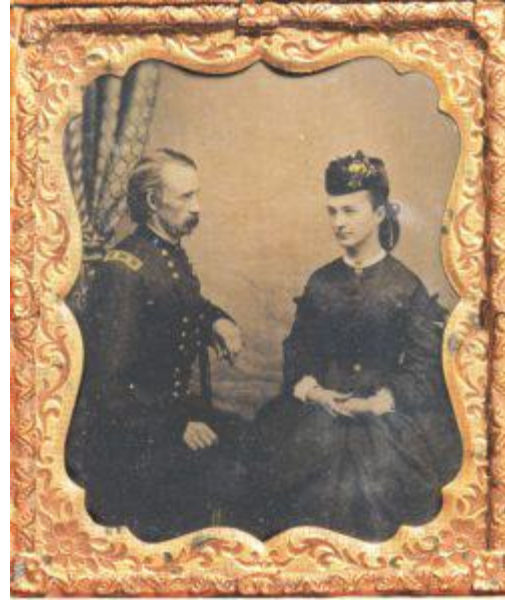
Libbie related a story of Hood's quest to find the best possible prosthetic leg after losing one of his at the Battle of Chickamauga. He had tried models from England, France, Germany, the South and the North. She happily noted that Hood acknowledged, despite his previous sectional loyalty, that "the Yankee leg was best of all." When the steamer arrived at Hood's destination and he disembarked, "General Custer carefully helped the maimed hero down the cabin stairs and over the gangway."

Libbie believed that many of the Army's highest-ranking officers shared her husband's desire for an easy peace. "In retrospect," she wrote, "I like to think of the tact and tolerance of General Sherman, in those days of furious feeling on both sides, and the quiet manner in which he heard the Southern people decry the Yankees."

Commending the general most famous for setting large swaths of the Confederacy ablaze, Libbie related that “he knew of their impoverished and desolated homes, and realized...what sacrifices they had made; more than all, his sympathetic soul saw into the darkened lives of mothers, wives and sisters who had given, with their idea of patriotism, their loved ones to their country.” He remembered a maxim that we all are apt to forget, ‘Put yourself in his place,’” she approvingly said of Sherman.

Beyond the theme of reconciliation, Libbie believed her readers should appreciate the sacrifices of the volunteer soldiers who fought the Civil War. The section of *Tenting on the Plains* dealing with the need to honor the service of individual soldiers is strikingly modern. She described the wounds received by many of the men who had campaigned with her husband as Custer’s Wolverines in the cavalry division of the Army of the Potomac. She described a soldier who “carried always, does now, a shattered arm, torn by a bullet while he was riding beside General Custer in Virginia.”

The wound, she explained “did not keep him from giving his splendid energy, his best and truest patriotism, to his country down in Texas even after the war, for he rode on long, exhausting campaigns after the Indians, his wound bleeding, his life sapped, his vitality slipping away with the pain that never left him day or night.” Libbie’s tribute to soldierly resilience could not ease the pain of the wounded men, but it recognized that not all Civil War service ended with an easy return to the pursuits of civilian life.



*Libbie and George pose together not long after his promotion to major general of volunteers on April 15, 1865. As a brooch, she wears a version of the “Custer Medal” designed by her husband and awarded to his troopers. (Heritage Auctions/Dallas)*

In their home at Fort Abraham Lincoln, Dakota Territory, George and Libbie surrounded themselves with mementos of the Civil War. He hung portraits of McClellan and Sheridan in his library, and she described how much the couple treasured two examples of sculptor John Rogers’ groupings—mass-produced plaster statuettes of various Civil War scenes—with which they crisscrossed the Great Plains. Life traveling in the back of army wagons did not particularly suit the statuary, but Libbie explained to readers that her husband’s first chore upon unpacking his library was mending the figures depicted in “Wounded to the Rear” and “Letter Day.” Looking upon the figures with guests (many of whom were Civil War veterans) sparked lively conversations about the war and how participants remembered their service.



