



The Second NJ Brigade

New Jersey's Civil War Brigade

Winter, 2020
Volume 5, Issue 2

The Second NJ Brigade is a 501c non profit organization. The board meets once a month and is represented by members of all Impressions. The Executive Board: President Mike Milling, Vice President Matt Belcastro, Treasurer Lin Kaufer, Secretary Abby Belcastro.

THE ADVANCE



Editor:

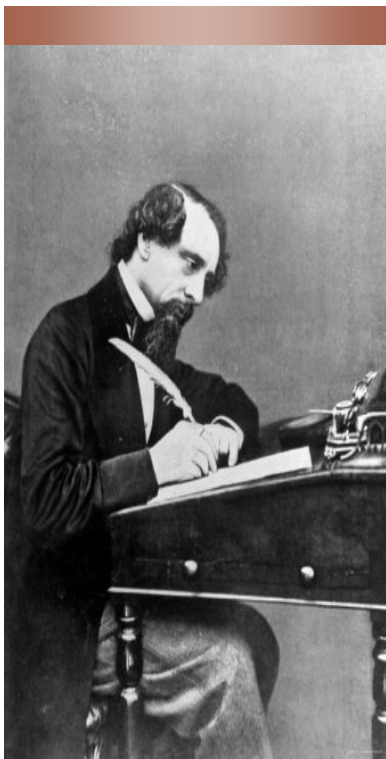
Abby Belcastro

Editor in Chief:

Mike Milling

Contributors:

Ed Bubnick
Bruce Form
Tim Rack
Amery Vasso



2020 BOARD INITIATIVES

- Moved monthly board meetings to virtual ZOOM during the Pandemic. The board voted to continue using ZOOM as our meeting space moving forward.
- Submitted grant for creation of reproduction of 1864 national colors.
- Organized our first authenticity training camp for the infantry/artillery.
- Donated \$385 to Battlefield Trust.
- Donated \$100 to the Gettysburg Foundation
- Donated \$500 to the Shriver House Museum.

DID YOU KNOW?

The board has been initiating donations to the Battlefield Trust for over 14 years. In that time the Brigade has donated \$10,777 to the preservation of Civil War battlefield sites and historic structures.

“I never had a policy; I have just tried to do my very best each and every day.” - Abraham Lincoln,

Authenticity in Camp & Beyond

Since the pandemic canceled our whole 2020 calendar, in place of the usual infantry/artillery training camp, the Brigade hosted a private authenticity training weekend over the summer.

Members presented on topics from ways we can affordably authenticate our uniforms to finding appropriate furniture for our camps and everything in between.

Greg Belcastro opened his Pennsylvania home to the brigade in August where the infantry and artillery set up a socially distanced camp on his lawn. Masked and ready, our members drilled, learned bayonet maneuvers, and attended lessons and workshops on how to be better reenactors.

Fun and informative, our members gave excellent presentations and hands-on workshops that inspired several to up their authenticity game.

Since we know so many of our members were not able to attend due to COVID precautions, our artillery sergeant, Tim Rack was kind enough to transcribe his presentation on authentic camp furniture for this newsletter. Please enjoy his article and look for more authenticity tips and tricks in our upcoming issues!



Authentic Camp “Furniture”

In Civil War reenacting there are different “levels” of authenticity reached by participants. Some (Hardcores) take authenticity to an extreme: counting buttonhole stitches, living on authentic rations, and praying to catch a case of dysentery in the field. On the other end of the spectrum, there are people (Farbs) that camp with a Civil War theme. They’ll make sure their cooler is blue or gray, but that’s about the extent of their authenticity. Most of the rest of us fall somewhere in the middle, trying to be more authentic, but without giving up all our creature comforts, or at least not those we can hide from the public. So how do we become more “authentic” without counting stitches and spending a fortune?

One way is to upgrade our camp furniture. Now, in this article, camp furniture covers everything from tent slips to seating and tables; essentially all those camp items that are normally on display, in one way or the other, to the public. The good thing is, most of us can vastly improve our authenticity with little effort and not a lot of money. So let’s look at some basic camp items.

Tentage

Tents and flies are pretty basic: put up some wooden poles, spread some canvas, and voila you’re done. But how can we improve on that? Well, have you ever noticed that most of our tents are held up with 2X4 lumber. It’s simple, inexpensive, and does a good job. Only one problem: 2X4’s didn’t look like that 1860’s. Modern 2X4’s are actually 1 ¾ X 3 ½ inches, and are smooth cut by modern machinery. Nineteenth century 2X4’s were literally 2 inches by 4 inches and rough cut with water, or steam powered saws. They were also heavier than modern lumber, so transporting can be a chore. In place of the 2X4, you can use tree branches, which was a common practice during the war. However, for full authenticity, the 1865 Quartermaster Manual actually has specifications for the vertical tent poles for A-frame tents and flies. The Manual calls for the poles to be eight sided, with a tin or iron cap and of appropriate length (depending on the tent size). These are relatively easy to reproduce, especially if you have access to a table saw, or have a friend who does. And while they may not be completely authentic, they are much closer and certainly look better than the standard 2X4. *Hint* - you can still use a 2X4 for the ridge pole since the public can’t see it anyway.



