



WESTERN RESERVE CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE

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Meeting: Wednesday, February 14, 2018
6:15 PM Assemble
6:30 PM Buffet Dinner
7:30 PM Business Meeting
7:45 PM Presentation

Place: Colony Room in the Student
Union at Baldwin Wallace
University, Corner of East
Grand & Tressel, Berea OH
(440-570-0009)

Presenter: Cass Kuhl

"The Little Bighorn: A Civil War
Band of Brothers"

For Civil War enthusiasts a topic of great interest over the years has been of what happened to George Armstrong Custer and the 7th U.S. Cavalry at Little Bighorn? This dashing, charismatic leader who rose so dramatically during the Civil War and who became so well recognized because of it, suddenly met his fatal end in such an unexpected and extraordinary way. While more than 140 years has passed since this dramatic event, our curiosity about what had happened has continued to invite discussion, opinion and debate. Most recently, In J. J. Stiles Pulitzer Prize winning book, Custer's Trials, the author leaves it to the reader to draw his or her own conclusions as to what likely happened. To this day, Custer has remained an enigma to us.

This month we'll once again revisit the topic of Custer and Little Bighorn. We last did so some 18 years ago when the late Harold George gave us a presentation. I recall then, that the topic generated considerable discussion and debate. So, it wouldn't be surprising that at the end of this month's presentation, being led by Cass Kuhl, a past presenter for us that this topic once again raises questions and comments about just how this moment came to be for both Custer and the 7th cavalry. Cass will be sharing with us the events leading up to Little Bighorn as well as a discussion of some of the personalities. So, brave February's cold and find out what "fire" this topic brings amongst us.



Hunley Mystery NOT Solved Yet:

Researchers Continue Investigation into What Really Happened

CHARLESTON, S.C.—Recently, Duke University issued a press release claiming one of their students discovered what caused the *Hunley's* crew to perish and the submarine to sink in 1864. In today's digital age, the story spread across the internet quickly due to the sensational headline. However, a spokesman for the *Hunley* Project said today, the story is not accurate.

The *Hunley* Project regularly receives theories from the public about what led to the submarine's loss and other ideas related to their research. "The case of Duke University's press release is a bit different as it has created quite a stir," said Kellen Correia, Executive Director of Friends of the *Hunley*. Duke University is not part of the *Hunley* Project's investigative team. They don't have access to the detailed forensic and structural information related to the submarine, which would be essential to draw any sort of reliable or definitive conclusions.

The *Hunley* Project said they felt the need to issue a statement today to make sure the unsubstantiated theory claimed by the Duke University student does not continue to spread, in view of the comprehensive research conducted by the *Hunley* team on the submarine for more than 15

years. The idea of a concussive wave from the torpedo explosion killing the crew, as outlined in the Duke University release, has been previously considered and is one of many scenarios the *Hunley* Project team has been investigating.

"The Duke study is interesting; they just unfortunately didn't have all the facts. If it were as easy as simple blast injuries, we would have been done a while ago. Though a shock wave can cause life-threatening injuries, this is something we discounted quite a while back based on the evidence," said Jamie Downs, former Chief Medical Examiner for the State of Alabama.

The *Hunley* became the world's first successful combat submarine in 1864 and then mysteriously vanished without a trace. Since its raising, a collaborative research effort with the U.S. Navy, the Smithsonian Institution, Clemson University, and others has been underway to uncover the reasons for the *Hunley's* loss and conserve the vessel for future generations.

Using detailed information about the composition and dimensions of the *Hunley's* iron structure, forensic analysis of the crew's remains, other research, and archaeological data, the

Hunley Project and its partners have conducted comprehensive digital and physical simulations for the past several years. While the likely cause of the submarine's demise has not been identified, the scenario of a concussive wave killing the *Hunley* crew has been deemed not likely by those working on the submarine who have access to this key data.

Their most recent study was issued by the U.S. Navy this month and was conducted in collaboration with the *Hunley* Project. "Given the amount of uncertainty surrounding the vessel's final mission, a bottom-up technical analysis was commissioned alongside ongoing archeological investigation of the *Hunley*. Calculations of *Hunley's* engagement with the *Housatonic* were successfully completed and it was observed that the engagement would have been devastating to the *Housatonic* while resulting in relatively low levels of loading on *Hunley*," according to their report.

