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Alexandria and Northern Virginia in the Early National Period: The Paradox of Liberalism in a Slave Society

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The American Revolution remains an enigma. Though generations of historians have grappled with the problem of the Revolution's social, economic and cultural meaning, it continues to be a contentious scholarly issue. A simple, though intractable, question underlines most historical writing about the decades after 1776: What were the social and ideological consequences of the American

Revolution? In short, historian J. Franklin Jameson's call to explore "the transforming hand of Revolution" remains as pertinent today as it was when he made it over seventy years ago.¹

Recent attempts to answer this question have focused primarily on the North and/or northern urban centers. Historians have argued that the Revolution gave rise to an expansive, commercial society

which embraced democracy and economic liberalism. In the words of historian Gordon Wood, the Revolution "transformed America," making it "the most liberal, democratic, and modern nation in the world." In short, the Revolution gave birth to a burgeoning commercial and democratic society, peopled by individuals who enthusiastically embraced the marketplace and sought to exploit opportunities created by political independence, a bountiful land, and growing world markets. Even "neo-progressive" or Marxist historians who argue that many--or most--Americans opposed the expansion of the market, concede nonetheless that the Revolution spawned a "bourgeois" social order.²

However, these recent studies largely ignore half the nation the Revolution created. While historians have ably traced the social consequences of the Revolution in the North, they have paid relatively little attention to changes in the Southern states. When mentioned at all, the South is usually described as a "precapitalist" or "anticapitalist niche" that stood apart from the rest of American social and economic life because of the survival of slavery and the social and political authority of a

"leisured," honor-bound planter elite. Indeed, Wood traces the origins of the Civil War to the differences engendered between the sections by the Revolution.³

This teleology, which has led historians to assume that the South was "peculiar" from the birth of the American republic, is historically problematic. In one stroke, 1861 becomes the defining moment of the entire antebellum South, with changing ideological, economic and social conditions, and regional variations assimilated into the section's ultimate destiny. Consequently, it is essential that historians examine the social consequences of the Revolution in the South, in a predominantly rural and agrarian region. They need to ask if the social, economic and cultural transformation which they have found in the North after the Revolution--democratization and the embrace of economic liberalism--can be found in the South.

The only way to chart convincingly the extent of social and economic change is to examine a small area in great detail (all knowledge, as anthropologist Clifford Geertz tells us, is local).⁴ The five counties of northern Virginia--Prince William, Fairfax, Loudoun, Berkeley, Jefferson, and

Frederick--stretching from Alexandria west along the Potomac River to the Shenandoah Valley provides an instructive and representative geographic area for exploring change in the Revolutionary era. The region was an integrated economic and political unit small enough to study in great detail, but large enough to trace broader cultural or ideological changes.

However, studying a slave-holding region of the South raises a new and equally important question: "What was the nature of the Southern slave society and economy?" This second question is perhaps more historically compelling, for early national Alexandria and northern Virginia do not accord with the dominant historical interpretations of a "lazy South."⁵ Here was one region of the South that was far more socially and economically complex than historians have generally recognized, for here was a region which exhibited both entrepreneurial and traditional

features.

Anecdotal evidence reveals the complexity of northern Virginia's social and cultural life. Traditional southern social institutions and attitudes certainly existed in the region after the Revolution. Most notably, in the thirty years after 1780 the region's slave population remained over 20 percent of the total population.⁶ More striking, many planters adopted

paternalistic attitudes towards their slaves, believing it was their Christian duty to treat their black servants humanely. Recording his thoughts about "ye Rights and Obligations" of masters and servants in his commonplace book, slaveholder Isaac Hite of

Frederick County argued that masters have a "civil Power over their Domestics," but it must be "managed consistently with Humanity." He believed, for example, that a master could sell a "servant" only with the servant's consent, and that "Correction" became "plainly

Richard Bland Lee



onerous" when it went beyond what was "necessary for ye good order of ye Family." Though in practice many slaveholders failed to live up to such standards, the ideal of paternalism thrived. Eliza Collins Lee, the young wife of Richard Bland Lee, marveled that her husband's Fairfax County slaves had "not the trace of slavery amongst them[;] they are all neatly clothed and well fed." So kindly a master was Lee, continued Eliza, that "his presence" among the slaves "defuses joy and gladness around there [sic] Huts."⁷

Lee's experience also reveals the patriarchy of Virginia society; her gender circumscribed her role to nursing the slaves and managing the domestic economy. She was not alone; with few exceptions, southern women played limited roles in the public sphere. And though Eliza Lee made no overt complaints about her status in southern society, other plantation mistresses did. For example, Anne Maria Thornton compared her activities to those of her husband, District of Columbia commissioner William Thornton, and concluded that there was "so little variety in [my] life that I have nothing worth recording" in a journal. But that didn't stop her. After yet another round of socializing and teas with

neighbors, she complained "I have a headache--Tea drinking is very stupid."⁸

Similarly, the region's elite revealed an ardent attachment to the South's honor ethic. Gentlemen in Alexandria and northern Virginia cared profoundly about their public reputations and would take violent action to protect them. For example, when Alexandria merchant David Findlay declared that he "would not entrust the life of a dog in Dr. [Gustavus] Campbell's hands," the doctor required Findlay to issue a public apology or he would "demand . . . that satisfaction to which every gentleman is entitled." Like honor-bound elites throughout the South, Campbell threatened violence to preserve his public reputation. Affairs of honor--many of which ended in violence--were a common feature of life in northern Virginia. Further west, in Bath (or Warm Springs), Berkeley County, Capt. George Thomas challenged "Captain Rutherford" to a duel in 1796, but was refused. Thereafter Thomas publicly boasted that he had "frightened" Rutherford, Major R. S. Blackburn, an associate of Rutherford's, responded to the slight by stabbing and killing Thomas. Despite numerous witnesses to the attack, a

Berkeley County jury acquitted Blackburn. The defense of personal honor justified violence.⁹

Taken alone such incidents (and there were many more like them), reveal that Alexandria and northern Virginia conformed to the traditional honor-bound, paternalistic society described by historians of the South. And who could expect anything less in the region that was home to the man who "exemplified" southern gentility, Robert E. Lee. But as suggestive as these anecdotes are, they provide only a partial picture of Virginia society in the early republic. For while duels and the master-slave relationship defined society, so too did commercial enterprise and an enthusiasm for economic development. Indeed, many of the region's inhabitants believed that northern Virginia and the port of Alexandria were uniquely situated to capitalize on the opportunities afforded by independence.