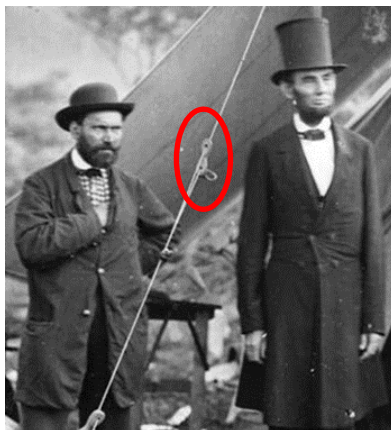
Another small item that can be made more authentic is the simple rope tensioner. Also known as tent slips, or dog bones, these were made of wood in a peanut shape. Army regulations called for "*Tent slips: To be made of cherry, birch, or other close-grained and suitable wood. For wall tents, 5 1/2" long, 1 3/4" wide at each end, 1" in diameter in the middle, and 1" thick throughout, a hole at each end, 3/8" in diameter, to receive the tent cord.*" Nowadays,

cherry and birch are expensive, so pine or poplar will work, and are easier to obtain in one-inch thick sizes. These can be made on a lathe, if you have one, or can be cut into the peanut shape with a band saw or jig saw, and then rounded using a router to obtain a similar effect. Finish with linseed oil or something similar and suddenly your tent or fly is more authentic. But keep in mind, the square wood blocks are still ok as they would have been field replacements for lost or broken “peanuts.” (continued on next page)



Don’t have a lathe or woodworking skills? You can buy the peanut tent slips from CC Sutlery for \$3.00 a piece.

[https://
www.ccsutlery.com/
store/tent-slip-
peanut.html](https://www.ccsutlery.com/store/tent-slip-peanut.html)



What does “Farby” Mean?

While no one is exactly sure where the word “Farb” or “Farby” truly began, the term is thought to have originated during the earliest Civil War reenactments of the 1960s. Coined as a shortened version of “Far be it from authentic” or an anagram of “Fast And Researchless Buying,” *Farb* is a derogatory term referencing a reenactor’s perceived indifference to historical accuracy in their impression, dress, mannerisms, and exhibit materials.

Also known as “polyester soldiers,” these reenactors are thought to spend very little time or investment in showcasing authenticity in their uniforms, accessories, or even period behaviors.

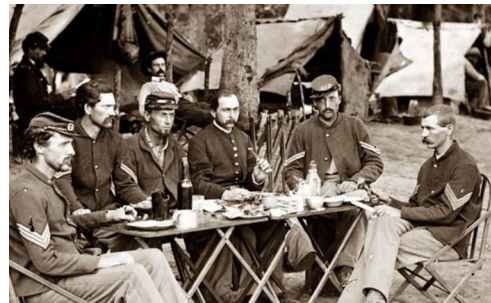
While the level of “farbiness” is highly dependent on context, most mainstream reenactors feel “farbiness” is anything a spectator might notice as ‘inauthentic.’

Taken from the [34thtex-ascavalrydismounted](#)’s WordPress Nov. 3, 2014 article, “*Finally, a Really Good Definition of the Term ‘Farby’*”

Tables

Tables in Civil War camps ran the gamut from elaborate factory-made folding tables to “liberated” plantation dining tables to crude planks lain across a couple of tree stumps or barrels, or large shipping crates turned upside down. These more primitive options are definitely under-represented in reenacting, probably because they are harder to transport than the folding variety. But that doesn’t mean they shouldn’t be used. A simple board, or a lid from a hardtack box, with four tree branches for legs can also make a rudimentary table, or just lay the board/ box lid on a stump.

Photographic examples show quite elaborate and ingenious factory made tables, such as the one in the photo below with an accordion style support that folded up for transport.



Seating

Notice I didn’t say camp chairs. This is because chairs were a much less common thing to sit on in camp than other items. Civil War soldiers, if they could find something to sit on at all, would often rest their backsides on an empty Army Bread box or a log. For most, just a ground cloth or gum blanket on terra firma sufficed. This is especially true while on campaign, as the extra weight of chairs often could not, and would not, be transported.

Unfortunately, one look at a reenactor camp can make visitors think there is a revival meeting going on with a preponderance of various chair types, most of which have absolutely no historical reason to be there. So let’s look at some often-used “authentic” seating and discuss some alternatives. Most reenactors use two types of “authentic” chairs: those two-piece chairs with horizontal slats where the bottom slides into the back for transport, and the wooden folding chair with metal hinges and usually thin slats forming the seats.