Elizabeth Custer revealed her memory of Civil War experiences in small glimpses, sprinkled among over 1,000 pages of recollections about life in the postbellum Army. Encouraging readers to practice sympathy toward defeated Confederates, she highlighted the degree to which her husband and other army officers committed themselves to reconciliation, while extending an army widow's sympathy to maimed veterans. Her writings reveal that she thought a great deal about the war and its memory, independently of her husband's role in saving the Union. To reduce Elizabeth Bacon Custer to just another professional widow denies modern readers a chance to explore the rich recollections she left of the most transformative period in the history of the United States.

### Friendly Enemies

In *Boots and Saddles*, Libbie Custer presented the wartime exchanges between her husband and Confederate cavalry commander Thomas Rosser as examples of a friendship the Civil War had briefly interrupted. In this passage from the book describing Lt. Col. Custer's postwar campaign in the Dakotas, she put a humorous tone to events that occurred in the 1864 Shenandoah Valley Campaign:



“[Custer] wrote of his delight at having again his whole regiment with him, his interest in the country, his

hunting exploits, and the renewal of his friendship with General Rosser...Once General Custer took all of his friend's luggage, and found in it a new uniform coat of Confederate gray. He wrote a humorous letter that night thanking General Rosser for setting him up in so many new things, but audaciously asking if he 'would direct his tailor to make the coat-tails of his next uniform a little shorter' as there was a difference in the height of the two men. General Custer captured his herd of cattle at one time, but he was so hotly pursued by General Rosser that he had to dismount, cut a whip, and drive them himself until they were secured.”

*Cecily N. Zander is a Ph.D. candidate at Pennsylvania State University, where she is completing a dissertation on the army and empire in the American West. She will publish a larger essay about Libbie Custer in a forthcoming volume from LSU Press.*

*This story appeared in the April 2020 issue of Civil War Times.*

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### Blue & Gray Education Society



**BGES Members Exceed Pamplin Gun Carriage Fundraising Goal**

**April 27, 2020**

A few weeks ago I announced a \$3,000 challenge grant to fund a partnership project with the Friends of the Pamplin Historical Park to replace the wooden cannon carriage that went with the tube that we helped purchase over a decade ago. The functional artillery piece, a 12 pounder Confederate Napoleon, is used in living history displays and with the park's popular "Adventure Camp" to help campers understand the complexity and power of artillery with a 19th century army.

We were approached by Pamplin Park seeking funding last summer and after discussion with the BGES Board of Directors, we negotiated a partnership which would allow Pamplin Park to fund 60% of the replacement cost of an all weather aluminum carriage with BGES being the last money in. BGES got a big start with a new member challenge donation from Rodger Kruse from Wisconsin--that \$3,000 challenge formed the anchor of the challenge.

A BGES blast email a couple of weeks ago produced an immediate and generous response with donations rapidly pouring in and more than \$3,800 was contributed with more than \$3,000 raised in the first 24 hours after the posting--WOW! Once again BGES members rose to the challenge of a great project properly defined and targeted. Thank you and congratulations.

This project is going to be a twofer as BGES is going to take the wooden carriage and restore it, equip it with a new tube and donate it to another site to be announced later. The funds raised were a little in excess of the BGES share and as promised those excess funds will form the basis of the restoration effort and a subsequent fundraising effort to finish the second project.

One cool element of the project was the successful efforts of new BGES member, Tim Talbott, Director of Education at Pamplin Historical Park. Using his social media platform, Tim sponsored a Birthday Fundraiser to celebrate his birthday with the donations going to BGES. He raised \$350 which we immediately poured back into this project as part of the pot of funds--a true win for BGES, a win for Tim and a win for his own employer! Thanks all.

The replacement carriage is to be ordered this week with delivery and installation scheduled for late June. We will send pictures in due course.