The *Hunley* Project remains committed to sharing the most accurate information about the submarine that is available. Still, Correia cautions, "As tempting as it may be, we are careful not to jump to definitive conclusions until all the research has been evaluated."

Western Reserve CWRT - 2017-2018 Volunteers --- Our 52nd Year



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Western Reserve CWRT - Membership Dues

Annual Dues: **\$30.00 Individual**
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Dues are to be paid each year on the anniversary month of each person's membership. For example, if a person joins the CWRT in March, then March is the anniversary month for future dues memberships. A member can see their dues status and anniversary month at check-in.

The Buffet Dinner Fee is \$20.00 plus a \$5.00 Speaker Fee for a total of \$25.00 per meeting. If a person chooses not to attend dinner, then the Speaker Fee of \$5.00 is requested to help defray the cost of our speakers.

Civil War Trivia

Last Month's Question: Why was every Navy enlisted Civil War recruit not happy with the Actions taken by Senator James W. Grimes of Iowa, on October 1, 1862?

Answer: It was on this date that enlisted Navy men could no longer receive as part of their duty, four ounces' of liquor as part of their rations.

Source: Richard Snow. Iron Dawn, p. 344.

This Month's Question: The Quaker City was a 1,500 ton side wheeler steamer that also was equipped with sails as well as with gun emplacements during the Civil War. But, in 1867 following the War the Quaker City carried as one of its passengers to the Holy Lands who?

Next Month: At the Front

March 14, 2018

Ken Bach

"History of the Gettysburg Cyclorama"



Recovered From Gettysburg Provenance of Loaded Muskets

TO THE EDITOR:

I'm a long-time researcher of U.S. Army Ordnance Department records at the National Archives, and for the last ten years I have been focused primarily on Civil War records, but I am new to the *Civil War News*. At a recent show in Richmond, I picked up a copy of your November 2016 issue (Vol. 42, Number 10) and was quite impressed. However, that is not my purpose in writing. In Mr. Bilby's column in that issue, I noticed a section titled "Provenance of Gettysburg loaded muskets," in which Mr. Bilby discussed an April 2016 "Watch-dog" column by Craig Barry. I have not seen Mr. Barry's article so I don't know specifically what he said, but based on Mr. Bilby's statements the substance of it was regarding a "much-repeated account of the 24,000 muskets, many of them with a number of loads in their barrels, retrieved from the field at Gettysburg." Mr. Bilby noted that neither he nor Mr. Barry had found any official provenance for the story. Well, as a matter of fact, I can help with that problem.

My primary interest is in cavalry arms and in my research I have not paid much attention to muskets. But sometimes I come across something that is far afield from my primary purpose but is so interesting that I make note of it for my files. On seeing Mr. Bilby's article I recalled seeing something on this topic, did a search of my material, and found the following notes:

1/4/1864, Record Group (RG) 156, Entry (E) 20, Volume 40, Letter W28 of 1864: Capt. Benton at Washington Arsenal forwarded a report of Master Armorer J. Dudley re the condition of small arms received from the battle fields.

1/4/1864, RG156, E201, Report #376: Master Armorer J. Dudley reported to Capt. Benton on small arms received from battlefields. He based his report on the arms taken from the Gettysburg battlefield. Of the number received (27,574), at least 24,000 of them were loaded.

About one half contained two loads each, one forth contained from three to ten loads each and the rest had only one load. Some of the guns had two to six balls with only one charge of powder, and in some cases, the ball was at the bottom of the barrel with the powder charge on top of it. In some arms, as many as six paper cartridges were found whole - not having been torn open. Twenty-three loads were found in one Springfield rifle, each load being in regular order. Twenty-two balls and sixty-two buckshot with a corresponding quantity of powder, all mixed up together, were found in one percussion smooth-bore musket. Mr. Dudley also stated: "About six thousand of the arms were found loaded with Johnson's & Dow's cartridges, many of these cartridges were found about half way down in the barrels of the guns, and in many cases, the ball end of the cartridge had been put into the gun first. These cartridges were found mostly in the Enfield Rifle Musket."

