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History Remembered, Inc.

*A Michigan Civil War Sesquicentennial
History Partner*

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Michigan Civil War Sesquicentennial Circular



Michigan Remembers the Civil War -

The moment I said I was going to send out multiple issues of the circular in April, I took ill with viral bronchitis (which I think my wife generously shared with me) and was unable to get back to my computer until Friday.

So, in spite of a week delay, here is the second issue for April--which will take us up to April 13. Items covered include the evacuation of Richmond by CSA President Jefferson Davis, the occupation of the City by Union forces, Lincoln's visit to the Confederate capital city, and the surrender of Lee's army to Grant.

I received a number of emails from readers who pointed out that the Civil War didn't end on April 9, 1865 but in 1866. In the

next issue, I'll have some interesting information regarding this.

Thank you for your support in remembering Michigan in the Civil War.

Bruce B. Butgereit,
Executive Director
History Remembered, Inc.
Grand Rapids, MI



Richmond, Virginia -

ROBERT E. LEE

When the Confederate government moved from Montgomery, Alabama to Richmond, Virginia, the quiet, prosperous Virginia state capital was transformed into a noisy, crowded metropolis that, as Furgurson notes, was capital, military headquarters, transportation hub, industrial heart, prison, and hospital center of the Confederacy. It was also a target for the Union army. In fact, the effort for both the Union and the Confederate armies during much of the Civil War in the east focused on capturing or threatening the enemy's capital city. Since the Union capital--Washington D.C.--and the Confederate capital--Richmond--were located a mere 100 miles apart, much of the fighting raged between these two cities. Washington was never seriously threatened by Southern forces, but Richmond experienced more than its share of alarms and battles.

By early spring 1865 the citizens of Richmond had become used to the threat of capture by the Federal army whose soldiers the Richmond newspapers described with great imagination as the vilest of humanity. Richmond had endured some frighteningly close chances, and its inhabitants had grown accustomed to the sound of artillery fire from just ten miles outside the city. Their faith in Robert E. Lee was so complete that they knew beyond the shadow of a doubt that he would never allow Richmond to be taken.

But the time had come for General Lee to consider just such a necessity. He had been able to hold back the Union forces for almost 10 months at Petersburg until his depleted forces were worn out and his supplies dwindled to nothing. Finally, he came to believe that he could best serve the Confederate cause by abandoning its capital. Furgurson records that Lee asked Lt. Gen. John B. Gordon for his opinion as to the Confederate Army's next steps. Gordon advised that the Confederacy should seek peace terms. If the terms were not acceptable, Gordon argued, the army should leave Richmond and Petersburg and retreat south to join Gen. Joseph E. Johnston's army in the Carolinas where their

combined forces could concentrate on defeating the Union army under General William T. Sherman.

Lee had always felt constrained by the duty to defend the Confederate capital. But abandoning it, he knew he could move more freely. So when General Philip Sheridan's troops overran Confederate defenses at Five Forks on Saturday April 1, Lee made the decision to abandon the Petersburg defenses and, in doing so, to abandon Richmond.

Jefferson Davis

Confederate President Jefferson Davis had discussed the probability of quitting Richmond with Lee a month earlier, and he had already sent his wife and family out of the city. Despite these precautions, Davis still believed Lee could stave off disaster. The people of Richmond knew far less of what was happening at the Petersburg lines than Davis, and they went about their business on Saturday ignorant of their impending fate. Frank Lawley, the correspondent for London newspaper, *The Times*, observed: "Upon the afternoon of Saturday, the first of April, Richmond, long familiar with the signs and sounds of war, wore its usual look of unconscious security, and there were few persons acquainted with the fact that Sheridan, with some 6,000 or 8,000 cavalry, supported by Warrens' corps of infantry and artillery, was at work upon General Lee's right, that he was opposed only by a handful of Confederate cavalry, and that momentous events were probably at hand."

"I advise that all preparation be made for leaving Richmond tonight." - General Lee's telegram to President Jefferson Davis

Davis read General Lee's telegram while attending Sunday morning church service. He immediately issued the first orders for the Confederate government's evacuation. Word spread across the city. Lawley reports, "...quickly from mouth to mouth flew the sad tidings that in a few hours Richmond's long and gallant resistance would be over." Officially, the citizens of Richmond did not hear anything for hours, but they could not help but notice the fires in front of the government offices as official documents burned. They kept asking each other what was happening.

Official word of the Confederate government's departure was finally announced at 4 o'clock. Lawley reported: "The scene that followed baffles description. During the long afternoon and throughout the feverish night, on horseback, in every description of cart, carriage, and vehicle, in every hurried train that left the city, on canal barges, skiffs, and boats, the exodus of officials and prominent citizens was unintermitted."

