

APPOMATTOX COURT HOUSE - THE FINALE

In the early part of the 19th Century it is doubtful if the people of Appomattox County, Virginia, ever thought that their little town of Clover Hill would one day be a part of American history. Clover Hill was a small settlement, a stopping-off point on the main Richmond – Lynchburg Stage Road with just a few houses around the tavern and within reasonable distance to the Appomattox Railroad station. When the County of Appomattox was formed in 1845, Clover Hill was chosen as the County Seat and renamed. The following year the courthouse was built and the settlement grew. The village of Appomattox Court House prospered in the 1850's and such refinements as picket fences with gates began to appear. It was a quiet, peaceful little village but the approaching war would change all of this and into this environment arrived Wilmer McLean and his family.

Even though he was an elderly non-combatant, Major Wilmer McLean seemed to be incapable of keeping out of the War. At its outbreak he was maintaining his acreage "Yorkshire" in Prince William County, Virginia, where his estate bordered on Bull Run, near Manassas Junction. On July 18, 1861, General P G T Beauregard, CSA, took over McLean's house as his headquarters and three days later a Union shell ripped through the roof while Beauregard was breakfasting. This was enough for McLean - he moved his family to an estate in Appomattox County, where he was far removed from the War for over three and a half years.

On the morning of April 9, 1865, however, two mounted staff officers, one in blue and one in grey stopped him. They were looking for a place to hold what was to be an important meeting for the country. After the first place was rejected, McLean took them to his home which was acceptable to both officers. Thus, the place where Robert E Lee would meet with Ulysses S Grant to offer the surrender of the once invincible Army of Northern Virginia was determined.



This painting by Tom Lovell *Surrender at Appomattox* is said to be the most authentic in every respect of the surrender scene, from the carpet to the tables, the furniture and those present at Wilmer McLean's house on that fateful day. Depending on biographies and books read, some say others were also present, notably Wesley Merritt, Rufus Ingles and President Lincoln's son, Captain Robert Todd Lincoln. It is known that some were waiting in the hallway. Those who have visited Appomattox Court House and seen this room would be aware that it is not be large enough to accommodate any more people than shown in Lovell's painting. Some have said that Custer was not present, although anyone having the slightest knowledge of Custer's personality would know wild dogs could not have kept him out of the room.

Looking at Lovell's painting, one wonders who they were and why they were there. They are certainly not the usual battery of generals or commanders that that such an important event might command their attendance. They were "special" people that needed or deserved to be present and with some research it is possible to see what interesting people they are.

Much has been said and written of the two principals of the surrender, Grant and Lee, and so this paper focuses on their subordinate officers who were at the meeting and are seen in Lovell's painting.

THE UNION OFFICERS

Major General Philip Sheridan

Sheridan was the Cavalry commander who smashed the Confederate lines at Five Forks necessitating the evacuation of Petersburg and Richmond, which finally blocked Lees, escape from Appomattox. Philip Henry Sheridan was one of the three Union generals who had won the greatest fame in the Civil War. He had a meteoric rise in the Union army during the latter part of the War, but earned the enmity of most of the South for laying waste to the Shenandoah Valley.

His height troubled him throughout his life. Often said to be the shortest general in the army, this is incorrect. At 5ft 4in he was easily outdone by many, in particular, Kit Carson who was only 5ft 2. Said to be born in New York in 1831, he took five years to graduate into infantry from West Point with the Class of 1852. Sheridan was suspended for one year from the Academy as a result of an altercation with a senior cadet, (later Brigadier General) William Rufus Terrill, at whom he made a thrust with a bayonet. Some say he should have been expelled and not permitted to return to the Academy.

After eight years of service on the frontier he was still a Second Lieutenant at the outbreak of the War. Serving in staff postings in the early part of the War, he was recommended for command of a cavalry regiment and his future was assured. In 1863, in the rank of Brigadier General he was ordered to close the backdoor to Washington DC – Virginia's fertile Shenandoah Valley and the Confederacy's eastern granary – in doing so he laid waste to the Shenandoah, where he openly boasted:

"...crows flying over it will be compelled to carry their own rations."

Sheridan rejoined the Army of The Potomac in front of Petersburg in time to take a leading part in the operations leading to Appomattox. After the War he participated in what may be described as a show of force against Maximilian in Mexico and subsequently headed the Reconstruction Government of Texas and Louisiana, but the severity of his will in this appointment forced his removal by President Johnson within six months.