So what's wrong with these chairs? First, neither design dates from the 1860's. The two-piece chair first appears in *Boys Life* magazine in the 1920s, so how they made the leap to Civil War reenacting is anyone's guess. Note that each slat in the chair pictured has four fasteners, probably Phillips head screws, for a total of 36. Not only were Phillips head screws not invented until the 1930's, but 36 fasteners in one chair was an extravagant amount for the Civil War. Screws were common, but somewhat expensive, so were used sparingly, and only where necessary.

The folding chair design also dates from the 20th century, and the metal hinges and slides are obviously mass produced. I'm not saying chairs weren't factory made during the 1860s, but those type of hinges and slides were certainly not available. Most Civil War era folding furniture used hammered rivets or wooden dowels at pivot points. So if these two common reenactor chairs are totally farby, what can we use?

1. **The Folding Chair**- These seats were fairly common during the CW, especially for officers. There are numerous photos showing soldiers sitting in cloth seats with cloth backs and the ability to fold flat for easier transport. Some chairs were almost identical to modern "directors chairs", missing only the metal lock mechanism found on modern versions. Others were similar to modern beach "sling" chairs, using cloth or carpeting material to create the sitting portion of the chairs. *****They did not have metal hinges, Phillips style screws, and shiny coats of Polyurethane. CW factory-made chairs would have been finished with stains, oils, shellac, and/or paints, while field-made chairs were often bare wood. Folding sections were normally riveted, and after a few trips in the back of a wagon, were often beat up or damaged in some way, requiring a field repair.



These type of folding chairs can often be found at flea markets and antique stores for relatively little money (eBay is another source). They may need new canvas or carpet material, but this can easily be obtained from a fabric store, or in the case of the director chair, from various websites. Pick a dull or neutral color, preferably the color of tenting canvas, or an old style carpet. You can mimic a field repair by using tent canvas, which was the handiest material back then.

And speaking of chairs at flea markets, there is nothing wrong with a basic kitchen style chair (don't take one of your spouse's matching set!). While they won't fold, the basic kitchen chair design has changed little in hundreds of years. Try to find one that is sturdy and has few, if any, modern fasteners like screws, in its construction. Wooden chairs with wicker or rush seats are quite comfortable and will give the impression they have been "liberated" from a nearby home or farm. Rocking chairs were quite popular in camp, if they could be obtained, and many photographs can be found with troops sitting in them.

2. **Benches**— Benches were very common and used for seating, footrests, and tables. Most were what is known as a "Five Board Bench" as that's the number of boards that are used in its construction. They are quite easy to build from scrap lumber, even in the field, and only use 12 fasteners - normally cut nails. These are also under-used in reenactor camps, and while they don't fold, they don't take up too much space in your car. An added benefit is that if they break, they cost very little to replace and they make great firewood. (continued on next page)





3. Stools—Stools come in many shapes and sizes, though normally two types, folding and non-folding, were most popular. Folding stools use two legs on each side with a pivot point in the middle. They have canvas or carpet material tacked on for the seat. These take up hardly any space when folded so are very useful as a transportable seat. There are three legged folding stools as well, though these have a tendency to break sooner than the four legged variety. Either is authentic to the period. Non folding stools also come in three or four legged styles and were also quite common. Look for simply built ones without metal reinforcing rods, and with no metal fasteners.

4. Other Seating—Now you don't need to buy or make one of the types of seats discussed above. Most soldiers, especially those of lower rank, used whatever they could find to sit on. Boxes, logs, stumps, rocks - you name it, they probably sat on it. Again these items are rarely found in reenactor camps as most participants bring a chair.

Hardtack boxes make some of the best seats as they are tall when stood on end and definitely lend an air of authenticity to the camp. They were quite common in CW camps and were used for many things: storage boxes, footlockers, tables, seats, and their lumber repurposed by camp carpenters. And speaking of carpenters, these tradesmen used hand tools to build all manner of items, including many of the items discussed here, especially once the Army settled into a long term encampment.



Authenticity Tips

Let's end this article with some tips regarding authentic camp furniture. These are listed in no particular order, but can go a long way toward making our camps look closer to what an actual CW camp would have looked like.

1. Visit The Library of Congress Photographs Collection.

- it is a wonderful source for finding what CW camps looked like. The photos can be searched (try "camps" or "soldiers in camp") and downloaded for free. If you want extreme details, download the .tiff versions of the photos. While the files are quite large, you can blow them up on your computer screen for unbelievable details.