Davis refused to believe it was necessary to leave. His train was scheduled to depart on April 2 at 8:30 Sunday night. He kept hoping that somehow Lee would send news of a reversal of fortunes and that the government would not have to abandon the city. Finally, at 11 o'clock, he boarded the train and began the sad trip to Danville. Lawley wrote: "Up to the hour of their departure from Richmond I can testify that Mr. Davis and the three most prominent members of his cabinet went undaunted forth to meet the future, not without hope that General Lee would be able to hold together a substantial remnant of his army,

and to effect a junction with General Johnston."

All through the night preparations for fleeing from the city kept the Richmonders busy. When the last Confederate soldiers rode across the pontoon bridge to catch up with Lee's troops, those left behind believed they would return soon, to take the city back from the Yankees. In the city small fires of document still burned.

Richard S. Ewell and Godfrey Weitzel

Despite every effort made on the part of the few remaining Confederate soldiers and the city's officials, chaos ruled Richmond that night. Knowing that the Union army was about to enter the town, and having heard how badly the city of Columbia, South Carolina had fared when Union soldiers discovered the stores of whisky, Richmond's officials ordered all liquor to be destroyed. In the need for haste, however, those men charged with going through the stocks of every saloon and warehouse found the most expedient way was to smash the bottles and pour the kegs into the gutters and down the street drains. The stench attracted crowds. They gulped the whisky from the curbstones, picked it up in their hats and boots, and guzzled it before stooping for more. So the action taken to prevent a Union army rampage started a rampage by the city's own people.

Lt. Gen. Richard S. Ewell, Richmond's military commander, was also under orders to destroy the city's tobacco, cotton, and foodstuffs before the Yankees got to them. To destroy the tobacco, Ewell had it moved to buildings that he believed could burn without setting the rest of the city on fire and asked the fire department to stand by to keep the fire from spreading.

In a city that had been suffering from scarcity, where high officials held "Starvation Balls," no one believed there could be much food left to destroy. But they were wrong. "The most revolting revelation," wrote LaSalle Pickett, "was the amount of provisions, shoes and clothing which had been accumulated by the speculators who hovered like vultures over the scene of death and desolation. Taking advantage of their possession of money and lack of both patriotism and humanity, they had, by an early corner in the market and by successful blockade running, brought up all the available supplies with an eye to future gain, while our soldiers and women and children were absolutely in rags, barefoot and starving." The crowd, seeing the commissaries filled with smoked meats, flour, sugar, and coffee, became ugly.

Enraged, they snatched the food and clothing and turned to the nearby shops to loot whatever else they found. They were impossible to stop. Ewell tried, but he had only convalescent soldiers and a few army staff officers under his command at this point. Not nearly enough men to bring order back to the streets. The fires, though, grew out of control, burning the center of the city and driving the looters away.

Embers from the street fires of official papers and from the paper torches used by vandals drifted. The wind picked up. Another building caught fire. The business district caught fire. Worse, as Admiral Raphael Semmes wrote, "The Tredegar Iron Works were on fire, and continual explosions of loaded shell stored there were taking place....The population was

in a great state of alarm." Lawley reported that as he walked toward the railroad station he saw a column of dense black smoke. Semmes had set his ironclads on fire to keep them out of Union hands. Moments later, the warships' arsenals exploded blowing the windows out for two miles around, overturning tombstones, and tearing doors from their hinges. The Union cavalry entered town. By 7:15 Monday morning, April 3, two guidons of the Fourth Massachusetts Cavalry flew over the capitol building. Not long after, two officers of the 13th New York Artillery took down the little triangular flags and ran up the great United States flag. Union General Godfrey Weitzel sent a telegram to General Grant: "We took Richmond at 8:15 this morning. I captured many guns. The enemy left in great haste. The city is on fire in two places. Am making every effort to put it out. The people received us with enthusiastic expressions of joy."

Weitzel ordered his troops to put out the fire. The city's two fire engines worked, bucket brigades were formed. Threatened buildings were pulled down to create firebreaks. Five hours later the wind finally shifted, and they began to bring it under control. All or part of at least 54 blocks were destroyed, according to Furgurson. Weitzel wrote "The rebel capitol, fired by men placed in it to defend it, was saved from total destruction by soldiers of the United States, who had taken possession." And the city rested.

-Civil War Trust





When Freedom Came -



The *Richmond Free Press* published a three-part installment chronicling the African-American experience during the liberation of Richmond in April 1865 and the final days of the Civil War. The following is a portion of Part 2:

In the early morning hours of April 3, 1865, the first Union troops arrived in Richmond.

Isaac J. Hill, a 38-year-old soldier from Pennsylvania who enlisted with the 29th Regiment of the Connecticut Colored Troops, wrote about events he witnessed as Confederates fled and his Union regiment moved to liberate Richmond and its enslaved people.