Upon the accession of Grant to the Presidency, Sheridan was appointed a Lieutenant General and commanded a number of posts when trouble with the Indians was almost a daily occurrence. He led the Marias River massacre in Montana in which 173 Indians were brutally slaughtered, a third of them women and children. A commonly used phrase attributed to Sheridan at this time is:

"The only good Indian is a dead Indian"

This is one version of the phrase known to be used by him in 1870. A more accurate statement of what he said was:

"The only good Indians I ever saw were dead Indians"

Between 1870-71 he was the United States Military Observer to the Franco-Prussian War and when General William Tecumseh Sherman retired in 1884, Sheridan became commanding General of the Army and was elevated to the rank of General on June 1, 1888.

General Sheridan died aged 57 on August 5, 1888 at Nonquitt Massachusetts and is buried at Arlington National Cemetery.

It is interesting to note that he is known to have worked tirelessly for the creation of the Yellowstone National Park and its preservation and provided troops for this purpose. Perhaps he was he trying to salve his conscience for the destruction of the Shenandoah Valley?

Colonel Orville E Babcock. (Aide de Camp and one of the officers that selected the McLean House.)

Babcock graduated third in the class of May 1861 at the outbreak of the Civil War he was appointed to the Corps of Engineers. Colonel Orville Elias Babcock joined Grant's Staff relatively late in the War. He was brevetted through the ranks to Colonel for the Wilderness and Appomattox Campaigns and appointed Aide de Camp to General Grant in March 1864.

Staying in the army after the War he was brevetted to brigadier general of regulars for his war service. He resigned his commission when Grant was sworn in as President in 1869 and became President Grant's personal secretary. Caught up on the Whisky Fraud Affair, he was he was forced out of the White House despite Grant's vigorous defence of him. Subsequently, he was appointed Inspector of Lighthouses by President Grant and drowned in 1884 while working at Mosquito Inlet, Florida. He was aged only 49.

Lieutenant Colonel Horace Porter. Aide De Camp

Horace Porter is best known as a staff officer and biographer of General Grant. He graduated into Ordinance from the 1860 class of West Point. On the second day of the Battle of Chickamauga he rallied fugitives from the broken line and held some important ground, allowing batteries and wagon trains to leave the field during the disastrous retreat. For his action he was awarded the Medal of Honor - but not until 1902. Brevetted to Colonel and Brigadier General he continued in the Regular Army after the War and served as an aide to both Generals Grant and Sherman until his retirement in 1873, when he became managing director of Trans America Railroad Corporation. His book "Campaigning with Grant," was published in 1897. He died in 1921 aged 84.

Major General Edward O.C. Ord. Commander, The Army of the James

Edward Otho Cresap Ord demonstrated great proficiency at mathematics, particularly as a child, which gained him admission to West Point at the tender age of 16 from which he graduated in 1839. His pre-war field service was against the Seminole Indians in Florida and in the Mexican War. He also participated in the expedition against John Brown at Harpers Ferry led by Robert E Lee.

Brevetted brigadier general at the outbreak of the War, he won one the North's earliest victories at Dranesville, Virginia. Twice promoted by Grant, first to replace the troublesome McClelland

before Petersburg and then to replace Butler to become Commander of The Army of The James. He played an important role, therefore, in the final operations against Petersburg, Richmond and Appomattox.

After the War, he was appointed brigadier general in the Regular Army and commanded various military departments including Military Governor of Richmond, retired as a major general in 1881. Sadly, while on a ship bound for Vera Cruz he was stricken with Yellow Fever and died in Havana, Cuba on July 22, 1883, aged 65. He is buried at Arlington National Cemetery.

Major General Seth Williams. Inspector General. United States Army

A career Staff Officer, Seth Williams served throughout the War in important staff appointments. Graduating into Artillery from West Point in 1842, he served on routine garrison duty and throughout the Mexican War as aide-de-comp to General Robert Patterson. He was appointed Adjutant of the US Military Academy, West Point, from 1850 – 1853, where he provided "...efficient and favourite service." He transferred to the Adjutant General Department where he served the rest of his life.

At the outbreak of war he became a major in August 1861 and a brigadier general in September of the same year. Williams was Adjutant General (Senior Administrator) of the Army of the Potomac to successive commanders - George B McClelland, Ambrose Burnside, Joseph Hooker, and George Meade. It is a credit to Williams ability and character that he was able to serve successfully directly under these diverse and flawed personalities. When Grant, as General-in-Chief, chose to make his headquarters with the Army of the Potomac, he selected Williams to be his Inspector General in the rank of major general.