About 1,000 of all muskets found, Union and Confederate, had stocks broken at the wrist with the butt of the stocks completely gone. One hundred and thirty-six arms of different kinds had been marred by shot; in many the ball had gone through the barrel or other parts had been shot away. Many barrels were burst, almost always near the barrel from having the muzzle clogged by mud or having left the tampon in place. Mr. Dudley noted that barrels of American manufacture were superior to those of the Enfields and Austrian weapons in both material and workmanship.

Without knowing where to look, this report would be difficult to find. One would expect it to have been filed in the letters received by the Chief of Ordnance, which is Entry 21 in the Chief of Ordnance records (Record Group 156), and the first set of notes above supports that assumption, for Entry 20 contains the registers for Ordnance Department letters received. But for some unknown reason, the Ordnance Office in-

stead filed the report with "Reports of Experiments," which the National Archives have cataloged as Entry 201.

Charles Pace

Civil War News

January 2017

Remains of Indiana Civil War vets will head to Arlington

By Tony Cook

tony.cook@indianapolis.com

After more than 100 years, unclaimed remains of two Civil War veterans from Indiana will find their way to a final resting place in the nation's capital.

The cremated remains of Lt. Zuinglius K. McCormack and Pvt. Lycurgus McCormack, brothers who served in the Civil War, will be transported to Arlington National Cemetery after a memorial service in Indianapolis on Tuesday.

A nonprofit veterans group called the Missing in

America Project, in collaboration with the American Legion, recovered the remains from the unclaimed storage vaults of Indianapolis-based Flanner and Buchanan Funeral Centers. The company operated the state's first crematory, where Zuinglius was cremated in 1908 and Lycurgus in 1912.

The two men came from a family with deep Hoosier roots. Their great-grandfather was one of the first settlers in the Connersville area, and their grandfather was one of the first settlers to arrive in Indianapolis, said Rick Franco of the Genealogical Society of Marion County.

At 17, Lycurgus joined the war as a minuteman regiment organized to repel Morgan's Raid in 1863. After the war, he attended Asbury College in Greencastle and became a printer. He later served as one of two Indiana Labor commissioners, Franco said.

Zuinglius joined the war in 1862 and rose to lieutenant. He went on to practice law and had a Downtown Indianapolis office.

Neither of the brothers married, which may explain why their remains were never claimed, said Bruce Buchanan, fourth-generation owner of the Indianapolis crematory.

The remains have been stored in plastic containers at the company's Floral Park Cemetery on the Westside since the 1950s.

But now their remains, along with those of four other veterans of the Civil War, World War I and World War II, are being recovered from Flanner and Buchanan by the Missing in America Project, which locates, identifies and interments unclaimed remains of forgotten veterans.

A ceremony to honor the veterans is planned for 6 p.m. Tuesday at the Hoosier Patriot Memorial in Washington Park East Cemetery.

SEPARATING THE MAN FROM THE MYTH

By Will Higgins

Will Higgins@hodytac.com

“I don’t do interviews,” said Timothy Lincoln Beckwith, politely, in the briefest of

phone interviews from his law office in West Palm Beach, Fla.

“Let’s let the past be the past.”

But if you’re a Lincoln — as in Abraham Lincoln — the past is never the past.

Especially not now. One hundred fifty years after the passing of the Emancipation Proclamation, Lincoln is hot. New books have been published and new movies made, including the badly received “Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter” and Steven Spielberg’s Oscar-nominated “Lincoln.” All across the country museums are mounting Lincoln exhibits.

The Indiana State Museum’s opens Saturday, and it’s not only different, it’s revelatory.

It’s not easy coming up with something fresh about Abraham Lincoln, but curator Dale Ogden has assembled dozens of objects that tell something real about a person who is often obscured by century-old myths.

Such as a large, beautifully crafted cabinet made by Lincoln’s father that shoots down the long-held understanding that Thomas Lincoln was a fool. That characterization was embraced early on by adoring Lincoln writers such as Carl Sandburg because it made Lincoln even more amazing, more self-made.

Historians haven’t played that type of game for 50 years, said historian James Madison, an emeritus professor of history at Indiana University and the author of seven books, “but once a story is printed, it’s hard to get it back, it’s hard to correct.”

“Lincoln’s greatness is true and real, so there’s a basis for the mythologizing. But to me, he becomes greater when he’s a human being.”