Three examples tell this side of the story--the story of two apparently contradictory impulses in action. The leading planter of the region, George Washington, provides clear evidence of the early national South's contradictions. Identifying himself first and foremost as a

farmer, Washington recognized that the "welfare and prosperity" of America "depend on the cultivation of our lands." And, like Thomas Jefferson, he believed that "the life of a Husbandman of all others the most delectable," and farming the most "innocent and useful pursuit." In contrast, he was uncertain "whether foreign Commerce is of real advantage to any country," whether the "luxury, effeminacy, and corruptions which are introduced with it are counterbalanced by the convenience which it brings." If an evil, however, Washington concluded that it was an evil that could not be avoided. As he noted to Jefferson, "From Trade our Citizens will not be restrained." The only alternative was to place commerce "under proper regulation, freed as much as possible, from those vices which luxury, the consequence of wealth and power, naturally introduce." And with this Washington plunged headlong into efforts to clear and develop the Potomac River, using his influence to convince the Virginia and Maryland legislatures to incorporate the Potomac River Company in 1784. Indeed, he concluded that the development of commerce between the eastern and western United States was a

positive development which would act as a "cement of interest," binding "all parts of the Union together by indissoluble bonds."¹⁰

Henry "Light-Horse Harry" Lee--Revolutionary War hero, a member of Virginia's planter elite, owner of eighty slaves in 1787, and father of Robert E. Lee--presents another example of these contradictory impulses in action. His correspondence is sprinkled throughout with classical and aristocratic republican rhetoric celebrating agrarian life and denigrating commercial and industrial development. In the early 1790s, for example, Henry Lee attacked Alexander Hamilton's economic policies, fearing that the encouragement of commerce and manufactures would harm the foundation of the American economy--namely, agriculture. Aiding commerce, argued Lee, would only give rise to a class of "stock-jobbers" who would "appropriate" "the circulating cash of the community" to activities "unproductive to society." More dangerous still, he believed Hamilton's encouragement of manufacturing would lead to a "debasement of" the American population. The "stout[,] muscular plough man full of health[,] full of comfort with

his eight or ten blooming children," argued Lee, would be succeeded by "squat, bloated fellows[,] all belly and no legs who can walk but two miles in the hour & manufacture a little." "Thank heaven," he concluded, "we are by situation[,] genius and habit agricultural." "I ardently pray that the United States may to the latest ages continue to possess the character & enjoy the blessings of tillers of the earth."¹¹

Yet at the same time that Lee lamented Hamilton's policies, he was involved in an economic project which he hoped would lead to the creation of a commercial and manufacturing town--to be called Matildaville after his wife--at the Great Falls of the Potomac. In 1788 Lee purchased a 500 acre tract of land at the Falls, convinced that the land's location made it perfect "for a town." Lee's optimism was based upon the tract's strategic location at the site of the Potomac River Company's most ambitious water navigation project. In 1784, prompted by Washington, the Virginia and Maryland legislatures incorporated the Potomac Company to open the Potomac River to boat navigation by deepening the river bed and building canals around the worst impediments. Potomac

navigation, its supporters argued, would enable farmers bordering the river to bring their produce easily to market; in addition, the river would provide the most direct route to the trans-Appalachian west. In 1788 the company was poised to begin construction of a canal to circumvent the Great Falls, and Lee's tract was to be the site of the canal. "The spot," Lee concluded, "is magnificent."¹²



Light Horse Harry Lee

Lee believed that the land at the Great Falls would become a center of trade and that land values would rise sharply when the Potomac Company finished its canal. But this was more than simple land speculation. Lee foresaw at least three sources of potential profit: "The singular

fitness of the situation for every species of water works, merchants mills, Forges, Slitting and Plating [sic] Mills, sawmills, &c."; "the importance of the backcountry"; and "the convenience of the place for a manufacturing town." In short, Lee anticipated an industrial town where the produce of the backcountry--primarily wheat--would be processed and shipped, and where the canal works constructed by the Potomac Company would provide a reliable power source for a number of industrial operations. Lee apparently had no fears that the mills and forges he planned would produce a work force of "squat bloated fellows." Indeed, there is little indication that he perceived any discrepancy between his political views and his business project.¹³

Other northern Virginians reveal a similar tension between their stated beliefs and their actions. James Rumsey, a resident of Berkeley County in the Valley, is most famous as the inventor of an early steamboat. But like many "projectors" (or inventors) in early America he was a jack of all trades. Before being hired as superintendent of the Potomac Company, Rumsey had worked as a blacksmith, a country merchant, a hotel

proprietor, and a building contractor. Rumsey's experiments with various types of boats began in the early 1780s. By the middle of the decade he had devoted himself entirely to the development of his inventions, which soon included new designs for steam-powered saw and grist mills, and a new steam-powered method of raising water. A successful trial of the steamboat on the Potomac River at Shepherdstown in December 1787 convinced Rumsey of the efficacy of this design, but a shortage of capital propelled him to Philadelphia in March 1788. Armed with letters of recommendation from Washington and Thomas Johnson of Maryland he secured the support of a number of influential backers (including Benjamin Franklin), and formed the Rumseyan Society to raise funds for the further improvement of his inventions. The company decided that Rumsey could best succeed in England, and in May 1788 he departed for London where he resided until his death in 1792.¹⁴

