



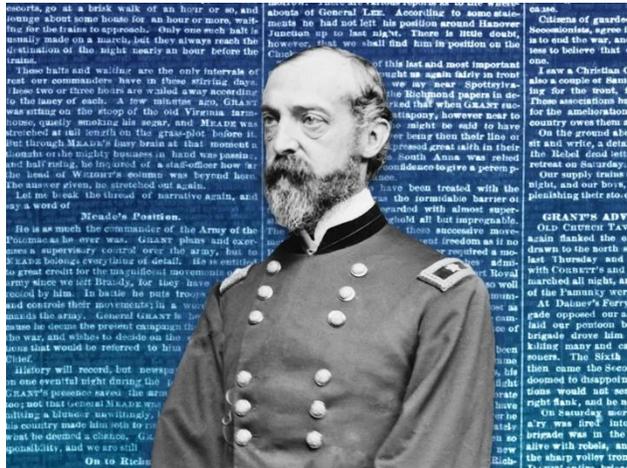
THE OLD LINER



After Winning the Battle of Gettysburg, George Meade Fought With—and Lost to—the Press

The Civil War general’s reputation was shaped by partisan politics, editorial whims and his own personal failings

Nicholas Liu, Smithsonian Magazine, July 3, 2023

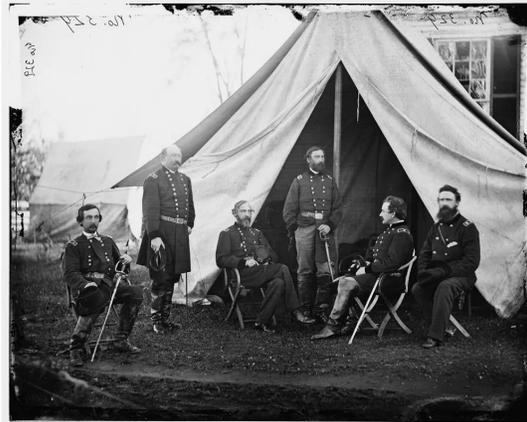


On a June morning in 1864, Meade expelled Edward Crapsey from camp, ordering his men to seat the reporter backward on a mule, with a sign around his neck that read “Libeler of the Press.” Illustration by Meilan Solly / Photos via Newspapers.com, Wikimedia Commons under public domain

When Union General George Gordon Meade read a *Philadelphia Inquirer* article accusing him of being too timid to “risk [his] last army on what he deemed a chance,” he took immediate steps to punish the story’s author, Edward Crapsey (sometimes misspelled as Cropsey). Meade, who had long chafed at what he regarded as the biased, mercenary press, could not abide such an article from his hometown paper, nor risk a loss of confidence among his troops. On a June morning in 1864, the general expelled Crapsey from camp, ordering his men to seat the reporter

backward on a mule, with a sign around his neck that read “Libeler of the Press.” A crowd of Union soldiers hurled insults at Crapsey as he departed.

Crapsey’s public humiliation served as a warning to the broader press. Any journalists who followed him in circulating falsehoods, Meade declared, would be similarly punished.



Generals of the Army of the Potomac in Culpeper, Virginia, in 1863. L to R: Gouverneur K. Warren, William H. French, George G. Meade, Henry J. Hunt, Andrew A. Humphreys and George Sykes Public domain via Wikimedia Commons

The general had no way of knowing his quest for revenge would backfire spectacularly, prompting a coordinated media blackout by the nation’s newspapers. “Every newspaper correspondent in the Army of the Potomac, and in Washington City, had first an implied, and afterward an expressed understanding, to ignore Gen. Meade in every possible way and manner,” wrote *Chicago Times* reporter Sylvanus Cadwallader in his memoirs. “The publishers shared their feelings to a considerable extent, and it was soon noticed that Gen. Meade’s name never



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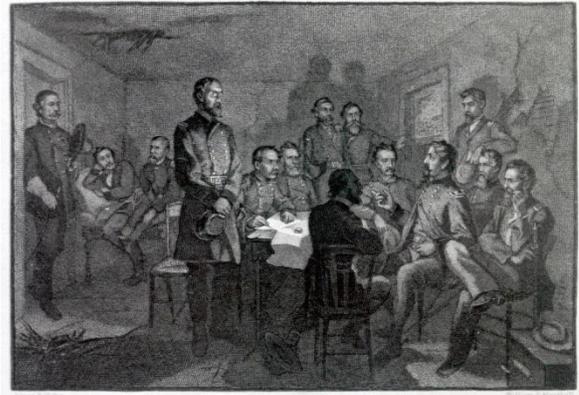


appeared in any army correspondence if it could be omitted.”