2. Check out flea markets, antique stores and eBay for furniture.

- these are very good sources, especially for folding chairs. Price-wise, flea markets are the best, with authentic chairs costing around \$20. Remember you may have to go to several fleas, or the same one over and over till you find what you want. Another source is bulk garbage days. I can't tell you how many chairs I see as I drive around. With a little glue and some paint, they would look right at home in a CW camp (I have saved a few). If you find it can't be salvaged after you pick it up and get it home, just throw it away or use it for firewood - they're FREE!

3. Use cut nails with squared heads when building your own furniture.

- cut nails were the most common nail used during the period. If you don't have any cut nails, carefully grind off two sides of a round head nail and it will look very similar. Slotted screws are ok as well, but limit the number and avoid stainless steel (unless it's going to be painted anyway). NO Philips head screws!!



4. Remember, things don't have to look old.

- think about it. If you were living during that time period, the table or chair would probably be fairly new. For camp made furniture, it *would* be brand new! So take that old furniture find and clean it up and/or repaint it. If you build something, leave it unfinished and let it weather on its own.

5. If you have woodworking skills, give it a try.

- the internet has numerous specifications for authentic boxes, crates, benches, etc. Another great source are the two books by AJ Hamler on Civil War Woodworking. These contain many plans and step by step instructions for a wide variety of camp furniture including tables, chairs, camp beds, ballot boxes, chests, etc.

6. No woodworking skills? Ask your fellow reenactors.

- As a woodworker (or is that wood butcher?) myself, I'm always looking for new projects to keep me busy, especially during the winter months. So for the price of the lumber required, I'd be happy to take requests for items. Brian Egbert also makes authentic supply boxes that can be used as chairs or tables.

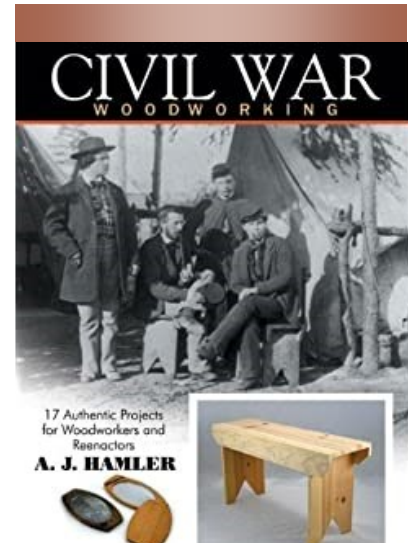
7. Not sure if something's authentic? Just Research.

- If you're not sure about a particular item, do some research. A short search can often lead to a treasure trove of information. Exact dimensions of ammo and hardtack boxes, as well as many other items are readily available on the internet. Historic photographs, fellow reenactors, museums, and even some Facebook groups can all show you what will work and what won't.

By Tim Rack

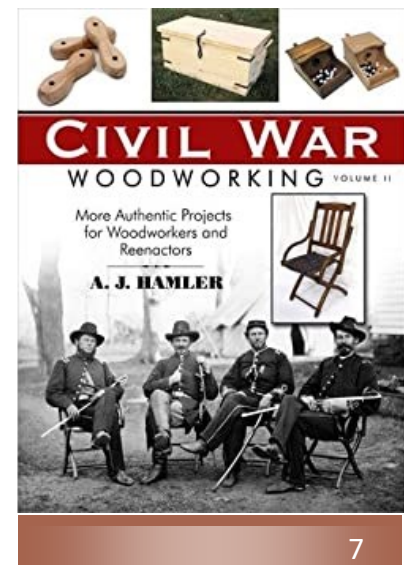
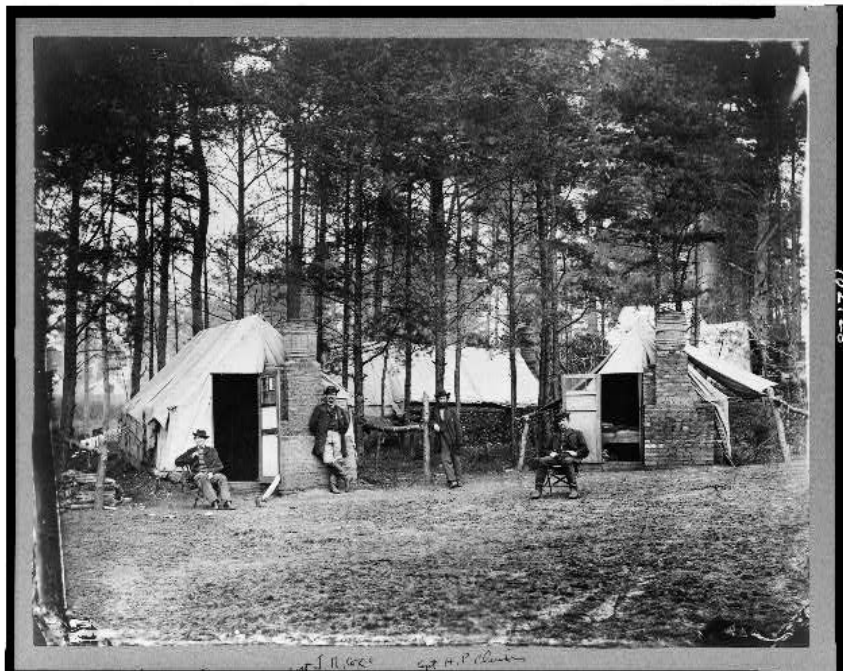
Edited for space by Abby Belcastro

HAPPY AUTHENTICATING!