Rumsey's commitment to technological innovation carried him far from his rural home; moreover, it promised to transform the region's agrarian way of life. Still, Rumsey

counseled his brother-in-law, merchant Charles Morrow, to "sell your property, goods and all, for a good farm." "After all is Said and done . . . it is the most comfortable life to be a contented farmer." In contrast, Rumsey expressed his dismay with Philadelphia where he found himself surrounded by "mostly Leaches and Sharks." London was even worse; that city's "men of genius" were nothing but "a Set of mean pilferers [sic]." London, he noted, was "the capotal [sic] of the world . . . pocessed [sic] with [an] agreea[ble] proportion of all the knowledge thereof," but it was "without much of its Virtue," for here "almost anything Can be accomplished by Bribery." In the midst of such corruption, Rumsey romanticized "Liveing [sic] in the peacefull [sic] shades of Berkley [sic]." However, he never returned to Virginia. Instead, he chased the fame and fortune that a successful steamboat would bring. Like Lee, Rumsey perceived no inconsistency between his behavior and his stated preferences.¹⁵

The contradiction between what white northern Virginians of the early republic said and what they did--and such examples could be multiplied--raises questions about the dominant

historical explanations of the society, economy and culture of the South because these interpretations fail to capture the complexity of a region full of many regions. Or as historian William Freehling would have it, there is not *a South*, but many Souths defined by both geography and time.¹⁶ Even more problematic, the dominant historical explanations tend to downplay the extent of social, economic, political and cultural change between 1790 and 1860. Instead, for many historians 1861 has become the defining moment for the entire antebellum South.

In the forty years after 1780, Alexandria and northern Virginia belie such assumptions, for here commercial enterprise and enthusiasm for economic development thrived. The most significant example of market responsiveness was the region's shift from tobacco to wheat, a change which began before the Revolution but accelerated dramatically after 1780 as new overseas markets opened. Equally significant, changes in the price of tobacco and wheat convinced farmers to abandon their traditional staple. After 1788 tobacco prices dropped to 13 shillings per hundredweight (cwt.) and remained at that level into the nineteenth century. In

contrast, wheat and flour prices began rising slowly in the early 1770s, then shot up sharply in the 1780s in response to rising demand in southern Europe and the Caribbean. In 1784 a barrel of flour was 31 shillings; by the mid-1790s the price had risen to 84 shillings. Prices dropped in the late-1790s, but flour never fell below 30 shillings before 1807. For the vast majority of planters, switching to what made enormous economic sense.¹⁷

And switch they did. Export and inspection records from the port of Alexandria indicate that northern Virginians seized the opportunities presented by independence. The records reveal two trends. First, after the mid-1780s tobacco exports declined from a peak of 7,000 hogsheads per year to between 3,500 and 4,000. Second, flour exports rose consistently (despite yearly fluctuations) after 1783. In that year northern Virginia farmers exported 5,000 barrels; twenty years later exports peaked at 100,000 barrels.¹⁸

Remarkably, the switch in staples occurred without any change in the composition of the region's labor force. Despite the seasonal fluctuations in labor required to produce wheat, the slave population remained over 20 percent of the total

population. To employ their labor force profitably throughout the planting year, planters and farmers varied their output, producing in addition to wheat significant amounts of corn for export. Corn suited a slave economy because it require regular tending. By integrating wheat and corn production (and limited amounts of tobacco), most planters managed to keep their slaves employed on a year-round basis. And if all else failed, planters and farmers could always hire out their excess slave labor. In fact, significant slave hiring took place within northern Virginia. The labor needs of the region--from agricultural workers to artisans, from wood cutters to wet nurses--could be supplied from this source. Perhaps largest employers of hired slaves in the region, however, were the transportation improvement companies formed after the Revolution to link the wheat-producing lower valley to the port of Alexandria.¹⁹

Without adequate transportation facilities, no amount of foreign demand could make grain farming profitable. Consequently, as farmers to the west of Alexandria expanded their grain production, growing numbers of northern Virginians worked to improve the region's

transportation infrastructure--and in particular, its rivers and roads. The most ambitious of these projects was the attempt to clear the Potomac River. As Thomas Johnson noted in the early 1770s, a cleared Potomac would "greatly increase" the "Export of wheat" from the region's farmers to Europe, where a rising "Demand" had led to a dramatic increase in "price."²⁰ The Potomac Company partially cleared the river bed for 218 miles--from Georgetown to Fort Cumberland, Maryland--and constructed two canals at the Great and Little Falls of the Potomac. When construction began in 1785 (it was completed in 1802), these canals represented the most complicated engineering feat undertaken to that time in the United States. Though it never managed to remove all obstacles from the river, by 1826 when the company was absorbed by the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal Company, it had expended over \$700,000 on construction--money that was injected directly into the local economy.²¹