Meade’s contentious relationship with the press cemented his fall from grace in both the eyes of the public and the annals of history. By refusing to publish positive stories about Meade, newspapers painted Union Generals Ulysses S. Grant and Philip Sheridan as the primary heroes behind Confederate commander Robert E. Lee’s defeat in the Civil War. In the century and a half since the conflict’s end, this perception has persisted, with Meade’s contributions to the Union cause often overlooked.

“Meade spent months watching his reputation crumble in the press and wondering if the ‘hero of Gettysburg’ was about to lose his command,” wrote Alexander G. Lovelace in the *Journal of Military History* in 2021. “Reporters also had power to influence the postwar reputation of generals, as Meade discovered the hard way.”

Meade was far from the first Union general to make an example of a reporter. In February 1863, for instance, William T. Sherman court-martialed *New York Herald* correspondent Thomas Knox on charges of espionage, disobeying orders and offering intelligence to the enemy. Officers generally regarded the press as little better than paid spies whose zeal to publish any and all information pertaining to the war often proved more useful to the Confederates than their own side’s reconnaissance. While aiding the enemy wasn’t most journalists’ aim, the lack of ethical standards for reporting at the time meant many articles were biased or outright wrong.



Engraving by James E. Kelly of Meade and his war council on July 2, 1863 Public domain via Wikimedia Commons

“There were no rules or guidelines,” says Allen C. Guelzo, a historian at Princeton University. “This was a novel situation, the first time that the United States [was] involved in a war in which correspondents [were] on the ground and able to relay articles through the electrical telegraph.”

Even before the Crapsey incident, Meade was the kind of figure the press gladly diminished. Nicknamed a “goggle-eyed old snapping turtle” by his men, the general was prone to caustic irritability that could, under the right circumstances, escalate into fearsome rage. Moreover, his quiet but firm support for the Democratic Party ensured he would never be fully trusted by either President Abraham Lincoln’s administration or much of the Northern press.

The 1860s news industry was unabashedly partisan, with many editors serving concurrently in government and party offices. Under Lincoln, Republican publications benefited from the shield of patronage, while Democratic counterparts that criticized the war effort risked closure or even criminal prosecution. Editors at the

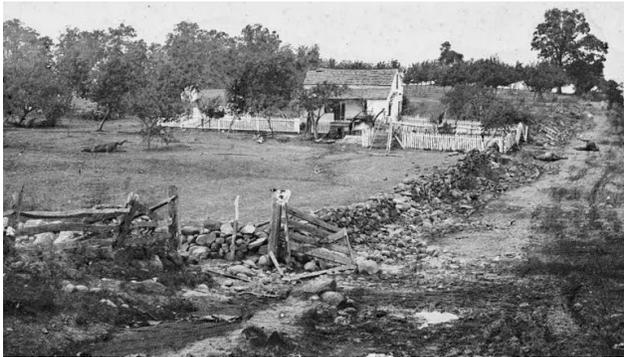


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time didn't view objectivity or accuracy with any serious reverence; instead, the editorial line reigned supreme.

In this kind of environment, a Democrat like Meade was especially vulnerable. "If you have a newspaper whose editorial leadership is favorable to Lincoln and the Republican Party, then they are going to have unpleasant things to say about commanding officers whose political loyalty lies with the Democrats," Guelzo says. "They did this with [Meade's predecessor George B.] McClellan, and they [did] it with George Meade."