“During Sunday night the brigade was out in line of battle, and at three o’clock in the morning the rebels blew up three gun boats and commenced vacating their works in our front. At 5 A.M. the troops commenced to advance on the rebel works — the 29th taking the advance, the 9th U.S.C. Troops next. Soon refugees from the rebels came in by the hundreds...

“...On our march to Richmond we captured 500 pieces of artillery... The main body of the army went up the New Market road. The 29th skirmished all the way, and arrived in the city at 7 A.M., and were the first infantry that entered the city; they went double quick most of the way. When Col. Wooster came to Main Street he pointed his sword at the capitol, and said “Double quick, march,” and the company charged through the main street to the capitol and halted in the square until the rest of the regiment came up.

“Very soon after the arrival of the white troops the colored troops were moved to the outskirts of the city, and as fast as the white troops came in the colored troops were ordered out, until we occupied the advance. The white troops remained in the city as guards. We remained on the outpost.” — Isaac J. Hill from “A Sketch of the 29th Regiment of the Connecticut Colored Troops: A Full Account of its Formation; of all the Battles through which it passed, and its final Disbandment”

The honor of being the first troops to enter Richmond has been accorded to several regiments and continues to be debated. What is irrefutable, however, is that members of the United States Colored Troops were among the first to enter, if not the first. What also cannot be refuted is the profound irony of the liberation of Richmond by men of color, many of whom had been sold from the capital of the Confederacy.

Marching into the city that day — April 3, 1865 — were several regiments of U.S. Colored Troops. Among them were members of the 8th Infantry, 9th Infantry, 36th Infantry, 38th Infantry, 22nd Infantry and the 29th Regiment Connecticut Volunteer Infantry, according to the National Park Service.

Thomas Morris Chester, the only known black reporter to cover the Civil War for a major daily newspaper, chronicled the entry of black troops into Richmond and their reception for the Philadelphia Press.

“...The General [J. Godfrey Weitzel] and staff rode up Main street amid the hearty congratulations of a very large crowd of colored persons and poor whites, who were gathered together upon the sidewalks manifesting every demonstration of joy.”

“There were many persons in the better-class houses who were peeping out of the windows...There was no mistaking the curl of their lips and the flash of their eyes...” — Thomas Morris Chester, April 4, 1865

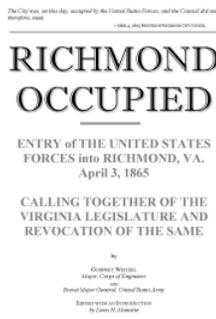
Richmond Free Press -

Click on the links:

[When Freedom Came, Part 1](#)

[When Freedom Came, Part 2](#)

[When Freedom Came, Part 3](#)



In 1965, for the Civil War Centennial, Louis H. Manarin published an edited version of a report by Godfrey Weitzel, Major, Corps of Engineers and Brevet Major General, United States Army.

It is a lengthy piece but filled with most of the behind the scenes orders, letters, conversations, troop movements, and emotions of the day Richmond fell.

Click on the image to the left for the PDF file.

NOTE: On page 41, Mr. Manarin gives credit for building lighthouses and the Soo Locks to Weitzel when in fact it was another member of the Corps of Engineers, Orlando Metcalfe Poe. Although born in Ohio, Poe would live in Detroit for a time and O.M. Poe G.A.R. Post No. 433 was named in his honor.

Richmond, Virginia, continued -



Lincoln Enters Richmond -

At City Point a few miles downstream, U.S. President Abraham Lincoln had learned of Richmond's capture and was eager to visit the city. Rear Admiral David Dixon Porter arranged for a grand trip upstream for his president on Tuesday. His gunboats, flags flying, lined the river and the sailors cheered as Lincoln, in Porter's flagship, the Malvern, sailed upstream. The trip, however, was not as smooth as the admiral would have liked. The Malvern encountered sunken Confederate boats in the James River. He transferred the president into a barge, which was tugged upstream. But then the tug encountered another Confederate obstruction. The ropes were thrown off the tug and the sailors leaned into their oars. They pulled against the current until they came to the rapids. The sailors jumped into the river, freed the boat, and headed toward the first safe landing spot they could find.

The barge landed at Rocketts, two miles from their destination, Capitol Square. No Union soldiers met them, but those on the shore recognized the tall man. A crowd, many recently freed slaves, formed as they strode along the streets. Recalled one contemporary: "Every window was crowded with heads. But it was a silent crowd. There was something oppressive in those thousands of watchers without a sound, either of welcome or hatred. I think we would have welcomed a yell of defiance." Others were exuberant, laughing, yelling. They tried to grab Lincoln's hand and kiss his boots. The sailors formed a guard around him. Admiral Porter and his men were anxious; the crowd could crush his president or an assassin could come close without ever being seen. The sailors cleared the way with bayonets until, at last, a cavalry party met them and escorted the president to what had been the Confederate Executive Mansion.