Check out the Library of Congress' Civil War Collection at:

<https://www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/civwar/>



What is POW/MIA Recognition Day?

Established in 1979 by Pres. Jimmy Carter, the third Friday of every September is designated as national day of honor and recognition for those military personnel who were held captive or went missing during the Vietnam War.



POW = Prisoner of War
MIA = Missing in Action

Interesting Fact:

The POW/MIA flag is the only flag ever displayed at the U.S. Capitol Rotunda, and is the only flag besides the national colors to be flown over the White House.

Want to be involved?

Mark your calendars for the 3rd Friday in September 2021 .

For additional photos, videos, and the POW/MIA newsletter please go to the Morris County Website:
(legionmorriscountynj.org)



POW/MIA Vigil

The Morris County American Legion & All Veteran Alliance held their annual POW/MIA 24-hour Vigil from Sept 19th – 20th at the All Veteran Memorial in Mt. Olive (Turkey Brook Park) with over 250 patrons in attendance.



Running concurrently with the Vigil, Mt. Olive High School's Air Force JROTC conducted the annual Bataan Memorial Death March event, commemorating the original march in 1942 where cadets who completed the 14-mile course earned a ribbon awarded by the JROTC command.



During the vigil, members of the 2D Brigade, First Sergeant Greg Belcastro and Private Ed Bubnick, set up a living history where they shared details regarding the life of a Union soldier. Greg and Ed also read several names from the list of New Jersey's still unaccounted-for veterans. Upon completion of

the reading of the list, Greg and Ed ended their one-hour shift by ringing the Ascension Bell 21 times, providing a symbolic beacon for those missing to return home. Ringing this bell is the highest honor the Legion can bestow on an individual.

During the closing ceremony, the 7th NJ Volunteer contingent was joined by Corporal Don Lopuzzo for the rendering of honors. First Sergeant Belcastro and Private Bubnick joined an honor guard near the Ascension Bell as Corporal Lopuzzo rendered



Taps. The Legion was happy for the participation of the 2D Brigade, and hopes we can participate again in 2021.

- ◆ By Amery Vasso
- ◆ Edited by Abby Belcastro

The Pandemic's Wake

As we round out this crazy year and hope that 2021 will bring better days, it's safe to say that how we enjoy our hobby, and the places where we reenact, may look very different next year.

While the pandemic has hurt many aspects of our lives both personal and social, one of the hardest hit industries to come out of this year is historic sites. With few visitors allowed in buildings and most historic sites' reliance on grants and donated financial support cut, these sites are struggling to make ends meet and keep their doors open for a post-pandemic world. While many have switched to digital programs and virtual tours to keep the lights on, the financial strain from 2020 will haunt these sites for years or close their doors for good.

Our own favorite site, Historic Speedwell, is one of these cases. Closed since March, with only light foot traffic allowed through the site, the Park Commission laid off ninety percent of its Historic Sites staff in June. While a skeleton crew is offering virtual programs from the site, Historic Speedwell has been shuttered to the public for the foreseeable future. Other sites, like Coldsprings Village and our friendly ladies at Wall Township Historical society, are facing similar circumstances.

But the good news is we can help immensely in the new year. As an organization, one of the greatest things we provide these sites is free educational programming that bring visitors who may never have known the site was there through their doors. Many visitors return to the site long after we've gone, becoming members, participating in programs, and raising revenue. This will be essential to these sites' survival in the next two to five years to help them recover from 2020's losses.

So how do we practically help these sites? First, and most importantly, is to attend and participate in our partner programs when we return to in-person events. Visitors want to see active sites when they come for programs, and the more reenactors they see, the more engaged and positive their visitor experience will be. Which in turn, will be a positive experience at the site itself that can turn into repeat visitation or financial support. Secondly is our ability to offer more robust, interactive programming like our holiday encampment. Visitors love to do things, and brainstorming some interactive activities into our impressions can go a long way to assisting historic sites with engaging the public in memorable ways. Think about your impression in a new way; how can you engage the public in an interactive way that you haven't done before? And thirdly is advertising. Social media is infectious, and a few posts about your participation in an upcoming program, or just sharing a virtual program a site is offering, can help spread the word about the site and its calendar to reach audiences the site may not have access to. These may seem like small things against a huge problem, but many little things add up to big things that can make an enormous impact.