The river project's slow progress prompted efforts to improve the region's overland routes to the West. The rise in grain farming after the Revolution increased dramatically the wagon

traffic from the Shenandoah Valley to Alexandria. The rise in trade overwhelmed the local road system maintained by the county courts. In 1802 Alexandria merchants and local farmers devised a solution when they organized a private joint-stock company, the Little River Turnpike Company, to construct a paved road from Alexandria into western Loudoun County. In doing so, northern Virginians were following the example of Pennsylvania where a private company had successfully constructed a turnpike between Pennsylvania and Lancaster in 1792. The turnpike company garnered broad support and by 1812 completed a paved road between Alexandria and the Little River in Loudoun County. From its earliest days of operation the road attracted a heavy traffic from the Shenandoah Valley, a traffic which boosted the regional economy and soon turned a profit for shareholders (a rare feat, indeed, for internal improvement companies in the early republic). A traveler heading west from Alexandria in 1820 has left the best description of this booming trade. In one day he observed close to one hundred "waggons [sic] conveying flour to" the town. The road, he continued, "was full from morning till long

after dark. . . . [I]t appeared that it was to have no end."²²

But economic development in northern Virginia extended beyond the construction of a more elaborate transportation network. In contrast to tobacco, wheat required processing before it could be transported overseas. Thus, the shift to wheat stimulated the establishment of a range of new subsidiary enterprises. These activities clustered at geographically favorable sites, spurring the growth of existing towns in the region, and encouraging local landholders to create seventeen new towns and villages after 1780. As a result, by 1810 almost 20 percent of the region's population lived in incorporated towns. Alexandria itself had over 8,000 inhabitants in 1820.²³

The process of economic development in northern Virginia followed a logical progression. Because wheat spoiled in high heat and humidity, it needed to be milled into flour and packed into barrels for overseas transport. In response, merchants and farmers constructed numerous mills throughout the region. Tench Coxe, a tireless booster of American industry, could report in 1790 that "Virginia appears to be making greater progress in merchant mills than any state in

the union." Milling, in turn, generated additional economic activity in the region's towns. Coopers constructed barrels to transport the flour, wagoners conveyed the flour to market, and wheelwrights and wagon-makers provided support services.²⁴

Grains were also processed into spirits or bread. In the Valley numerous distilleries appeared, while in Winchester and Alexandria, the region's two largest towns, breweries produced ale for local consumption. These manufactures, in turn, provided business for pipe and pump makers, and copper and tin smiths who built and maintained the apparatus. In addition, numerous bakeries appeared in both towns to supply a growing urban population, while in Alexandria the production of "biscuits" and "shipbreads" became an important export staple. The production of grains also encouraged the raising of livestock, which in turn spurred the manufacture of leather goods.

This process of economic development occurred throughout northern Virginia, but Alexandria best reveals the nature and extent of the change. Prior to the Revolution when the town's economy revolved around tobacco only limited

manufacturing and processing took place. In contrast, by 1795 26 percent of the town's tithables were employed in manufacturing. By 1808 manufacturers comprised 39 percent of the town's tithables, and almost half of them made their living directly aiding in the transport and processing of grains and livestock.²⁵

As the regional economy developed increasing numbers of northern Virginians became convinced that financial institutions were needed to facilitate trade and investment. Indeed, most politically active residents of the region--at least after the 1790s--saw banks as crucial agents of economic development. Accordingly, in 1792 the merchants of Alexandria incorporated the Bank of Alexandria; by 1820 the town was home to seven banks with a capital of over \$2.2 million. These banks supported a broad range of economic endeavors--agriculture, industry, internal improvement projects, and commercial activities all benefitted from the increasing availability of bank capital. The broadening access to capital reveals that as in the northern states there was a "democratization" of banking in northern Virginia. When

individuals found themselves unable to obtain bank credit, their usual response was to create new institutions to service their needs.²⁶

Equally important, white northern Virginians displayed a broad interest in new technologies, mechanical invention and agricultural innovation. The region's inhabitants believed that independence offered new opportunities to exploit the resources of the nation and develop technological solutions to the economic, geographic and social hurdles which obstructed the progress of regional prosperity. The Potomac Company's canals and the Little River Turnpike Company's road were among the most complicated engineering projects undertaken to that time in the United States. Northern Virginia was also home to craftsmen-turned-inventors such as James Rumsey, James Deneale (who invented a corn kiln and thresher), and Richard Claiborne (who invented a boat paddle). These "projectors" were committed to developing utilitarian inventions and received enthusiastic support from local inhabitants. And after abandoning tobacco for wheat, northern Virginia's farmers closely followed news about agricultural

improvement and contributed to a growing national discourse on the subject. Most notably, farmers such as John Binns of Loudoun County and George Redd of Frederick County espoused and publicized the latest agricultural techniques--deep plowing, crop rotation, and the use of fertilizers. In short, northern Virginians displayed a growing fascination with utilitarian inventions and innovations which promised to promote the economic development of the region and the nation--despite their commitment to slavery. Thus what historian Carroll Pursell has called the "technological euphoria" of the early republic was not simply a northern phenomenon, the inhabitants of northern Virginia fully shared in the nation's enthusiasm.²⁷

In sum, the character of northern Virginia and Alexandria in the years after the Revolution complicates the historical view of the American South. For what is most notable about the region in the early republic is how its inhabitants combined commerce and cockfights, industry and indolence, a projecting and a paternalistic spirit. Looking at the South from the perspective of Civil War and the cotton economy historians have chosen to emphasize the traditional aspects

of Southern society. However, to do so is to foist a teleology on the South--and northern Virginia--and risk losing a complete picture of a complex region. In the early republic northern Virginians celebrated independence and the commercial opportunities it afforded. They also remained ardently attached to the institution of slavery and a patriarchal social order. Moreover, few residents of the region sensed any contradiction between their paternalistic and profit-oriented impulses. While the economy boomed--as it did with periodic disruptions to 1820--slavery and the South's traditional values appeared no impediment to economic development. In the years after the Revolution, northern Virginians--led by the inhabitants of Alexandria--forged a distinctive variant of economic liberalism.