Meade's Gettysburg headquarters Public domain via Wikimedia Commons

Meade was the fifth commanding general of the Army of the Potomac, the Union's main fighting force in the eastern theater of war. Lincoln appointed him on June 28, 1863, as Lee's Army of Northern Virginia advanced into Pennsylvania, seeking a decisive battle that would shatter Union morale. Three days later, on July 1, the armies met in and around the town of Gettysburg. Meade waged a skillful defensive battle, securing Lee's costliest defeat of the war. But the Union general handled internal challenges with considerably less finesse.

After the first day of battle, Meade replaced Abner Doubleday, commander of I

Corps and a staunch Republican, with a more junior Democratic officer—a move that prompted criticism from within his own ranks. That same day, wrote Guelzo in a 2013 essay, the "long train of grievances and quarrels" that plagued Meade at Gettysburg continued when Major General Daniel E. Sickles defied his commander's direct orders.

Instead of defending the army's southern flank, Sickles deployed his troops too far forward, leaving them vulnerable to enemy artillery and infantry attacks on three sides. Meade rebuked Sickles, who offered to withdraw to the intended position. But as Meade later testified to a congressional committee, he told Sickles "the enemy would not permit him to withdraw, and that there was no time for any further change or movement. And before I had finished that remark, or that sentence, the enemy's batteries opened upon him, and the action commenced." During the clash, a cannonball smashed into Sickles' right leg; doctors amputated the limb above the knee after administering a dose of chloroform.



General Daniel E. Sickles Public domain via Wikimedia Commons

In the heady days following the Battle of Gettysburg, the press exalted Meade as the savior of the Union. But as Lee fled south, Meade failed to pursue him as aggressively as Lincoln and the public had hoped. As the



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glow of victory dimmed, Northern papers began to criticize Meade for his apparent timidity and failure to make any further progress. “The Battle of Gettysburg was purely defensive,” read a letter published in *Wilkes’ Spirit of the Times* on August 29, “and our success was mainly due to the natural strength of our position, to our artillery and the firmness of a portion of the troops, but in no degree to the strategy or ability displayed by any of the generals.”

Sickles, who had survived his ordeal, came out of Gettysburg with a fierce grudge against Meade. Believing the general had wronged him, he told reporters, administration officials and anyone else who would listen that he had moved his corps forward to force an engagement and prevent the cowardly Meade from retreating. Sickles’ tale gained traction among newspapers, including the *New York Herald*, which in March 1864 published a letter that echoed his version of events. It stated, “Had General Meade been more copious in his report and less reserved as to his own important acts, the necessity for this communication would not have existed.”

Though the letter was signed by the anonymous reporter “Historicus,” Meade saw Sickles’ hand in it. “The prominence given to General Sickles’ operations in the enclosed communication, the labored argument to prove his good judgment and my failings, all lead me to the conclusion he is either indirectly or directly the author,” he reported to the War Department.



A photograph of Meade by Mathew Brady or Levin C. Handy Public domain via Wikimedia Commons

Lincoln tried to placate Meade, reaffirming that “the country knows that, at all events, you have done good services.” Behind the veneer of courtesy, however, both men harbored suspicion of the other. On an operational level, Meade’s natural caution frustrated Lincoln, who didn’t believe the general had pursued Lee with sufficient vigor after Gettysburg. Politically, the Lincoln administration questioned Meade’s motives, speculating that his sympathies toward a party with strong antiwar elements had influenced his apparently passive leadership.

“There is bad faith somewhere,” Lincoln complained to Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles. “Meade has been pressed and urged, but only one of his generals was for an immediate attack. ... What does it mean, Mr. Welles?”



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Guelzo says the Lincoln administration probably encouraged the press to continue its negative coverage of Meade. “For the Lincoln administration and many of the Northern newspapers, Meade was understood to be on the other side of the political divide,” he explains.

In February 1864, a congressional committee launched an investigation into Meade’s conduct at Gettysburg. Spurred on by Sickles, Doubleday and others, the hearings added official varnish to the charges already circulating on the nation’s front pages. Meade was discouraged by the incessant attacks, writing to his wife, Margaretta, that “after a while, it will be discovered I was not at Gettysburg at all.”