Like our mission to keep alive the stories of the average soldiers and unnamed women who sacrificed and bled for a greater cause, these small historic sites hope to keep alive the untold stories of farmers, inventors, blacksmiths, and housewives who shaped our history with their daily lives and contributed in sometimes greater ways than the big names in the history books. While small and quiet, these sites provide important local historical context that would be horrible to lose. As we look forward to the new year, let's aim to help these sites survive.

◆ By Abby Belcastro



WHO'S WHO?

Showcasing Our Brigade Membership: Ed Bubnick



Meet Ed!

Ed Bubnick is a staple at events with his two-man buck saw and pioneer impression. As a man with many talents from sewing his own quilts to creating leather spoon holders, Ed's got a number of surprising hobbies that go beyond the battlefield and living history events. I sat down with Ed to get some information about the hobby that he's most passionate about outside of reenacting: cleaning and restoring Civil War era graves.

AB: Hi Ed, thank you so much for doing this interview. When did you first join the brigade and how did you find us?

EB: My first event was back in 2004 at Fosterfields. I met the 6th NJ guys the week before and they invited me to go out with the 7th. It was the dreaded Red Noses at morning formations affair. I became a member in 2006, although it was part time, as I was still with my original unit, the 14th NJ. I went full time with 2D around 2010.

AB: How did you get started with grave restoration? When did you first realize this was something you could do?

EB: Charles F. Hopkins' grave in Boonton's Greenwood Cemetery was the reason I started. He was a medal of honor recipient, and was one of the most humble men. He actually refused to pick up his medal, feeling he didn't deserve it. His family had to make him claim it. I wanted to do my part to honor him. It took a few years to find the right way to clean stones, as you can do more harm than good to a 100 year old grave. Its quite intimidating to start, and I cleaned some of my own family's graves to practice first. But when they came out well, I felt ready to move on to historical ones.

AB: What is the process for restoring graves?

The most difficult part is finding family and getting their permission. I went to school with the great-granddaughters of Mr. Hopkins, so that one was easy. But I've worked on some that I couldn't find any living relatives for. I mostly concentrate on Civil War veterans' graves, but if there's one nearby that needs cleaning, or the soldier's wife's grave is in bad shape, I can't help myself, and I restore those also. For cleaning, I use an assortment of natural and plastic brushes, plastic scrapers, and wood skewers or dowels for the fine detail and letters. I use a special cleaning fluid called D2, which is a biologic that works on the lichens and organic matter that kill the stones. Its used by the National Park Service and Arlington Cemetery staff, so I feel safe using it. Cleanings also requires a ton of water since you're constantly rinsing the stone.

AB: How did you learn how to do this?

EB: I learned the techniques from a man on Facebook called "The Good Cemetarian." He was on 60 Minutes and has cleaned over 3,000 stones himself. I also recently attended a workshop by one of the foremost stone and monument repairmen in the country, Jonathon Appel. He's the owner of *Atlas Preservation* and has worked in Jamestown, and is the industry go-to for tough jobs. Mr Appel is currently on a 48-state tour of the US, teaching the proper techniques of cleaning and resetting headstones and larger graves. He was a very focused man, and he can tell which quarry the marble on the old stones came from and the approximate date, just based on the tightness of the layers in the rock. The class started with cleaning aspects, but most of the day was spent on resetting and repairing slab stones and multi-layer monuments.



Before Cleaning



After Cleaning



We dug out the slab or flat stones and learned how to pull them out of the ground on the sides and move them without cracking before resetting them back in. The multi-layer monuments' layers got reset with different epoxies and mortars depending on the make up of the stone. We used wedges of lead to keep the stones from sitting directly on each other, and then filled the voids with a variety of mortars. There were also powders to fill the cracks in the stones, and about 10 different colors to match with. I took 6 pages of notes and my head was spinning for 3 days after, but it was quite a day. I had some idea of how much work it takes to do this properly, but the knowledge Mr. Appel has can only be obtained over years of hard work.

AB: That sounds like an amazing class. How many stones have you cleaned so far, and do you have an ultimate goal?

EB: I have done about 33 or so. I start by taking before-photos and documenting the names, although I'm working on a system and trying to find a program to make it easier. One Friday I had off, I spent 6 hours in the cemetery because I just kept finding Civil War veteran's stones. Even as I was walking out, I found a star with a 7th NJ Co. F grave. It's like reenacting, very rewarding but it can be tiring sometimes. I would love to do them all, but it's a time consuming process, and some will take 5 to 8 months to finish as I can only take so much off at one time without causing damage.