Thus, it should come as no surprise to find a region in which planters converted to wheat in response to overseas market demands; in which entrepreneurs established towns and mills and banks; in which merchants eagerly competed for the trade of local farmers; in which farmers and merchants invested their profits into enterprises designed to modernize the regional economy; and in which

"projecters" displayed an avid interest in technological and agricultural innovation. As for "Light-Horse" Harry Lee, he celebrated the new age, pointing to the affluence that commerce and trade brought to the region. Linked to world markets by the Potomac, the "industrious . . . inhabitants of the So. Potomac," he believed, were "the most wealthy set of husbandman in proportion to the extent of the country within these States." Surveying the region from Mount Vernon, Washington could only agree. "The spirit of Trade pervades these states," he concluded, and "is not to be restrained."²⁸

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ENDNOTES

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24. Crothers, "Projecting Spirit," 240-309; Tench Coxe, A View of the United States of America . . . (Philadelphia, 1794), 303. See also, Carville Earle and Ronald Hoffman, "Staple Crops and Urban Development in the Eighteenth-Century South," Perspectives in American History 10 (1976), 7-78.

25. Crothers, "Projecting Spirit," 240-309.

26. Crothers, "Banks and Economic Development in Post-Revolutionary Northern Virginia, 1790-1812," Business History Review 73 (Spring 1999), 1-39. On the "democratization of banking see, Edwin J. Perkins, American Public Finance and Financial Services, 1700-1815 (Columbus: University of Ohio Press, 1994), 1-10, 106-136, 266-281; Paul A. Gilje, "The Rise of Capitalism in the Early Republic," Journal of the Early Republic 16 (Summer 1996), 162-164; and Wood, Radicalism of the American Revolution, 316-322.

27. Crothers, "Projecting Spirit," 373-450; Carroll Pursell, The Machine in America: A Social History of Technology (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 48. See also, Brook Hindle, The Pursuit of Science in Revolutionary America, 1735-1789 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1956), 219-385.

28. Lee to Madison, September 8, 1789, Madison Papers, LC; Washington to James Warren, October 7, 1785, Writings of Washington, 28: 28-29.

Civil War Vignettes

compiled by T. Michael Miller

Foot-ball--this game seems of late to have become universally popular in this city. In all the streets, in the market, on the wharf, on the commons, everywhere--football--football. Men play it, boys play it and just now it seems to be "the thing."
[T h e L o c a l N e w s : N o v e m b e r 6 , 1 8 6 1]

During the occupation of the **Courthouse** as a barracks by the United States soldiers, some damage was done to various portions of the building, both interior and exterior. The Judge of the Military Court has recently had a careful examination made of all these damages, and had them repaired.. Other portions of the building and walls injured before the beginning of the present difficulties have also been repaired so that the Courthouse is now in a better condition than it has been for some time. [The Alexandria and Alexandria County Courthouse was located on the west side of the 300 block of North Columbus Street]

Child Run Over by Careless Artilleryman -- On yesterday afternoon about 5 o'clock, an artilleryman passed up King St. on horseback at a very rapid pace, and when in front of the Fire Insurance Company office, near St. Asaph street, ran over a little child. The lad, a boy eight years of age, is a son of Mr. John Lloyd, residing on Franklin St. near Yeates' garden. He was picked up immediately after the accident and carried into the shop of Mr. J. F. Weadon, where his injuries were attended to.

These proved to be wounds in the forehead and in the mouth, somewhat severe, but not at all dangerous. The artilleryman was at once arrested by the guard and punished for culpable carelessness. [The Local News: November 12, 1861]

A huge **balloon** drawn by a large number of men, passed through several streets of the town, yesterday afternoon, en route for the camps and attracted much attention... [The Local News: November 14, 1861]

A large **fire** broke out about midnight of the 8th, at the three story brick store on King St. between Sarepta Hall and Exchange Block. The flames made great headway and before the progress of the fire was stayed, Sarepta Hall and the Exchange block were destroyed. [North side of the 400 block of King Street] The establishments of Messrs. Henry Cook, Coles & Ramsay, Corse & Co., James Entwisle & Son, James M. Stewart, D. Haas and others were embraced in the conflagration, the total loss being estimated in the neighborhood of \$150,000--the largest destruction of property by fire in Alexandria since the great fire of 1827. The Local News: March 9, 1862]

Accidents: Several accidents have lately taken place during the target firing at the fortifications near this town. On one instance a Negro woman was killed and in another a ball passed through Mr. Bright's house in the neighborhood. The Alexandria Gazette: [hereafter cited as **AG**] May 14, 1862

Two colored persons have been arrested in this place, charged with violating the laws of Virginia, in keeping a school for Negroes. The arrested persons promising to dismiss the school were discharged by the mayor. [**AG**: May 22, 1862]

A number of idle and mischievous boys are prowling every day about the gardens and lots in the suburbs of the town, shooting birds, endangering the lives of citizens, trampling down, the growing vegetables, and breaking the fences. [**AG**: June 2, 1862]

Boys of the town not going to school--Let it be remembered that reference is here made to the open and shameless gambling with cards carried on around the suburbs of the town--the petty thieving and pilfering of the bands of young "forty thieves"--the cursing, swearing and drinking of mere boys and the absolute vagabondage of numbers. -- A few examples would be of great service--for the looseness of restraint which has prevailed for years past in a greater or less degree, is more perceptible now than ever and more productive of evil consequences. [**AG**: June 7, 1862]

The Fourth of July was one of the most delightful days experienced this summer in the temperature and weather; the day was, after the early morning hours, bright and clear; and so continued until the sun went down. The Union celebration of

the occasion passed off with spirit and without an accident. National salutes were fired in town and from the adjoining fortifications; U.S. flags were displayed from the shipping and at various points in the town; the troops under Col. Gregory paraded and made a handsome appearance. The military and a civic procession escorted the Reader and Orator to the Lyceum Hall and in front of that building the exercises took place. ...Prayers was offered by Rev. Mr. Lanahan--the Declaration of Independence was read by Gilbert S. Minor and an address delivered by Wm.T. Wiley. The audience was then dismissed and Col. Gregory previous to the dismissal of the soldiers made them a brief address. A dinner was given in the afternoon at the City Hotel, when a number of toasts were drunk and speeches delivered. At night there were brilliant displays of rockets, and bonfires--and throughout the day and night and on the eve of the 4th, there was a continual firing of guns and pistols by parties celebrating on their own hook. Numbers of citizens went on picnic excursions out of town. The day was, also, celebrated by the troops at some of the forts and camps near this place; and the employees at the Quartermaster's Department had an entertainment and gave a handsome show of fire rockets which were much admired. [AG: July 5, 1862]