For all of his private complaints, Meade rarely defended himself in the public sphere. “Meade didn’t feel like it was his duty to get into public spats,” says Tom Huntington, author of *Searching for George Gordon Meade: The Forgotten Victor of Gettysburg*. “Meade was embittered by [the Sickles affair], but he always felt constrained by what he considered his duty, and engaging in the kind of attacks that Sickles was engaging in was something he wasn’t willing to do.”



President Abraham Lincoln (wearing top hat) with George B. McClellan and other Union officers Public domain via Wikimedia Commons

In March 1864, Grant, the newly appointed commander of all Union armies, established his headquarters with Meade’s Army of the Potomac, placing the latter in an effectively subordinate role. Though Meade continued to oversee the army’s tactical movements, he found himself largely forsaken by the same press that heaped praise onto the more affable Grant and his close companion and cavalry commander, Major General Philip Sheridan. “The papers are giving Grant all the credit of what they call success,” Meade complained to Margaretta on June 1. “I hope they will remember this if anything goes wrong.”

A few days later, Meade took out his accumulating frustration on *Philadelphia Inquirer* correspondent Crapsey. On June 2, Crapsey wrote an article suggesting “that on one eventful night during the present campaign, Grant’s presence saved the army, and the nation, too; not that General Meade was on the point to committing a blunder unwittingly, but his devotion to his country made him loath to risk her last army on what he deemed a chance.”

The “eventful night” in question took place during the Battle of the Wilderness in May. After a bloody stalemate against Lee’s Army of Northern Virginia, Meade proposed a “minor withdrawal”—an order that sparked “a slight disagreement” between the general and Grant, according to Lovelace’s article. As the historian adds, “soldiers’ gossip had inflated the story by the time it reached Crapsey,” suggesting Meade had ordered a full retreat rather than a tactical step back.



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Ulysses S. Grant (standing) examines a map held by Meade (seated, with paper in hand). Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division

Enraged by the report, Meade summoned Crapsey, who defended himself by saying the incident “was the talk of the camp.” In response, Meade recounted in a letter to his wife, the general “told him it was a base and wicked lie, and that I would make an example of him, which should not only serve to deter others from committing like offenses but would give publicity to his lie and the truth.” After describing Crapsey’s punishment, Meade concluded, “This sentence was duly executed, much to the delight of the whole army, for the race of newspaper correspondents is universally despised by the soldiers.”

Meade paid the price for his treatment of Crapsey. What could initially be considered moderate neglect by the papers soon turned into a near-total blackout. By the end of the year, tensions had cooled, and the general’s name began to creep back into the front pages. But his relationship with the press

remained strained and his military contributions overlooked. What could not be overlooked was the power of the press to shape a general’s reputation or, if reporters so wished, wipe a man’s legacy from public consciousness. “Meade was the longest-serving and most successful commander of the Army of Potomac,” wrote Lovelace. “Yet his victories are mostly remembered as Grant’s triumphs.”

As the North celebrated the end of the war in spring 1865, the names and faces of Grant, Sheridan and Sherman dominated the nation’s newspapers. Meade, however, was largely left out. Gamely attempting to reconcile himself to his relative obscurity, he reflected, “So long as the soldiers appreciate my service, I am indifferent to the opinion of politicians and newspaper editors.”

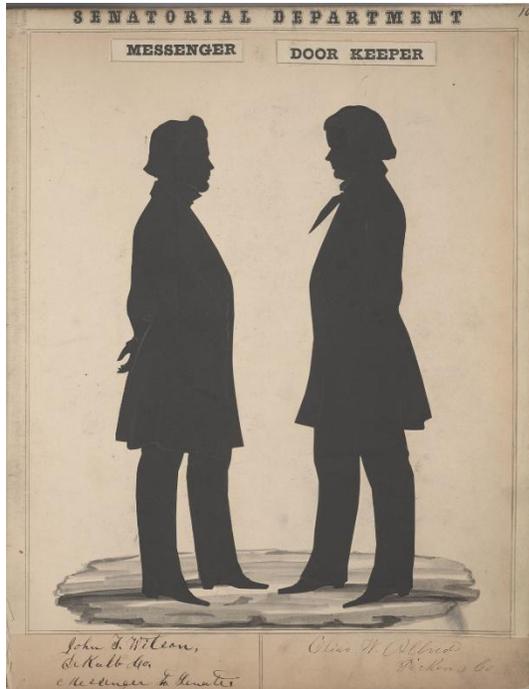
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The Strange Life of Reverend Allred of Jasper, Georgia