Len Riedel, Executive Director

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BLUE AND GRAY DISPATCH

### **Ben Wade at Bull Run**

By Fergus M. Bordewich, April 24, 2020.  
Adapted from his new book, *Congress at War: How Republican Reformers Fought the Civil War, Defied Lincoln, Ended Slavery, and Remade America.*

[blueandgrayeducation.org](http://blueandgrayeducation.org)



*Ben Wade | Library of Congress*

After the fall of Fort Sumter, many of the North's political men dithered between resistance and conciliation toward the breakaway South. Sen. Ben Wade of Ohio's Western Reserve was not one of them. A tall, angular man with sharp bright eyes, bristling iron-gray hair, booming voice, bulldog stubbornness, and an unyielding hatred of slavery, the 60-year-old Wade declared to a roaring audience in Cleveland, "The time for argument has passed and the time for action has come. They wish to meet you hand to hand, and foot to foot. Old as I am, I'll go with a musket on my shoulder."

In the weeks that followed, the northern public and its political leadership gradually caught up to Wade. Demand for a decisive battle to crush the rebels steadily swelled. Reflecting later on the mood of the time, Rep. Albert Riddle, Wade's fellow Ohio Radical, wrote, "The average man then supposed war meant to march upon the enemy by the shortest route, assail, hang to him, and lick him in the shortest possible time." *The New York Tribune*, the most influential Republican newspaper in the country, hammered the administration daily

with a taunt beneath its masthead: "The Nation's War Cry: Forward to Richmond! Forward to Richmond!"



*Battle of Bull Run. Library of Congress*

The army faced another unforgiving source of pressure. Nearly all the troops under arms had been called up for just 90 days—the maximum allowable under the Militia Act of 1793—and their term of service was about to expire. The army's newly appointed field commander, Irvin McDowell, knew they weren't ready for battle. But he also knew that if he didn't use the men he had, he'd soon lose them. By mid-July, some regiments were already starting for home.

On July 16, the first regiments began marching out of their bivouacs on the Potomac toward the rebel encampment at Manassas Junction, 30 miles southwest of the capital. Five days later they collided with an army commanded by Pierre G.T. Beauregard, the Confederate hero of Fort Sumter, at a meandering stream called Bull Run. An army of civilian tourists, including many members of Congress, followed the army in carriages freighted with picnic baskets and bottles of wine, and in at least some cases armed with guns with which they hoped to take pot shots at the rebels.

Among them were Ben Wade and his friend Sen. Zachariah Chandler, a giant of a man who, like Wade, was partial to explosive profanity that could stop men in their tracks. They were accompanied in a second carriage by the Senate's Sergeant-at-Arms and several others, all of them armed and confident that the rebels would be captured to a man.

Wade's party drove past deserted farms and ripening cornfields, past the expectant eyes of enslaved people, and their sullen masters. Carriages by the hundreds pulled up on the hills overlooking the rolling countryside where the battle was underway. A well-dressed lady watching the fight through opera glasses was heard to say, "Oh, my! Is not that first-rate! I guess we will be in Richmond this time tomorrow." The first messengers dispatched back to Washington reported a great victory.



Zachariah Chandler | Library of Congress



P. G. T. Beauregard | National Archives

Then it all began to come apart. The Confederates overran the Federal batteries on Henry House hill. Civilian wagon drivers panicked. First in twos and threes, then by the score, then in the hundreds, demoralized Federal troops began drifting back up the Centerville Road. Soon they were no longer walking but running, throwing away their rifles, canteens, cartridge boxes, haversacks, bed rolls, hats, and coats. Artillerymen abandoned their cannon and caissons. Officers disappeared. Drivers lashed maddened horses. Fleeing men's faces gaped like gargoyles, blackened from the powder from the cartridges they'd bitten off in battle, their eyes bulging with fear. There was Gen. David Hunter in the back of a wagon, blood pouring from his head. And, there, Col. Ambrose Burnside, whose Rhode Islanders had seemed on the brink of victory a few hours before, now hatless, galloping past on a horse. And there, Sen. Henry Wilson heading away from the battle on a mule. The army that had marched off so proudly the night before was no longer an army but a mob, commandeering ambulances, carts, caissons, any kind of conveyance that rolled. With the explosion of every Confederate shell, the vast straining mass of men, animals, and wagons was seized as if by an electric convulsion.