“The Lincolns: Five Generations of an American Family,” at the museum through Aug. 4, ex-

amines the great man and his kin, from his parents through to his last direct descendant, who was perhaps a bit too human.

He was, by Ogden’s reckoning, Robert Todd Lincoln Beckwith, a high-living, thrice-married playboy who died in a Virginia nursing home in 1985. Beckwith, the Great Emancipator’s great-grandson, described himself as a “gentleman farmer of independent means” and as “a spoiled brat.”

He is likely the end of the Lincoln line and is treated as such in the exhibit.

But he is listed as the father of Timothy Lincoln Beckwith, the Florida lawyer, which would seem to make Timothy Lincoln Beckwith the last Lincoln.

By the time Robert Todd Lincoln Beckwith’s third wife, Annemarie Hoffman, became pregnant (he was 63, she was 27), he’d had a vasectomy, and in a public and embarrassing court case in the 1970s, a doctor testified that there was nothing wrong with the vasectomy.

Years later, the organizations that had waited for decades to inherit the Lincoln fortune once the family became extinct — the American Red Cross, Iowa Wesleyan College and the First Church of Christ, Scientist — secretly reached a settlement with Timothy Lincoln Beckwith that left Beckwith with “more than a million dollars” of Lincoln money. This, according to an exhaustive 1994 “New Yorker” story by the historian Michael Beschloss.

The Indiana State Museum’s exhibit contains 145 objects, most of them from the museum’s permanent collection. They are telling. There’s the Thomas Lincoln cabinet (with cherry wood inlay) that indicates Lincoln inherited good genes and the small bell that Mary Todd Lincoln, before she was the first lady, used while liv-



A diptych of family photos owned by Abraham and Mary Todd Lincoln, an item in the exhibit, shows their two youngest sons. “Abraham Lincoln would have held these in his hands in the living quarters of the White House during his presidency,” curator Dale Ogden says.

ing in Springfield, Ill., to summon servants, proof that while Abraham Lincoln might have grown up in a log cabin, he was a pretty big deal long before he was elected president.

But the Lincolns who came afterward are a different story. Actually, they are a fairly typical story:

the progeny of highly successful people sometimes become masters of easy living. Letter-day Lincolns smoked fine cigars, flew airplanes, married frequently. They were light on achievement. Blood thins out.



Robert Todd Lincoln (center), Abraham Lincoln’s son, was the first of the president’s family to go to college. He made a fortune as CEO of the Pullman railway car company.

The Burning Of Atlanta:

By Stephen Davis

Big fire in American history spawn legends. Mrs. O'Leary's cow may not have started the Great Chicago Fire, but William T. Sherman's shadow looms large over the Burning of Atlanta.

The old legend has it that he allowed his soldiers to burn the entire city. Go to the Georgia state capitol today and you'll see on the square a plaque placed there in 1920 by the United Daughters of the Confederacy. On September 2, it states, Federal troops entered Atlanta and shortly thereafter Sherman "reduced the city to ashes."

It really didn't happen that way, but after almost a century the plaque is still there. Old legends die hard.

The truth—or as near to it as we can get—is more complicated and fascinating.

General Sherman had only been in Atlanta a few days when he proposed to U. S. Grant an idea for his next campaign: rest his troops at Atlanta for a while, then march them across Georgia to Savannah and the Atlantic Ocean. "I would not hesitate to cross the State of Georgia with sixty thousand men," he wrote on September 10, 1864. Later he added, "I can make the march and make Georgia howl."

Of course, before he left for the sea, Sherman would have to tend to the enemy facing him. At the time, Gen. John B. Hood's Army, of Tennessee, having evacuated Atlanta, was hovering twenty miles south of it. In late September Hood decided to march off into north Georgia, either hoping to lure the Federals into battle or striking the Chattahoochee-Atlanta railroad to cut them off from supplies. Sherman eventually sent George Thomas and John Schofield with two infantry corps back to Tennessee, where Hood seemed to be heading. Then, in early October, Sherman slowly followed Hood's course with three corps, leaving Gen. Henry Slocum's XX Corps to hold Atlanta.