Fire. Last night about twelve o'clock the restaurant of Mrs. Ann English (widow of the late James English) on Royal St. was consumed by fire. The fire originated in the third story, in the servant's room and before the flames could be extinguished the interior of the building was destroyed together with nearly all the furniture, and a great deal of clothing. Mrs. E's dwelling in front of the restaurant was somewhat damaged and during the fire many things were stolen among them a trunk containing a quantity of silver ware. The fire was accidental. ...This was the oldest restaurant in the city and has enjoyed a high reputation. [AG: August 25, 1862]

Serious Accident -- A soldier had his right leg cut off just above the ankle while lying on the railroad track at the eastern entrance to the tunnel, on Wilkes St. last night about 9 o'clock. He was under the influence of liquor and in attempting to cross the track, fell and laid with his leg across the rail when a locomotive passed over and cut it off. The soldier was taken to a hospital at once. [AG: August 26, 1862]

President Abraham Lincoln, Secretary of War Stanton and Gen. Heintzelman and staff on Wednesday [June 10] paid a visit to Alexandria and, in company with Gen. Slough, visited the fortifications... [AG: June 12, 1863]

Swearing -- The most revolting and disgusting sounds that reach the ear in this city of Alexandria, are the horrid oaths and villainous blasphemy which are uttered from the mouths of many persons who pass along the public streets, or congregate in public places. Especially are young men and boys guilty of the low, and vulgar vice, of cursing and swearing. Ingenuity seems to be racked to extort new phrases of blasphemy. ...Ladies cannot walk the streets without being shocked with language which it is difficult to believe could have emanated from anywhere else than the

infernal regions. ... [AG: June 23, 1863]

Embalming -- Last night I visited the embalming establishment of Messrs. Brown and Alexander. Stretched upon a board awaiting the coming of the ambulance was the body of Gen. Kearney. The pale but marked features changed only in their appearance by their unnatural color, proved how speedily the fatal ball had sped its way.

The process of embalmment was by making an incision four inches long in the femoral artery, inside of the left thigh and injecting there a certain liquid, which, in three hours permeate every vein in the body and will render it of a yellowish tinge, but marble like in hardness. [General Philip Kearney, a federal soldier, was killed at the Battle of Chantilly near Fairfax Virginia on September 1, 1862. He was interred at Arlington Cemetery.] [AG: September 6, 1863]

I.J. Peverill -- Embalmer and Undertaker -- No. 60 S. Fairfax Street. -- wooden and metallic coffins at the lowest cash prices...[AG: January 7, 1864]

Alexandria -- Alexandria was one of the most delightful of old foggy towns, when water was delivered at your door from water carts at two cents per pail. The retrocession gave it an impulse upward and water and gas were introduced, the railroad built, a number of fine dwellings and some extensive stores. But the war chilled the growing enterprise of the place, destroyed the social life and annihilated its trade. Of late it has been picking up. Business has largely increased, the population almost doubled, and the enormous supplies of the Government for the Army of the Potomac being transshipped, have naturally drawn in with them both population and trade. It is said that since General Slough has been military governor 600 new buildings have gone up. Eleven sheds have been erected to protect the locomotives of the Orange and Alexandria R.R., one of which will contain 40 locomotives. The town wears the look of a place gradually converting its slow, easy going habits into more energetic business aspects. [AG: January 12, 1864]

Prostitution -- Several females have recently been brought before the mayor in this place for keeping disorderly houses and have had their establishments closed up. [AG: January 19, 1864] ... The military authorities have directed that all houses of bad character in which soldiers are harbored or allowed admission are to be broken up and the women living in the same banished or otherwise punished. [AG: June 18, 1864]

The **Second Presbyterian Church** in this place used for a U.S. hospital for upwards of two years is now being fitted up for barracks for the Invalid Corps, now on guard duty here... [AG: February 16, 1864]

The police yesterday afternoon made a descent upon the boys, white and black who are in the habit of congregating at the upper end of Prince st. and are having

the occasion passed off with spirit and without an accident. National salutes were fired in town and from the adjoining fortifications; U.S. flags were displayed from the shipping and at various points in the town; the troops under Col. Gregory paraded and made a handsome appearance. The military and a civic procession escorted the Reader and Orator to the Lyceum Hall and in front of that building the exercises took place. ...Prayers was offered by Rev. Mr. Lanahan--the Declaration of Independence was read by Gilbert S. Minor and an address delivered by Wm.T. Wiley. The audience was then dismissed and Col. Gregory previous to the dismissal of the soldiers made them a brief address. A dinner was given in the afternoon at the City Hotel, when a number of toasts were drunk and speeches delivered. At night there were brilliant displays of rockets, and bonfires--and throughout the day and night and on the eve of the 4th, there was a continual firing of guns and pistols by parties celebrating on their own hook. Numbers of citizens went on picnic excursions out of town. The day was, also, celebrated by the troops at some of the forts and camps near this place; and the employees at the Quartermaster's Department had an entertainment and gave a handsome show of fire rockets which were much admired. [AG: July 5, 1862]

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stone battles and arrested a number of them. This morning they were taken before the Mayor who dealt with them according to law--several were fined and others sent to the work house...[AG: March 31, 1864]