After the War Williams was assigned to the posting of Adjutant General of the Military Division of the Atlantic, but towards the end February 1866 became ill and went to his sister's home in Boston where he died in March of "...congestion of the brain." His body was taken to Augusta for internment in Forest Grove Cemetery. He was 44 at the time of his death.

Colonel Theodore Bowers, Chief of Staff, Army of the Potomac

Reading from the biography of Colonel Bowers it states:

"Few soldiers of the Civil War had a more honourable career, - and fewer men in the army - were as near to the heart of General Grant, or so unqualifiedly enjoyed his confidence - and personal esteem - as Theodore Bowers.- Born on 10 October 1832 in Hummelstown, Penn - amid humble surroundings,- he struggled and overcome disheartening conditions - but rose to a rank of influence and honour."

Before the war Theodore Bowers was a printer and for some years owned and published the Mt Carmel Register in Illinois where it is understood he first met General Grant. At the beginning of the war he took an active role in organizing the 48th Illinois Infantry. He declined the rank of captain for his friend and instead joined the army as a private soldier. Later being detailed as a clerk on General Grants Headquarters, he at once attracted the attention of his commander who rapidly advanced him in commissioned rank to major, Lt Col, Col and at the end of the war to Brevet Brigadier General.

After passing safely through all the perils of all General Grants campaigns he met instant death on March 6, 1865, (Not 1 Year after the war) when he fell between two carriages while attempting to board a train leaving Garrison Station, on the Hudson River Railroad - opposite West Point.

According to his biography:

“...Gen Grant was visiting West Point with his son and his aide Col Bowers. When leaving West Point for New York some confusion arose over a carpetbag, which was left on the station, and Col Bowers volunteered to retrieve. Gen Grant had taken his seat in the second last car. The station attendant handed Col Bowers the carpetbag, and he said “this is not the one!” these were the last words he uttered, as he rushed for the train that was already in motion. In attempting to board he grasped the railing of the car, slipped and fell under the wheels of the next car and was killed instantly. When the train stopped, Mr Garrison, proprietor of the West Point ferry said to Grant; “General, I think your adjutant is killed.” Upon viewing the body of his friend and aide he sadly remarked “That is he; a very estimable man was he. He has been with me through all my battles.”

General Grant later directed Major Hill to arrange for the burial at West Point, even though he was not a graduate of the Academy. At a personal request of General Grant, Congress appropriated \$5000 for the erection of a splendid monument over Colonel Bowers grave. When Grant became President, he stated that, had Theodore Bowers lived he would have made him a Cabinet Minister.

At the time of his death Colonel Theodore Bowers was aged 34.

Colonel Ely S. Parker. Military Secretary to General Grant

A full-blooded Seneca Indian, Ely Samuel Parker or Donehogawa to use his Indian name, fought against discrimination to become a Union Officer. Born at Pembroke, New York, he studied Law, but as an Indian and not classed as a citizen and was refused admission to the Bar. Consequently, he returned to the Polytechnic in Troy, New York and graduated as a civil engineer. When working in Galena, Illinois in the 1850's he became firm friends with an ex-army officer who he knew as Sam Grant.

When war broke out the Governor of New York denied him a commission, and even Lincoln's, Secretary of State, William Seward, in a blatant example of insensitivity, went so far to tell Parker:

“The War will be fought and won by white men without the aid of Indians.”

Finally commissioned on May 25 1863 he served as Divisional Engineer with General J. J. Smith's VII Corps. He became re-acquainted with Grant during the Vicksburg Campaign and joined Grant's staff during this period. There he was derogatorily referred to as *“the Indian.”* or *“that Indian.”*

Parker was appointed and served as Military Secretary to General Grant with the rank of lieutenant colonel from August 30, 1864 until July 25, 1866. At Appomattox in April 1865 it was Parker at Grant's order who transcribed in beautiful copperplate handwriting the official document that outlined the terms of the surrender.

Observing Parker, General Lee is believed to have remarked: -

“I'm glad to see one real American here.”