Robert S. Davis, June 30, 2023,
blueandgrayeducation.org



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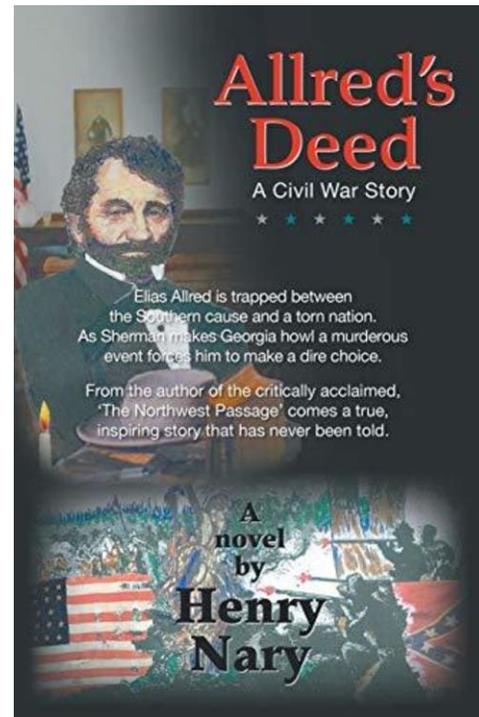


Silhouette of Elias W. Allred (right) | courtesy of the author

The Allred family has a tradition of incredible stories forgotten for generations but recovered by modern descendants. Elias Walter Allred (b. 1824), the second son of War of 1812 veteran Elias and Mary Harrison Allred, the grandson of Revolutionary War veteran Elias Allred, led such a life

When his politician older brother Lemuel James Allred created Pickens County, Georgia, in December 1853, Elias became the county's first tax collector. By 1860, he had acquired much land and a reputation as a good businessman owning a hotel in the county seat of Jasper. He married Martha Arthur in Cherokee County in 1848. They had no issue. As a powerful Baptist minister, Allred baptized at least 206 people and ministered to numerous churches over his career. He also served several terms in the state legislature.

In July 1864, federal cavalry came to Jasper. Reverend Allred was one of a delegation that met the Union soldiers.



Cover of Allred's Deed | Amazon

Reports appeared that Elias helped rescue 10 Yankees held by the Confederates. Reports also surfaced that a small band of Southerners organized by Allred to protect citizens from the deprivations of marauding former Confederates also committed their own criminal acts. At the same time, Elias Allred was serving in a Georgia state Confederate cavalry unit. Even more outrageous, Federal spy James George Brown claimed he had been appointed governor of a new state in North Georgia with Elias Allred as its congressman. The story was false, but Allred suffered the consequences. His property was looted, and he was arrested and briefly imprisoned in Macon before released through the influence of his brother Lemuel, then executive secretary to the governor. His Civil War



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adventures have become the subject of Henry Nary's novel *Allred's Deed*.

The reverend's postwar career proved no less eventful. In the autumn of 1873, Allred was among the ministers at the revival of Sharp Mountain Church, where the congregation saw a strange light that emitted eerie noises. They refused to leave the church for weeks. He helped with the resulting mass baptism of at least 73 people.

Allred's adventures did not end there. He helped his younger brother, Justice Department commissioner John Marion Allred, to bring to an end the Honest Man's Friend and Protector, moonshiner vigilantes who burned homes of federal informants in 1890. Elias owned a vein of pink marble that he was swindled out of in 1897, but the Georgia Supreme Court returned to him. Later, he sold the property that contained the marble but the family still mistakenly believes that they would one day inherit it.

Elias Walter Allred died on March 8, 1910, at the home of his nephew Thomas Faulkner in Hall County, where he was born, although buried at Cool Springs Baptist Church in Tate. He had lived an eventful life that spanned from the Cherokee Removal to the modern era.