Wade and his friends were swept along against their will in the rout. Shame at what he saw metamorphosed into a towering rage as the mob drove them on pell-mell over a road that was literally paved with discarded guns and gear. Just short of Fairfax Court House, 10 miles north of Bull Run, Wade convinced his friends to pull their carriages sideways across the road where it passed between a fenced-in farm and a dense wood. "Boys, we'll stop this damned runaway!" he shouted. He pushed his hat back on his head, levered a cartridge into the chamber of his new Maynard carbine, and cocked it. Chandler drew a heavy navy revolver. Their friends did likewise. They pointed their weapons at the boiling mass of men who jostled against their carriages. Wade boomed that if they attempted to run any farther he'd blow their brains out. Wade's stand lasted only about 20 minutes, but it was enough to stem the tide until the arrival of the still-intact Second New York Volunteers, which brought some semblance of order to the fleeing multitude. Wade's fame spread because of his sensational bravery.

"Whatever credit there was in stopping that rout is due wholly to senators Wade and Chandler," wrote the *National Intelligencer*, with some exaggeration.

But the statesmen had shown extraordinary courage at a time when many had not.

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## **Those Damned Black Hats! The Uniform of the Iron Brigade**

*By Laurence D. Schiller*

*"Loud cheers were frequently given when some particular regiment or brigade passed by. Especially when...the 1st Corps came along with the 'full moon' on its banners, and as the great Western or Iron Brigade passed, looking like giants in those tall black*

*hats...And giants they were, in action...I look back and see that famed body of troops marching up that long muddy hill unmindful of the pouring rain, but full of life and spirit, with steady step, filling the entire roadway, their big black hats and feathers conspicuous..."*

Captain Charles Stevens, Berdan's Sharpshooters, May 1863

On the morning of July 1, 1863, Major General Harry Heth directed his division to advance towards Gettysburg. He and his superior, Lt. General A.P. Hill had dismissed reports of Federal cavalry in that town assuming it could only be militia or, at most, a post of observation. To his dismay, he ran into Brigadier General John Buford's veteran cavalry division whose brilliant delaying tactics and superior firepower held his men up for more than two hours. Frustrated by his slow progress, Heth had deployed his two leading brigades, Brigadier General James J. Archer's and Brigadier General Joseph R. Davis's, south and north respectively of the Chambersburg Pike in order to sweep those pesky blue coats away. Archer's southern infantry had just splashed across Willoughby Run and were driving the cavalrymen when his men were suddenly and rudely confronted with the reality that a new foe had arrived on the ridge before them. His Tennessee and Alabama men viewed the onrushing men of the 2nd Wisconsin with the shout, "*Thar are them damned black hatted fellows again! Tain't no militia, it's the Army of the Potomac!*" And indeed, it was.



*The Iron Brigade (at Gettysburg) by Don Troiani*

The Federal brigade racing to confront Archer was the famed Iron Brigade, called the Black Hats due to their distinctive regular army M1858 dress hat, sometimes erroneously referred to as the 'Hardee'. Commanded at Gettysburg by Indiana native Solomon Meredith, they were the only all-Western brigade in the Army of the Potomac and suffered the highest percentage of soldiers killed in combat of any brigade in that army. They would, for all intents and purposes, be destroyed at Gettysburg along with much of the rest of the 1st Corps helping save the high ground south of town for General Meade's army. Composed originally of the 2nd, 6th, and 7th Wisconsin and 19th Indiana, losses in 1862 led to the addition of the 24th Michigan after Antietam.