By October 11, Grant had approved Sherman's proposed march to the sea. Sherman would have to wait awhile, though, before launching it. For the next month he tarried in north Georgia with his XIV, XV, and XVII Corps, monitoring the movements of the Rebel army. Meanwhile he got his commissary and quarter-master officers in Atlanta gathering supplies and getting rid of the stuff his troops would not need for "the grand move into Georgia," "my big raid," and "the grand march," as he

repeatedly called it. On November 1 he also ordered Slocum to "make preliminary preparations for the absolute destruction in Atlanta of the railroad track, depots, car and store houses, shops, and indeed everything that might be used to our disadvantage by an enemy."

It is likely that General Sherman had more than that in mind for the city he had worked so hard to capture. To Grant on November 8 he confided that before he left, he would see that "Atlanta itself is utterly destroyed."

The people themselves had all been cleared out. Soon after taking Atlanta Sherman ordered all remaining civilians to leave. They could go south; he arranged a ten-day truce with Hood so those wishing to enter Confederate lines could do so. Or they could go north; he offered train transport to Nashville, Louisville and other points. By late September almost all civilians had been expelled.

After that, the story of Sherman's wrecking of Atlanta begins with three Federal regiments. During most of the occupation, only three Union regiments—the 2nd and 3rd Massachusetts and 11th Pennsylvania—were quartered downtown. The rest of Slocum's troops were encamped outside of the city. To these three regiments was assigned the work of planning the destruction of Atlanta's railroad

and manufacturing facilities. The 2nd got the big passenger depot (the "car shed") in the center of the city, and factory buildings to its east along Decatur Street. The 11th would destroy the Western & Atlantic roundhouse and the gas works at Marietta Street. The 3rd would target the Macon & Western roundhouse, but also the several blocks of commercial storefront along Whitehall and Peachtree Streets. On a map submitted to Col. William Cogswell, post commandant, an officer of the 33rd shaded in an area labeled simply "brick block." But also to be destroyed were downtown hotels and even the Medical College, where sick Federal soldiers were being treated. The only explanation for destroying such non-military targets was that orders had come down for everything made of brick

to be demolished. As one Federal recorded, "it was argued that the rebels could use the large buildings for hospitals, warehouses and so forth." So everything brick would come down.

Notice that Atlanta's houses and private residences were not on the Federals' list of structures to be burned. That did not mean that General Sherman did not expect his soldiers to spare people's homes. Earlier in the year, Sherman had led 26,000 troops from Vicksburg eastward across Mississippi to Meridian. At

Jackson, Brandon and other places, Union soldiers had burned both public facilities and private homes. Even after Gen. James B. McPherson ordered no burning of citizens' houses, soldiers set fire to them. "There was a growing sense among Sherman's men," writes historian Clay Montcastle, "that their destructive behavior would largely go unpunished and was perhaps even welcomed by the officers."

This was indeed the attitude among the men when Sherman was about to lead his three corps from northwest Georgia back to Atlanta. Before leaving Rome, Gen. John Coxe's division was ordered to destroy railroad shops and foundries, but the soldiers set fire to houses, too. Much of Rome thus went up in flames. "It is against orders," wrote one Federal on November 10, "but the soldiers want to see it burn."

Orders could vary, and at points Union officers were told to burn houses and whole towns if guerrillas were active in the area. Gen. John Smith, division commander in the XV Corps, directed a regiment at Canton to "permit the citizens to remove what they desire, and burn the town." Caseville was also torched. One lady remembered years later how a Yankee officer came up and said, "Madame, I have orders to burn your house. You have twenty minutes to get your furniture out."



Stephen Davis is a longtime Civil War buff and avid book collector. His two paperbacks on the Atlanta Campaign, *A Long and Bloody Task* and *All the Fighting They Want*, will be published this summer as part of Savas Beatie's Emerging Civil War Series.

What Really Happened?

Before he got here to Atlanta, Sherman changed his mind on who would do the wrecking of the designated structures. The plan submitted by the three pioneer regiments stressed fire and explosives, but trained engineers knew how to knock down buildings more efficiently. Sherman on November 7 first ordered his chief engineer, Capt. John P. Poe, to take on the work of demolition in Atlanta. A few days later Sherman gave to go-ahead to Poe: "You may commence the work of destruction at once, but don't set fire until the last moment." One probable reason for the delayed fire order involved Sherman's infantry. As Poe's engineers went to work, the XIV, XV and XVI Corps would be marching back into and through Atlanta to perimeter east and south of the city, preparatory to beginning the big campaign. Sherman could not have them marching through a city on fire.