Dumping Grounds -- The Provost Marshal of this place has by order of General Slough, directed that, "in future, carcasses, manures and all other refuse matter must be deposited on the grounds near the mouth of Hunting Creek, south of the city. All officers and men on duty as patrols, guards or policemen, in or around the city are ordered to arrest any person caught in the act of throwing filth into the streets, and all officers on the guard lines will see that no refuse matter is allowed to pass their lines or be deposited near them. [AG: May 18, 1864]

The U.S. Hospitals in Alexandria -- A writer in the Washington Chronicle gives a sketch of the hospitals in this place. He says: The **First Division Gen. Hospital** has its headquarters in Alexandria at the corner of Fairfax and Cameron Streets.[formerly 121 N. Fairfax Street--now razed] The headquarters are known as the Mansion House Hospital and occupy a building which was formerly a hotel, the largest in Virginia. It has been used as a hospital for 2 1/2 years and we were told, a portion of it was once occupied as a slave market. As a hotel it was capable of accommodating 500 people. A very convenient arrangement in this hospital is the presence of a sort of dumb waiter, by which not only provisions are transported from story to story with dispatch and promptitude, but also by which the wounded can carefully be raised or lowered on stretchers from one floor to another.

[We have never before heard that any portion of the building was ever used as a slave market. It was formerly the Bank of Alexandria.]

The **Mansion Street Hospital** is the largest in Alexandria. Some two months ago a tragic incident occurred here. One of the patients who was insane managed to get through a window in his ward and catch hold of the eaves of the building. There he hung for a little space and finally fell upon the balustrade below, injuring himself so seriously as to die in a few hours. He was a resident of Syracuse.

The **Second Division General Headquarters** are at the [N.W.] corner of Prince and Columbus Streets. The hospitals which we visited formerly belonged to the Rev. Dr. Johnston [806 Prince Street] who went to Richmond where for all that is known to the contrary, he yet resides. The house is commodious and for a confiscated dwelling is very fine. It is known as the Prince St. hospital. That and the **Fowle Hospital**, [811 Prince Street] opposite belong to the same division.

These mansions are known as the **Johnston and Powell [Fowle] Houses**, Mr. Powell (?) was formally a merchant, and like Mr. Johnston went to Richmond. Almost opposite this Prince St. Hospital lies a mansion and garden which, if we understood our informant belongs to a relative of the late owner of the Johnston House. The

garden is thrown open to the use of the soldiers. It is a beautiful and spacious garden, affording a delightful place of repose to those who have tasted the dangers and distress of battlefields and have experienced all the unutterable pangs which under the most favorable circumstances beset hospital life. The sun was gloating over the bright beauty, of the wide spreading verdure when we took a peep within this garden, and the air which lazily stirred the million leaves was tinted with the attenuated perfume of young flowers. The lady who owns these grounds may be pardoned if she felt at first afraid that some of their beauty might be marred by the tread of careless feet or the desecration of ruthless hands. She has had, however, no cause to fear this. The soldiers have respected the privileges she has accorded them. They look and enjoy, but handle not, and leave the grounds as inviting and inviolate as when they entered them.

The **Third Division General Headquarters** are situated on Washington Street between Queen and Cameron streets. We visited the McVeigh Hospital. [N.E. corner of Cameron and N. St. Asaph Streets]

Alexandria, though it does not give the visitor an impression of being a peculiarly charming locality ought to be an excellent place for a patient to recover in. It is a very quiet place. No brawls and bickerings yesterday disturbed the streets. Perhaps this is partly due to the prevalence of a spirit analogous to that evinced by a good looking young fellow whom we passed and whom we over heard remarking to his companion that even if he had the chance, he wouldn't drink as much as he could pour into a canary bird's ear. Every street and lane and alley in Alexandria, holding communication with the river is blocked up with stockades, to keep out the rebels, and which were put up to forearm Alexandria against the approach of Stuart's cavalry. At the [S.E.] corner of Fairfax and Prince streets, an old but commodious building is being rejuvenated and transformed into a prison for deserters. [The Green Furniture Factory] [AG: May 20, 1864]

Improvements -- In walking along King Street especially on Saturday nights, the old resident is struck with the change which has come over the scene. The crowded pavements, the glare of the shops, the glitter of the ice cream saloons, the music from the theaters, the rattle of the billiard balls, the crowds at the restaurants, all tell of the difference between "now and then." [AG: May 31, 1864]

Wandering Cows -- A number of cows grazing near Battery Rogers were taken up yesterday by military order and sent to the Provost Marshal's office from whence they were ordered to the pen at the government slaughter house. Quite a scene ensued among the owners, when the seizure of the cows was known, and all interested busied themselves in having their property restored. After explanations, the cows were returned to their owners and the excitement subsided. The grass on the commons, around the town now is excellent, and if the cows have to be kept up, hereafter, it will be a serious loss and disadvantage to those who own them and

supply milk to many families. ... The battery, at the southern end of the town, is now a point of attraction to visitors, especially as a fine band of music plays there every afternoon. [Battery Rodgers was a large U.S. military fortification located nearly one half mile below the wharves and populous portion of Alexandria along the waterfront block bounded by Jefferson, Union, Lee, and Green Streets. The fort included a hospital, slaughter houses and barracks. Of particular interest however, were the five 200 pound Parrott rifles and an enormous fifteen-inch Rodman gun which were mounted at the Battery. The Rodman gun was the heaviest cannon utilized in the defenses of Washington and it alone weighed twenty-five tons. [AG: May 28, 1864] "...The firing of the big gun at Battery Rodgers tomorrow morning at 10 o'clock will attract a crowd. A target placed in the river is to be fired at..." [AG: June 16, 1864]

City Burial Grounds -- As there are no enclosures around several of the cemeteries, it is to be expected that cattle will enter the grounds of their own accord in search of food. But, it is another matter to see a man drive his cows in among the graves and watch and keep them there as a better pasture than he can procure on the commons....Let some respect be shown the last resting places of our former friends and relatives and let not what the Germans call "God's Acres" be changed into a cow pasture where cattle are herded and kept...No change in and about Alexandria since the war has been as great or as melancholy as that in the appearance of the burial grounds. An old resident who is fast becoming a stranger in his own land and living among strangers feels this most sensibly. [AG: June 29, 1864]