These Western soldiers were distinguished by their uniform from most other union soldiers. Not only were they amongst the few who wore the distinctive M1858 hat with brass, hat cord and feather, they also wore the 9-button frock, and linen leggings. How did the Iron Brigade come to have this distinctive uniform? It is commonly assumed that when newly minted Brigadier General of Volunteers John Gibbon, an 1847 West Point graduate and career officer, took command on May 7th, 1862, that he wanted his brigade to look 'regular army' and consistent in their dress and so issued orders for the Regular Army regulation signature

hats, frocks, and leggings. But, of course, the reality is far more complicated.

The first of the regiments that became the Iron Brigade to be mustered into Federal service was the 2nd Wisconsin and I will use them to illustrate the permutations that led to the Black Hats distinctive uniform. While there were uniform regulations for the regular U.S. army, there were none for militia units and when the boys north and south rushed to the colors, there was not only no uniformity as to how they looked, there was not even agreement as to what color uniform would distinguish each side. Not only were there colorful Zouaves and Chasseurs in reds and blues, but the 1st Minnesota and the 4th Alabama both wore red flannel shirts. Worse, a number of northern militia units wore gray uniforms, similar to the cadets at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point while some in the south wore blue, like the Regular army dress uniform. This confusion of attire at the Battle of 1st Bull Run (1st Manassas), led to friendly fire incidences which only added to the shock and chaos of combat for the green troops on both sides.

The 2nd Wisconsin was formed from companies raised all over the state after Ft. Sumter was fired upon, who were then sent to Camp Randall in Madison to train. The State of Wisconsin issued them gray wool, single breasted frock coats and gray trousers with a narrow black stripe on the outer seam of the same cut and pattern that the 1st Wisconsin had adopted in April of 1861. They participated at Bull Run in those uniforms and the survivors were in camp around Washington in September when Wisconsin Governor Randall visited and promised that the government would shortly replace those raggedy gray uniforms, which had given rise to the sobriquet 'Raggedy a - - Second', with the proper blue which all the rest of the Badger State units, save the first

two, had been issued from the start. They gladly received their new uniforms in the first week of October and a correspondent wrote, *“The boys no longer look like beggars, with ventilated suits of clothing, but present a very neat, tidy and soldier-like appearance. Their new uniform consists of a handsome blue frock coat, pants of the same, a high felt hat, blue cord and black plume.”*

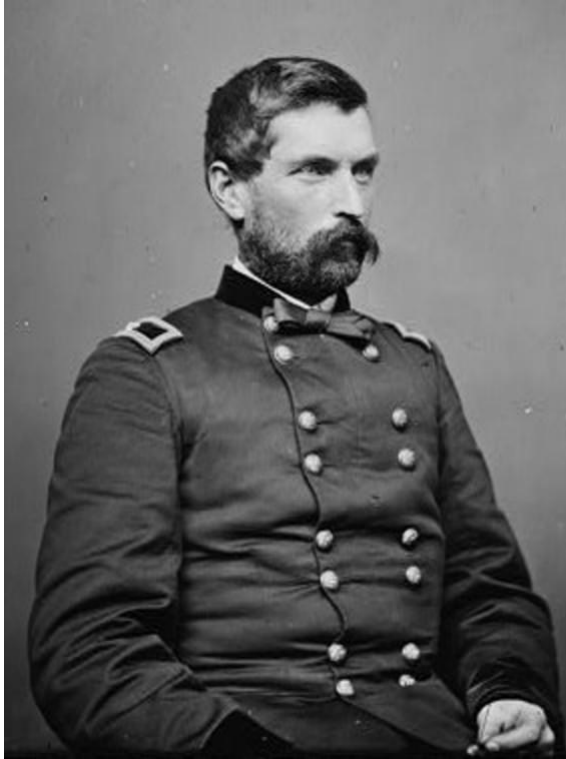
The second had been outfitted with the regulation army uniform as per the revised Army Regulations of 1861 which specified the 9-button frock and matching dark blue pants. Images of the time show that their hats were the M1858 and they were equipped with a brass eagle pin, which pinned the brim of the hat up on the left, plus a hunting horn (bugle), regimental numerals, and company letters. The left side was pinned up because the position of ‘shoulder arms’ in Scott’s Infantry Tactics was on the left shoulder, not the right where the 1855 Rifle and Light Infantry Tactics, commonly called ‘Hardee’s’ for William Joseph Hardee who revised Scott’s, placed it. Pinning up the left brim kept the hat from being knocked off the soldier’s head during the manual of arms. Of course, soldiers being soldiers, there are many pictures of 2nd Wisconsin boys either pinning up the brim or not and photos show everything from full brass and feathers to nothing but the hat cord. It should be pointed out here that the 2nd was also unusual because they actually used Scott’s Tactics for their manual of arms throughout their service, while the other Iron Brigade units, and nearly all other infantry units north and south, used Hardee’s.