Allred's tomb in Tate, Georgia | Find a Grave 0-0

The Long Legacy of Louisiana's Oakley Plantation

Norman Dasinger, Jr., July 21, 2023
(originally published May 10, 2021),
blueandgrayeducation.org



Oakley Plantation | NPS

Oakley Plantation may be most famous for its naturalist resident, a young John James Audubon, who stayed here during the summer of 1821—indeed, it's now called the Audubon State Historic Site. But the stately mansion has a long, interesting heritage, including, of course, a connection with the Civil War.



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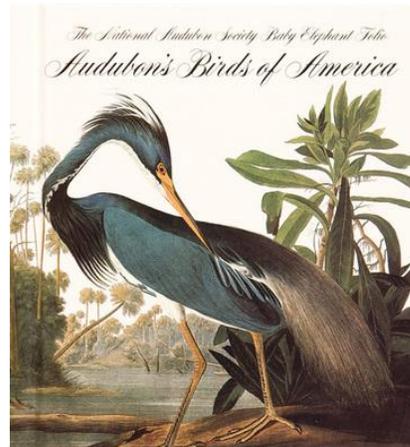


Ruffin Gray, from Natchez, Mississippi, began construction on Oakley Plantation in West Feliciana Parish in 1799. He purchased the land from the Spanish government but died before the house was completed.

His widow, Lucy, oversaw its completion, and she soon married James Pirrie. His family was from Scotland, and he and Lucy had one child, a daughter named Eliza. In 1821, Lucy travelled to New Orleans and met John James Audubon. She hired him to tutor Eliza. Audubon stayed at Oakley for four months, and while there he would receive fifty dollars a month plus room and board for himself as well his thirteen-year-old protégée. While at Oakley, Audubon developed a love for the natural beauty of the area and used his free time to paint 32 of his bird pictures. These would become the basis for his famous Birds of America.



Self-portrait, John James Audubon | public domain



Book cover, The Birds of America | public domain



Eliza Pirrie, by John James Audubon | public domain

Eliza Pirrie eloped in 1823 to marry her cousin, Robert H. Barrow. Sadly, he contracted pneumonia on their honeymoon and died six weeks later. As a widow, Eliza gave birth to their son, Robert H. Barrow, Jr.

Robert, Jr., went on to aid the formation the 4th Louisiana Infantry, Confederate States Army. The unit was organized on May 25, 1861, at Camp Moore, Louisiana, with 862 men. Robert Barrow was made a colonel and served as the first commander of the regiment. The 4th Louisiana reported to the



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Mississippi Gulf Coast until September, when it was moved to protect the lower Atchafalaya River near Franklin and Brashear City. In February 1862, it was ordered to Jackson, Tennessee. While there, Colonel Barrow resigned and did not join his men for the battle of Shiloh, Tennessee, in April 1862.



Gen. Robert H. Barrow

Robert Barrow, Jr., and his wife, Mary, had six children. Their great-grandson—also named Robert H. Barrow—was born in 1922 on another family plantation near Oakley. He was a smart, hard-working child and managed to take advantage of a special opportunity to attend Louisiana State University in 1939 for free. While there, he worked as a janitor and waiter and served in the school's corps of cadets. He liked the military. During World War II, he joined the Marines as a private and rose in rank as he saw action in World War II, Korea, and Vietnam. A military historian described him as the “finest regimental commander” of the Korean War. He retired in 1983 as the Commandant of the Marine Corps. As the 27th leader of the Marines, he was the first

commandant to serve, by law, as a regular full member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. He died in 2008 and was buried with full military honors at the family cemetery at Grace Episcopal Church in St. Francisville.

His son commented on his father's leadership style by saying, “[My father] believed that people and quality of people transcends everything else that you do in an organization.”

Today, Oakley Plantation—aka Audubon State Historic Site—is open for tours, and the grounds host events like weddings and reenactments. But, apparently, the visitation goes on nonstop, because paranormal activity is commonly reported. Footsteps and voices and the image of a young girl have been reported in the house. Tour guides report seeing a young boy standing near one of the beds, a woman with children sitting in a chair, and even a young girl waving from an upstairs window.

With all the history and beauty associated with Oakley and the heritage of the families that have lived there, who knows, maybe some of them just keep coming back to reconnect with times gone by??

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