The Village --The wall that surrounded the handsome old residence in the Village and which has stood for more than half a century as sound as when it was first built, has hardly a brick left in place, it has been pulled down and the materials used in the construction of adjoining houses. Thus, one by one, the old landmarks are disappearing. The residence at the Village, as our olden readers will recollect, was once owned and occupied for many years by the late Judge Cranch. [AG: September 8, 1864] [Ethelyn Cox writes in Historic Alexandria, Virginia Street by Street that "Judge Cranch was appointed an Assistant Judge of the Circuit Court of the U.S. for the District of Columbia in 1801, and Chief Judge, in 1806." Cranch was a nephew of Abigail Adams, and the great-grandfather of T.S. Eliot, the poet and critic. The Village was a settlement located just outside the corporate limits of Alexandria in Fairfax County. It was bounded by Columbus, Alfred, Franklin and Jefferson Streets.]



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**President Abraham Lincoln Reviews
the Troops near Shuter's Hill**

by T. Michael Miller

On October 22, 1862, the Alexandria Gazette announced that "President Lincoln passed through this city this morning, on his way to witness the review of Sickles' division, which took place this afternoon."

Another entry in the same paper reported "This afternoon, at 2 o'clock, the brigade of Gen. D(aniel) E. Sickles¹ were to be reviewed by Gens. Banks² and Heintzleman.³ The review, will be about a mile and a half from Alexandria, near Fort Ellsworth."⁴

On the following day, October 23, 1862, the Gazette described the military evolutions near Fort Ellsworth: "The review of U.S.

¹ Daniel E. Sickles (b. 1825; d. 1914) was a Union General, an attorney and a diplomat who also served as a U.S. Senator, and New York State legislator. Sickles obtained notoriety when he shot Philip Barton Key, son of Francis Scott Key, in Lafayette Square. Key was having an affair with Sickles' wife. During the subsequent trial, Sickles was one of the first defendants to invoke the concept of "temporary insanity." In the Civil War he commanded a brigade composed of New York troops until he was made a major general in November 1862. Sickles was criticized for his role at the Battle of Gettysburg in July 1863 when he advanced beyond his assigned position losing about half his men in the conflict. After the war General Sickles purchased land in New York City which was later transformed into Central Park.

² Major General Nathaniel Banks (born in Massachusetts in 1816; d. 1894) An attorney, he held numerous positions of civic responsibility: Governor of Massachusetts, Speaker of the Massachusetts Legislature, U.S. Senator. During the Civil War, Banks was defeated by Confederate General Stonewall Jackson in the Shenandoah Valley Campaign and at Cedar Mountain in 1862.

³ Major General Samuel Peter Heintzleman (b. 1805; d. 1880) From Pennsylvania Heintzleman graduated from West Point in 1826, and during the Civil War participated in the campaign of First Manassas and that of General McClellan on the Virginia Peninsula. Subsequently, he was "employed successively in command of portions of the Washington defenses...and on court-martial duty." Ezra J. Warner, General in Blue, p. 227.

⁴ The actual review was probably staged in the vicinity of the open flat ground west of Alexandria National Cemetery, later the location of Slough Barracks. (present day Carlyle complex) The convalescent camp housing 10,000 troops was situated on the northwest slope of Shuter's Hill.

troops, near Shuter's Hill, took place yesterday afternoon. President Lincoln and the Secretary of War (Staunton), and other officers, civil and military, were present. The President and his suite reached here, (Alexandria) on their way to the review, about two o'clock, P.M. and were received with military salutes, and escorted to the ground by a detachment of troops. They returned between five and six o'clock P.M., and embarked for Washington."

A more detailed account of events appeared in the Washington Star of October 25, 1862. It wrote:

The review of Gen. Sickles' Division, on Wednesday was one of the most brilliant pageants of the war. Many thousand troops, mostly veterans, were formed in line about 2 o'clock p.m. near the contraband camp by Capt. Hart, Gen. Sickles' A.A.G., to receive the high functionaries who were expected to witness the display. The steamer "Martha Washington," conveying President Lincoln and suite, including Ex-Governor Newell, of New Jersey, reached Alexandria about 2 1/2 o'clock, and the party arrived on the ground about 3, escorted by the Thirty-fourth Regiment of Massachusetts Volunteer, Col. Welles, a squadron of cavalry, and a battery. The review was conducted by Major General Banks, and in company with the President were Major Gens. Heintzelman and Cadwallder, with their full Staffs, and Brigadier Generals Asbooth, Ager, Slough, Carr, Kadee, and many officers of lesser rank, making nearly two hundred mounted officers of all grades. The presence of the celebrated Marine Band added greatly to the interest of the occasion.

The review passed off most happily, and was pronounced by the President and Gen. Banks equal to any they had ever witnessed. Each man seemed in his place, and to know his duty. Great enthusiasm was manifested, the soldiers cheering fondly for the President and the Union. Gen. Sickles won much admiration for his soldierly bearing.

The force is composed of Hooker's old fighting division of three brigades, replenished by recruiting, and increased by new regiments. The brigades are commanded by Generals Carr and Patterson, and Colonel Brewster. A large concourse was present of citizens and ladies of Washington, on horseback and in carriages.

After the review, Gen. Sickles escorted the President with a squadron of cavalry, and all the Generals and their Staffs, through the convalescent camp, stragglers' camp, and camp for paroled prisoners, the latter of whom some 2,000 were reviewed, and seemed in good spirits but wanted clothes. Enthusiasm prevailed everywhere. About dusk the President was escorted to the boat and took his leave.