*Cornelius Wheeler, Company I, Second Wisconsin*

Dark blue cloth was more expensive and harder to obtain, so most states ignored the regulations of 1861 and provided cheaper sky-blue trousers to their men. This led the War Department to issue General Orders 108 on December 16, 1861 which specified the sky-blue pants, but naturally, having already a supply of dark blue pants on hand, we know that the Quartermaster issued dark-blue pants to the 2nd into the summer of 1862. Records show that the other regiments in the brigade received the lighter pants and we even have a note from the 7th Wisconsin’s Quartermaster in May 1862 requesting more sky-blue pants because they had mistakenly been given, *“138 prs Dark Blue Pants which we could not use but turned over to the 2d Regt. Wis. Vols.”* The 2nd likely had a mix of dark and light pants at Antietam, while by Gettysburg, they

would all have received the sky-blue replacements. Records also show that the other regiments received the M1858 hat and a mix of frocks and four button sack coats well before John Gibbon arrived to take command.



*John Gibbon*



*Charles Keeler of the 6th Wisconsin*

John Gibbon, though, is certainly the man that made the brigade. He drilled them hard and made them proud of who they were, which they amply showed at their first real test as a brigade at Brawner's Farm when they went head to head with the Stonewall Division on August 28, 1862. He did two other things. First, he made sure that the men would continue to wear the regulation uniform with the M1858 dress hat, thus the sobriquet 'Black Hat Brigade' in addition to the title of 'Iron Brigade' they would earn at South Mountain. And Second, he ordered white 'linnen' leggings to be added to their uniform. These leggings were supplied to many of the eastern regiments and the design was patterned on a French model. They were distinguished by closing the outer seam by means of a series of leather looped thongs which were passed through each other until the top, where a leather strap secured the highest thong. It is a measure of their popularity that although there were many still in use by the Iron Brigade in the



Fall of 1862, they would never receive a second issue of them.

Moreover, although Gibbon never told the story, several correspondents relate a tale that not long after the men received the leggings in May 1862 opposite Fredericksburg, “*Gen. Gibbon found his pet horse equipped with leggings much to the amusement of the men.*” (Philip Cheek and Mair Pinton of Co. A, 6th Wisconsin). First Lieutenant William H. Harries of Company B of the 2nd Wisconsin related the best post war anecdote. About 16 years after the war the men of SE Wisconsin were having a reunion in Boscobel. Gibbon, in civilian clothing, was passing close by, heard about it and came to greet the men. On asking if any of the old Iron Brigade were present, one man came up and Gibbon inquired of him, “*Well, I am looking for the man.*” “*What man?*” says the soldier. “*Why, the man who put the leggings on my horse when we were opposite Fredericksburg!*”. Gibbon, it is said, never did find out who did it!