On the morning of November 12 the last northbound train left Atlanta, carrying the last equipment and stores not needed in the forthcoming campaign. After the train crossed the Savannah River thirty miles north of the city, Federals moving south along the railroad began tearing up track. Inside Atlanta regiments were assigned to pry up the rails, beat down or burning ties, and burn them beyond repair. On the 12th engineers brought down the Western & Atlantic Stage over the Chattahoochee, which Northerners had rebuilt on wooden beams months earlier, after the Rebels had destroyed it in their retreat. The next morning, obeying Sherman's orders not to use fire till the last, Poe's engineers used iron rollers to roll up the rails to knock down the brick car shed. The Mason & Western freight depot, built of granite, was too sturdy to be knocked down; the 1st Michigan Engineers blew it up with 100 pounds of powder.

All was not orderly, however. For days word had spread among Sherman's men that Atlanta was going to be looted. A Wisconsin private wrote his wife on November 7 that they would "burn up the Gate City." "Old Sherman," wrote another, "is drawing Atlanta and is going to burn her place."

Sensing that they were within days of setting out for the sea, some soldiers took matters in their own hands and set unauthorized fires to houses along Decatur Street on the night of the 11th. Fire wagons about to be set on the train heading north were

called into action, and guards were ordered to "shoot on the spot all incendiaries." General Slocum posted a \$500 reward to any informant, but nobody snitched. Despite all the precautions, somebody set another blaze on the 12th. "Large fire in the City again today," recorded Isaac Roseberry, a Michigan engineer, in his diary.

It was even worse the next day. On November 13 engineers and pioneer regiments began setting fire to designated facilities. "Of course the fires have spread considerably among the residences," observed Capt. Edwin E. Marm of the 5th Connecticut. Soldiers marching in could see all the fires being set and determined to start some of their own. Eleven-year-old Carrie Berry and her family were among the few civilians allowed by authorities to remain in the city. "Sun, Nov. 13," she entered in her diary, "the federal soldiers have been coming to-day and burning houses."

The men were right about their officers looking the other way. The 13th was the day Sherman and his staff rode into Marietta, and saw men set fires to the courthouse, hotel and stores on the town square. According to the general's aide-de-camp, Maj. Ward Nubola, "stragglers will get

into these places, and dwelling-houses are leveled to the ground." Another officer, Maj. Henry Hitchcock, expressed concern at the men's misdeeds, to which Sherman replied, "I never ordered burning of any dwelling—didn't order this, but can't he help it?"

On the 14th, having knocked down the car shed and other buildings, Federals set fire to the wreckage. The infantry saw all this, and concluded (as one put it), that "the pioneers were having all the fun." So they set their own blazes. Allen Campbell, a sergeant in the 1st Michigan Engineers, knew very well the orders against unauthorized arson, but he didn't care. With torch in hand he approached a residence, only to be stopped by a little girl. "Mr. Soldier, you would not burn our house, would you?" she asked. "If you do, where are we going to live?" Campbell felt so ashamed that he skulked away, leaving the little girl's home unharmed.

The engineers conducted their final detonations on the morning of November 15. This was the day that the "brick block" along Whitehall and Peachtree Streets was set afire, as were the downtown hotels which had been marked for destruction. Of course the men joined in "the fun,"

especially after commissary officers opened their warehouses and soldiers found liquor inside. "The men plunged into the houses, broke windows and doors with their muskets," Capt. David Conyngham recorded. Drunken looters pillaged, "dragging out armfuls of clothes, tobacco and whiskey, which was more welcome than all the rest."

The burning of both businesses and residences reached its hellish crescendo that day. "Many houses had been burned," recorded Dr. F. P. Berlon of the 7th Illinois in his diary, "and all day long the fires kept increasing in number." The infantry marching into town along Marietta Street continued to do their part. "We arrived in the suburbs of Atlanta at 2 p.m.," wrote Capt. James R. Ladd of the 113th Ohio. "No sooner did we arrive than the boys commenced burning every house in that part of the town."