AB: Has doing this hobby impacted your perception of the past?

EB: While walking the cemeteries, I've found so many personal stories: 2 brothers in a Towaco cemetery are on either sides of the same stone. I've found a few USCT soldiers; 1 in Boonton that fought mostly out west, and another in Independence, NJ, who was in the 2nd USCT. I haven't had a chance to do the very detailed research I'd like to do, but I always try to get something to help me understand what it was like for them after the war. Very few books are written about soldiers after the war, and most diaries stop when they get home. But when you can finally see the lettering on the stone after a cleaning or 2, you start to get a picture of the man's life. The 7th soldier I talked about above was actually in the 5th NJ originally. I haven't found too much information on him, but I imagine he was part of the brigade reorganization after Gettysburg. I can't imagine him being moved away from the unit he had fought with up to that point. I guess for every stone there's a few stories, and I hate seeing a death date that was within a few years of the war. To have made it all the way through, and then not have had a long, happy life is sad. I do wonder if some of those early deaths were due to PTSD. Although, based on my research, I have found that most were like Mr. Hopkins, humble men fighting for the guy next to them, and just wanting to go home. They never believed they deserved medals or acclaim. I just want to keep their memories alive, and by having clean gravestones, their families can find them more easily.

I get attached to the person and their stone. Some take so long, it's like going back to visit a family member. It's been a real test of patience for me, as I've always been an immediate-results kind of person. But this type of work is slow and steady. One of the best things is that my granddaughter, Lauren, has been going with me to clean. She enjoys it, and we talk about the history and stories as we go. Her favorite place is Gettysburg, and she wants to come to some events next year.

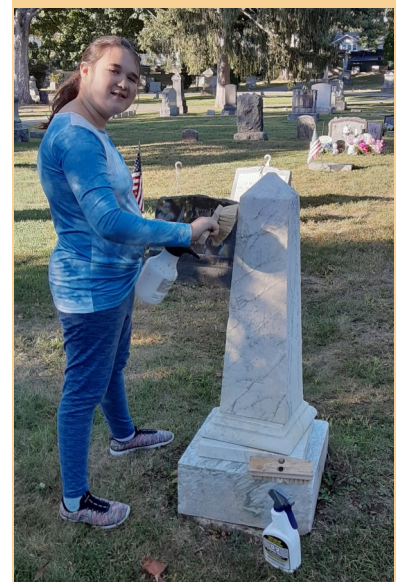
AB: If other members would like to get involved in grave restoration, do you have any resources you could recommend?

EB: To get started, the best place is Youtube; *Atlas Preservation* has a database of videos and Q&As there. "The Good Cemeterian" is on the web and can be followed on Facebook. I would be more than happy to help people get started. I was thinking of doing a workshop if anyone wanted to attend. I'm talking to a Presbyterian Cemetery in East Hanover for permission to clean another 7th NJ soldier's grave, and I'd also be glad to help anyone clean their families' graves. If anyone wants to go cleaning, let me know, I'm always available!



Appel, replacing a slab stone grave during his workshop.

Lauren helping Grandpa

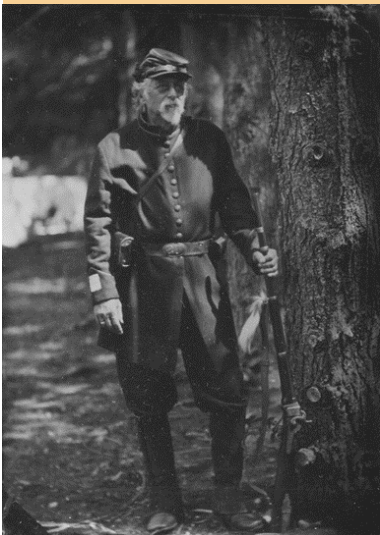


Reporting from Gettysburg: The Berdan Sharpshooters, Part I



48 star Sharp Shooters reunion flag. The flag was owned by Lt. Curtis Abbott (11/4/1840-11/15/1935) of Co. H 2nd Berdan Sharp Shooters. Abbott was WIA at the 2nd Battle at Bull Run, the Battle of the Wilderness, and also fought at Gettysburg. It is likely that Abbott acquired this flag at the 50th Gettysburg Reunion in

Bruce in Berdan Impression



The Battle of Gettysburg has contributed many fascinating military strategies, heroic actions, romantic stories, & myths over the last 157 years. Historians (be they noted authors or ‘armchair historians’, like Civil War Round Table members) and scholars have examined, dissected, or second guessed the events of those three days to almost the minute. But one group that is not often discussed is the United States Sharpshooters (USSS), a.k.a., “Berdan’s Sharpshooters”, and their contributions on the second day. To understand their actions, one must first delve into the history of what made them unique.