So, the Black Hats came by their uniform partly by accident and partly by intent. Had the 2nd Wisconsin not been wearing worn out militia uniforms at the time they did, they may well have been outfitted as a more typical Federal regiment of the eastern theatre. But they happened to need new duds at a moment when the Quartermaster had regulation hats and uniforms and so they got them. And because they got them, the other regiments, once brigaded together in the Fall of 1861, also got them, at least the hats. Then John Gibbon resolved to keep the uniform as a symbol of his western brigade and so it was and passed into history. After Gettysburg, after the losses of that battle and then the mustering out of many veterans in the spring of 1864 who chose not to re-up, the brigade lost its character. Already in the summer of 1863 new, non-western regiments had been added to the brigade and,

in essence, the brigade really ceased to exist. But history wouldn't forget them, their deeds, and their black hats.



*Color Guard of the 2nd Wisconsin Infantry, 1862*

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History books

## **Every Drop of Blood review: how Lincoln's Second Inaugural bound America's wounds**

**Edward Achorn delivers a fascinating account of an address which entered the national consciousness**

John S Gardner. The Guardian

Sat 18 Apr 2020 02.00 EDT Last modified on Tue 21 Apr 2020 10.13 EDT



*Abraham Lincoln delivering his second inaugural address, on the east front of the*

*Capitol. Photograph: Universal History Archive/UIG via Getty Images*

As Abraham Lincoln prepared to take the oath of office for a second time, on 4 March 1865, the nation waited to hear what he would say about its future. Triumphalism at military success? A call to further sacrifice? Vengeance on the rebel South or an outline for reconstruction?



### **'What it means to be an American': Abraham Lincoln and a nation divided**

It was to be none of these things, and thus Lincoln's Second Inaugural is enshrined in the national memory.

Edward Achorn, a journalist and historian, considers Lincoln's address and the dying flames of civil war in which it arose. He adds sketches of people such as the supreme court chief justice, Samuel Chase, (who thought he should have been inaugurated that day), abolitionist and orator Frederick Douglass, nurse Clara Barton and poet Walt Whitman, with his tart description of the capital city: "This huge mess of traitors, loafers, hospitals, axe-grinders, &

incompetencies & officials that goes by the name of Washington."

### **Advertisement**

It is also, of historical necessity, the story in parallel of John Wilkes Booth's obsession with Lincoln and involvement in a conspiracy to kidnap him on inauguration day or even to assassinate him there, perhaps in some imitation of the murder of Julius Caesar. Booth is the second character in the book.

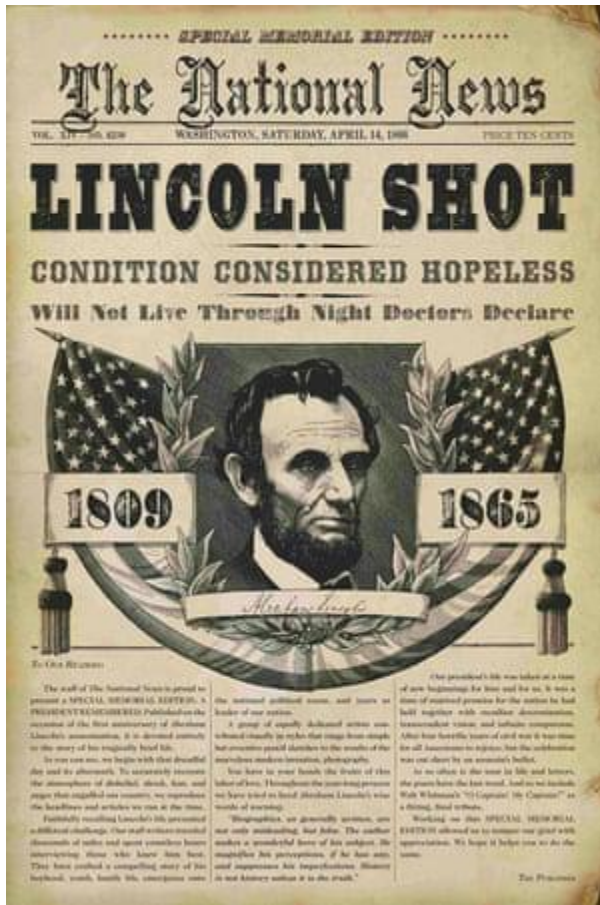
In early March 1865, Washington was a mess. Literally with mud-soaked streets and crowded hospitals treating combatants; figuratively, with unscrupulous war profiteers and a dysfunctional Congress racing to the end of its session. In the war itself, William Tecumseh Sherman continued his march through the South while Ulysses S Grant tightened the noose around Lee at Petersburg.