The unauthorized arson continued well after sunset. Carrie Berry and her family set up all night in their home on Fairlie Street. "If we had not sat up our house would have been burnt up," she entered into her diary the next day; "the soldiers were

could not see



Atlanta's passenger depot called "the Car Shed," was completed in 1854. The forty-foot tall, 100-yard-long brick building was at the very center of the city, the point at which all the railroads converged; it was of course marked for destruction. (Library of Congress)

going around setting houses on fire while they were not watched?"

In truth, areas of downtown were under guard by Colonel Criswell's provost regiments. Capt. Henry Conroy of the 2nd Massachusetts later wrote that the men of his regiment stood their posts while all the burning was going on, under orders "to guard all other structures, houses and churches from those who would torch such private property." (The Berry family was fortunate to have a guard standing at their house.) On the night of November 15, Major Hitchcock was with Sherman at his headquarters in the John Neal house, opposite the street from City Hall. At some point he chose to take a walk to the far shed, a few blocks away. Coming back, guards at two downtown churches judged him into the street; they would not let him pass on the sidewalk.

This brings up the local legend of Father O'Reilly.

Thomas O'Reilly was priest of Immaculate Conception Cathedral downtown. He was one of those civilians allowed to stay in the city after the expulsion. A half-century ago the Atlanta Historical Society dedicated a monument to Father O'Reilly, thanking him for saving City Hall and five nearby churches, including Immaculate Conception, from being burned by Union soldiers on the night of November 15. A local newspaper article about the monument dedication was entitled, "Monument to Priest Who Stood Up to Sherman," as if the Union commander had ordered the downtown church-burnings.¹⁶ But how did the good Father "save" the churches? The story has several variants. An early one is that on the night of the great fires, Catholic soldiers voluntarily stood guard at the cathedral and parsonage, "and would not allow any homes adjacent to be fired that would endanger them."¹⁷ Then the nearby City Hall and Protestant churches were saved.

Never mind that one of the provost regiments keeping order in the city—the 2nd Massachusetts, had its camp on the very grounds of City Hall square, or that General Sherman's city headquarters were right across the street.

Another spin comes from Union Captain Conyngham, who wrote in 1864 that "millions"—he could not say them follow Federal soldiers—were camping, smok[ing] downtown, surrounding the cathedral, when Father O'Reilly confronted them, and "sprayed" them for their sacrilege. The Yankees "shook before virtue" and were "driving away in silence." Thus, Father O'Reilly "not only saved

his own church, but also those of his fellow Christians."¹⁸

Another version has the priest counseling Sherman. "General Sherman conferred with the Rev. Father Thomas O'Reilly," according to the *Atlanta Journal*, "and consented to spare five churches."¹⁹ Still another has O'Reilly meeting not with Sherman, but the XX Corps commander—he "lobbied General Slocum," according to another local writer, to have guards posted at the churches.²⁰ Wilder versions have O'Reilly a) threatening Slocum that "he had the authority to send all the Catholic soldiers home" if the churches were burned²¹; and b) lecturing Sherman that he could have offending Catholic soldiers excommunicated; whereupon "the red-haired general... respectfully withdrew his orders and the churches of Atlanta were spared."²²

Amidst all of these urban legends, as I call them, the historian has to sort out the facts: how much of Atlanta was destroyed? The Yankees, of course, low-ball their estimates: Major Hitchcock, 25%, Captain Poe, 37%. How they came up with these numbers is anybody's guess, especially as both officers left Atlanta the very morning after the great fires of November 15, when Sherman set out on his march. Southerners just as naturally tend to exaggerate. A Georgia militia officer, William P. Howard, surveying the city a few weeks later, claimed that anywhere from 3,200 to 4,000, maybe as many as 5,000 houses had been laid waste. "The suburbs present to the eye one vast, naked, ruined, deserted camp," Howard asserted.²³ Ironically, Atlanta's returning to their city estimated the destruction rather conservatively. Zachariah Rice, for instance, wrote a column for the *Montgomery Appeal*, offering his observation of the property damage. Noting destruction of the business district along Whitehall and Peachtree Streets, Rice also emphasized the burning of buildings along main thoroughfares which would have been used by the Yankees marching into the city (Marietta Street) and out of it (DeKalb). Of note, Rice confirmed that "the churches are all unharmed," except for a small chapel in the northern suburbs and St. Luke's Episcopal downtown—the latter, established by Confederate chaplain Charles Guistard in April '64, was called "the Rebel church" by the Federals, and seems to have been deliberately targeted for burning by them.²⁴