According to the story, Parker's reply was:

“Now, Sir, we are all Americans”

Brevetted Brigadier General, US Volunteers on 9 April 1865 and Brevet Brigadier General United States Army on March 2 1867 for “Meritorious and Gallant Service.” He continued on the general's

staff after the War, in the rank of colonel in the Regular Army as ADC for three years before resigning in 1869. When Grant assumed the presidency, he appointed Parker Commissioner of Indian Affairs and he served in this capacity from 1869 to 1871. After making and losing several fortunes, he died a relatively poor man at Fairfield Connecticut on August 31 1895. He is buried in the Forest Lawn Cemetery, Buffalo New York. He was aged 67 when he died.

Major General George A Custer: A Cavalry Division Commander.

Destined to become one of the most celebrated and controversial figures to emerge from the Civil War, George Armstrong Custer, was born in New Rumley, Ohio on December 5, 1839 but spent most of his early life in Monroe Michigan. His training at West Point was less than impressive where he graduated last in his class of June 1861.

His meteoric rise to fame commenced when serving with General Alfred Pleasanton who with the support of General George Meade recommended his promotion from Captain to Brigadier General. At that time, he was the youngest general officer in the army and was later to become the youngest officer to ever hold the rank of major general in the US army. Assigned to command a brigade in Judson Kilpatrick's division, which he later led at Gettysburg and until the end of the War, Custer fought with distinction in all the cavalry battles of the Army of the Potomac. He was in command of the division, which cut off the last avenue of escape for Robert E Lee's army at Appomattox for which he was appointed a major general US Volunteers. It is known he was at the meeting, for there is a drawing of him carrying away a table said to be one of the surrender tables. He did not steal the surrender table, however, what he did steal was another table from the McLean house. General Sheridan purchased the surrender table from Wilmer Mclean and presented it to Mrs Custer.

Relegated to his substantive rank after the War, Custer was appointed to command the newly formed 7th Cavalry in the rank of lieutenant colonel. He bears the blame for destroying the unoffending Black Kettle's Cheyenne village on the banks of the Washita River in November in 1868. On June 28, 1876 upon discovering a huge Indian village, along the Little Big Horn River, Custer divided his own command into three battalions and without any further reconnaissance or waiting for support, led an attack, which resulted in the loss of his life and the extermination of his command - a total loss of 266 officers and men. He is buried at the United States Military Academy West Point. He was aged 36.

CONFEDERATES

Lieutenant Colonel Charles Marshall. Military Secretary to General Lee, who with Babcock selected the McLean house.

Little is known of this most important man. What is known of him was that he was a Confederate from Maryland which is not entirely unusual even though Maryland stayed with the Union throughout the War. Marshall was the son of a Chief Justice of the United States and a pre-War lawyer. He was also Lee's favourite Chess opponent.

As a major, CSA, Marshall was appointed ADC to General Robert E Lee on March 22, 1862 and remained on Lee's staff throughout the War. He was promoted lieutenant colonel and posted as Assistant Adjutant General to Lee on February 25, 1864 and Chief of Staff until April 9 1865.

He was important because at the McLean house when Grant commenced to write the terms of the surrender they found they had a pen but no ink. The ever-efficient staff officer, Marshall, withdrew from his vest pocket, a boxwood portable ink stand, handed it to Colonel Parker and the proceedings continued. The following day, it was Marshall who produced General Order No. 9; Lee's Farewell Address to the Troops. After some minor alterations by Lee, Marshall then wrote out in his fine handwriting, three copies for distribution to Corps Commanders for promulgation to his command. Some would say the War was over.

It is considered fitting that this paper should conclude by allowing readers to reflect on those words written by Colonel Charles Marshall, signed by Lee and accepted by his officers and men as a kind and farewell gesture:

GENERAL ORDER No 9

General Lee's Farewell Address to his Army:

Headquarters, Army of Northern Virginia. April 10th, 1865

After four years of arduous service, marked by unsurpassed courage and fortitude, the army of Northern Virginia has been compelled to yield to overwhelming numbers and recourses.

I need not tell the survivors of so many hard fought battles, who have remained steadfast to the last, that I have consented to this result from no distrust of them, but, feeling that valour and devotion could accomplish nothing that could compensate for the loss that would have attended the continuation of the contest, I have determined to avoid the useless sacrifice of those whose past services have endeared them to their countrymen.

By the terms of the agreement, officers and men can return to their homes, and remain there until exchanged. You will take with you the satisfaction that proceeds from the consciousness of duty faithfully performed; and I earnestly pray that a merciful God will extend to you His blessing and protection.

With an increasing adoration of your constancy and devotion to your country, and a grateful remembrance of your kind and generous consideration of my self, I bid you an affectionate farewell.

R.E.Lee, General

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