In the midst of it all stood Lincoln. The French minister in Washington wrote that "[h]is face denotes an immense force of resistance and extreme melancholy. It is plain that this man has suffered deeply." The president's own secretary, John Hay, noted that "the boisterous laughter became less frequent year by year; the eye grew veiled by constant meditation on momentous subjects".

Achorn wisely avoids deep psychobiography but simply and accurately notes that "Lincoln's hard life had left him with thick scar tissue over his psychic wounds" from his upbringing, yet the war "had reawakened his thoughts about God's role in this world of suffering".

Lincoln's religion or lack thereof has been a subject of lively debate. Achorn falls

squarely in the pro-belief camp. Indeed, Lincoln had foreshadowed the themes and words of the Second Inaugural in remarks in 1862 to a delegation of Chicago ministers who wanted him to move more quickly on slavery. Achorn believes Lincoln spoke truthfully, not cynically, in saying to General Ethan Allen Hitchcock: “[D]id I not see the hand of God in the crisis – I could not sustain it.”



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A memorial edition of The National News, 14 April 1866. Photograph: Reuters

In his message to Congress in 1861 and more famously at Gettysburg, Lincoln put the vast struggle in a universal context affecting all humanity, asking if republics

could survive. Particularly after the Emancipation Proclamation, the war had proceeded beyond the expectations of either side into a war not only for the Union but to abolish slavery, which Lincoln accurately described as “the cause of the war”.

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Now, Lincoln went deeper, turning the inaugural address into an extended reflection on the causes of the war, divine justice and “the mystery of suffering”. As Achorn writes, Lincoln “would not bask in the glory of recent, hard-fought military victories, or present a detailed plan for reconstruction. He would speak about human depravity, about the hideous sin committed by both sides, and about the justice of God’s infallible, implacable, inescapable will.”

The speech was “a confession of grave national failure ... Lincoln was freely stating that he had not been in control of the nation’s fate, a confession of weakness rare for any politician” – and, in a sense, that *he* was responsible for the calamity as well. While the evil of slavery had caused the war, *both* sides, not the South alone, were responsible for the conflict and its horrors. The sacrifice Lincoln now asked of all Americans was to sacrifice hatred and vengeance, and in their place put charity.

We treat the Second Inaugural as a valedictory, prior to Lincoln’s assassination a few weeks later. Douglass felt there was “murder in the air” that day, and he was right. As Lincoln walked through the crowd, the official planning the inauguration “happened to see a man jump” into the official procession, “determined to get close to Lincoln”. It was Booth (who had an official ticket; read the book to find out why), but after what one described as a

“severe struggle” Booth was released – a great “what if” of history.

fraught with portents. Vice-President Andrew Johnson made a drunken speech to the Senate. Violent winds and rain gave way to bright sunshine as Lincoln rose to speak. Whitman noticed that “a curious little white cloud, the only one in that part of the sky, appeared like a hovering bird, right over him”. The many African Americans in attendance applauded vigorously but, as Douglass noted, during the speech the crowd was “wonderfully quiet, earnest, and solemn”.

Its broader reception was mixed, largely based on partisan affiliation, a reminder of how unpopular Lincoln was in certain parts of the North. Lincoln’s own verdict is typically direct: “It is a truth which I thought needed to be told; and as whatever of humiliation there is in it, falls most directly on myself; I thought others might afford for me to tell it.”

Achorn has done Lincoln justice, distilling the essence of the speech in a reflection Lincoln would have understood: “It was time for Americans to stop thinking about self-righteousness. The only way forward was to recognize that all had been wrong and to treat each other with mercy.”