Rice's and some other southern poetry accounts have allowed Dr. Gordon Jones of the Atlanta History Center, writing last for a historical

marker sponsored by the Georgia Historical Society, to state that "only forty percent of Atlanta was left in ruins."²⁵

To me, that sounds about right. One GHS marker that doesn't get it right, though, is one which was dedicated in November 2014 on the grounds of the Carter Center in Atlanta. Its text seems to go out of its way to show that the Federals didn't burn houses in Atlanta—"destroying Atlanta's industrial and business (but not residential) districts," as it reads. Someone complained to President Carter about the obnoxious inaccuracy. At the President's request the Historical Society has removed the offending plaque to another site.

One hundred-fifty years after Sherman's burning, and we're still arguing about it! Somewhere on Capitol has got to be checking over his legacy in Atlanta!

1. "THE EVACUATION OF ATLANTA... PRECETED BY THE ATLANTA CHAPTER UNITED DAUGHTERS OF THE CONFEDERACY, 1920," Washington Street entrance, State Capitol.
2. Stephen Davis, *What the Yankees Did to Us: Sherman's Bombardment and Wrecking of Atlanta* (Macon, 2012), 160.
3. Davis, *What the Yankees Did to Us*, 360-62.
4. Davis, *What the Yankees Did to Us*, 370-72.
5. Clay Mountcastle, *Famine War: Confederate Guerrillas and Union Reprisals* (Lawrence KS, 2009), 87-88.
6. *What the Yankees Did to Us*, 373, 379-80.
7. *Ibid.*, 372-73, 378.

9. *Ibid.*, 373, 390.
10. *Ibid.*, 390-91.
11. *Ibid.*, 381-82; M. A. Delany Howe, ed., *Marching with Sherman: Postmortem from the Centers and Campaign District of George Lincoln of Lincoln 1862, 1902*, 52-53.
12. *What the Yankees Did to Us*, 365.
13. *Ibid.*, 363-65.
14. *Ibid.*, 404.
15. *Ibid.*, 365.
16. *Atlanta Journal*, Oct. 19, 1945, p. 29.
17. "Atlanta As Left by the Enemy: Report of Gen. Howard," *Albion Telegraph*, Dec. 10, 1864.
18. David P. Conyngham, *Sherman's March Through the South* (New York, 1865), 258.
19. Laura McGregor, "Trinity Church: Order Spaced by Sherman," *Atlanta Journal*, Aug. 17, 1957.
20. Russell S. Bonds, *War Light: The Thunderbolt: The Battle and Burning of Atlanta* (Yardley PA, 2006), 353.
21. John Wesley Brinsford, Jr., *The Spirit Divided: Memoirs of Civil War Chaplains* (Macon, 2008), 225.
22. Doc Lawrence, "Ireland's Gift to Atlanta—Father Thomas O'Reilly," *Brookhaven Buzz*, March 1996, 14.
23. Franklin M. Howard, *Atlanta and Environs: A Chronicle of its People and Events*, 2 vols. (New York, 1954), vol. 1, 654.
24. Davis, *What the Yankees Did to Us*, 405.
25. "The Burning and Destruction of Atlanta," Georgia Historical Society marker, originally dedicated at Martin Luther King Jr. Drive and Central Avenue; recently moved to front of Georgia Railroad depot.
26. Alan Blinder, "150 Years Later, Wrestling With a Revised View of Sherman's March," *New York Times*, Nov. 15, 2014.



General Sherman ordered his chief engineer, Capt. Orlando Poe to avoid using fire in downtown destruction until the very last. Poe accordingly rigged up two tall battering rams, each with a 21-foot iron bar suspended by chains. Soldiers got these swinging against the walls on the morning of November 14. "In about three hours," wrote Wisconsin Cpl. Harvey Reid, "that elegant structure was a mass of ruins." The next day this wreckage was set on fire.