Soon afterward Lincoln set out on a sightseeing tour of the burned-out, sad-looking Confederate capital with General Weitzel as his guide and a large cavalry escort to protect him. He visited Libby Prison and Castle Thunder, the two prisons where not long before Union soldiers had suffered. They rode to Camp Lee where the U.S. Colored Troops had set up their camp. They drove around the burned out business district. Weitzel asked President Lincoln for guidance: how should he treat the people of the city? "If I were in your place," Lincoln told him, "I'd let 'em up easy, let 'em up easy."

After the afternoon tour, the presidential party returned to Porter's flagship, to Admiral Porter's relief.

Word of Richmond's fall had been telegraphed across the United States. Newspaperman George Townsend wrote, "This town is the rebellion. It is all that we have directly striven for; quitting it, the Confederate leaders have quitted their sheet-anchor, their roof-tree, their abiding hope. Its history is the epitome of the whole contest, and to us, shivering our thunderbolts against it for more than four years, Richmond is still a mystery." To honor the long struggle to take the Confederate capital, an official order was given. And so, at noon, while Lincoln toured the city, a one-hundred-gun artillery salute was fired at all military posts, arsenals and naval bases.

Five hard-fought days later General Lee and the Army of Northern Virginia surrendered to

U.S. Grant. And four days after that, Lincoln was assassinated. Johnston surrendered his army to Sherman on April 18. Lee had gambled that the Confederacy could survive the fall of its capital--that leaving Richmond would offer him a freedom of movement that could spell hope. But hope died when Richmond fell.

- *Civil War Trust*

The Surrender Letters -

"General R.E. Lee, Commanding C.S.A.:

5 P.M., April 7th, 1865.

The results of the last week must convince you of the hopelessness of further resistance on the part of the Army of Northern Virginia in this struggle. I feel that it is so, and regard it as my duty to shift from myself the responsibility of any further effusion of blood by asking of you the surrender of that portion of the Confederate States army known as the Army of Northern Virginia.

U.S. Grant, Lieutenant-General"

The note was carried through the Confederate lines and Lee promptly responded:

"April 7th, 1865.

General: I have received your note of this date. Though not entertaining the opinion you express of the hopelessness of further resistance on the part of the Army of Northern Virginia, I reciprocate your desire to avoid useless effusion of blood, and therefore, before considering your proposition, ask the terms you will offer on condition of its surrender.

R.E. Lee, General."

[CLICK HERE FOR MORE LETTERS](#)

The Civil War officially ended on April 12 and not the 9th? -

A very good friend of mine is the greatest living fan of Colonel Joshua L. Chamberlain. While I have respect for much of what he did before, during, and after the war, I've always felt the credit he and the 20th Maine received for his actions at Gettysburg were more from self-promotion or marketing than anything. (This is my personal opinion.) Mention Little Round Top on July 2, 1863 and

you will hear 95% or more bring up the name Chamberlain and the 20th Maine, and yet on that hill were the 83rd Pennsylvania, 44th New York, and the 16th Michigan Infantry Regiments. 1st Lt. Charles Hazlett's Battery provided support and reinforcement came from the 146th New York, 91st and 155th Pennsylvania Infantry Regiments.

I bring this up because I ran across an article posted on Facebook by the New England Historical Society in which Joshua Chamberlain tells the real story of the surrender of Lee to Grant...or was it Gordon to Chamberlain?

Joshua Chamberlain Tells the Real Story of Appomattox Court House, 40 years Later

After reading the article, I spent some time trying to find any evidence of his version of the story and I couldn't find it. And then, just before I went out for breakfast this morning, I remembered I had the book by John B. Gordon, *Reminiscences of the Civil War* from the *Collector's Library of the Civil War*.

Interestingly enough I purchased the 30 volume set back in the early 1980s and I had never opened the Gordon volume--actually I've only read two or three of them so far.

So, while having a great tasting BLT on toasted sourdough bread and a few tater tots, I read Gordon's version of the surrender. It was not the same as Chamberlain remembered but I did find it interesting that Gordon commented on the extremely large horse that General Philip Sheridan rode. Of course it was Rienzi. (There is another story to be told in the future after more research on the horse.)

I'll be interested in hearing how my friend Jeannine explains this one as neither Custer, Sheridan, Gordon, Grant, or Lee remembered it this way. And since none of us were there, we'll never know the entire story.

Interesting Websites -

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From the Smithsonian:

The Gentleman's Agreement That Ended the Civil War

From CNN:

The Spirit of Appomattox Court House

From the Atlantic:

The Civil War Isn't Over

Michigan Civil War Sesquicentennial History Partners -

There are 113 events posted on the website--see link below.

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