In 1861, there were no formal “Sharpshooter,” or what we now call, “Sniper” units in the U.S. armed forces. But a wealthy mechanical engineer and inventor, Hiram Berdan, reputed to be “The Best Shot in the Country,” approached the War Department early on with the idea of creating a special regiment of marksmen to serve in the conflict. These men would work almost independently, unrestricted from the standard Napoleonic formation of fighting. They would work in *skirmish* style, trained to “One-shot, one-kill,” specifically on officers and artilleryists where possible.

Berdan was given approval by the War Department on June 15, 1861 to establish a regiment, and he wanted the best shooters available from all the Northern states. He recruited from everywhere: New York City, Albany, New Hampshire, Vermont, Michigan, Minnesota, Maine, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin. Berdan was an entrepreneur and somewhat of a showman, saying his sharpshooter regiment was “destined to be the most important and popular service” with men who were specially trained, wore distinctive uniforms, and used innovative weapons that no regular infantry service would be given. However, to qualify, each recruit had to put ten consecutive shots, in a ten-inch diameter target circle, at 200 yards; the average distance of the shots - or string of shots - no more than five inches from the center of the bullseye, using the weapon of their choice.

Most recruits were marksman in their own right, hailing from shooting clubs, and they brought their own target rifles with them to the qualifying location in Weehawken, NJ. Their heavy bench target rifles could hit a target at half a mile, where standard military muskets, even rifled ones, were rarely accurate at 300 yards. Upon qualifying, all recruits were sent to the Camp of Instruction outside of Washington City (D.C.) with Colonel Hiram Berdan as their commanding officer, even though he had no military background or field experience. The Camp began in the Fall/Winter of 1861-1862 with some 1800 men broken into the First and Second Regiments.

As one could imagine, the recruits’ own target rifles were impractical in combat, some weighing in at 30lbs. To replace them, Berdan requested the War Department supply the men Sharp’s Model 1859 breech loading rifle with .52 caliber cartridge. Because they were breach loading, they allowed soldiers to load up to ten rounds per minute, roughly three times the rate of an infantryman. In a test action, a Berdan Sharpshooter using the .52 caliber Sharp’s rifle placed 24 shots in a 24” target at 600 yards, showcasing that sharpshooters could target the enemy before they were in range to return fire. However, the War Department refused Berdan’s request, declaring that breach loads would lead to a waste of ammunition. Though Berdan continually pressed the department, and even wrote directly to President Lincoln, The War Department remained rigid, even going so far as to publicly discredit Berdan as a self-promoting showman and military ignoramus.

But eventually Berdan prevailed, as Capt. Charles Augustus Stevens, the USSS’ Historian in his text, *BERDAN’S; United States Sharpshooters in the Army of the Potomac 1861 – 1865*, shows:

“Colonel Berdan was continually hosting various guests to the Camp of Instruction where the Sharpshooters were to demonstrate the skills of his men. There came a time when President Lincoln with General McClellan and Assistant Secretary of War, Colonel Thomas Scott, visited the Camp. In the rifle pits 100 Berdan’s men were practicing their shooting, each man using his single shot heavy target rifle, at painted canvas target images of two Zouaves set at 600 yards away....”

While in the rifle pit President Lincoln took up a rifle and fired three shots...All three hit their mark...President Lincoln handled his rifle like a veteran marksman and commented, "Boys, this reminds me of old time shooting". Cheers erupted...His visit aroused their slumbering patriotism. Following the President's shooting Colonel Berdan put on a display to entertain the guests making several difficult shots of varied distances and targets...Afterward Berdan commented that this could be done by his men if they had the proper weapons to do so, referring to the Sharps rifles..."

In Berdan's own account,

"Then occurred one of those extraordinary accidents from which great and beneficial results often follow; Thomas Scott, Assistant Secretary of War, thought to gain a point by attacking me personally, and what I knew about guns and war that I should set up my opinion against all these officials [referring to General Winfield Scott and the War Department who were denying him the Sharp's Rifles], and ended by challenging me to fire, thinking doubtless, I would decline or, if I accepted, to get the laugh on me by my making a bad shot. I at once accepted and told my men to bring out a target; the only one left was the figure of a single man, full size, with the words, 'Jeff Davis' painted above his head. I remarked that I did not think it was exactly the thing to fire at Jeff Davis in the presence of the President of The United States. Mr. Lincoln laughed heartily and replied,

"Oh Colonel, if you make a good shot it will serve him right."

"The target was set up and I called for the Sergeant-Major's rifle, which I knew to be correctly sighted for this distance. Thomas Scott the remarked, "Now fire standing, for officers should not dirty their uniforms by getting into rifle pits."

"I replied, you are right Colonel Scott, I always fire from the shoulder.

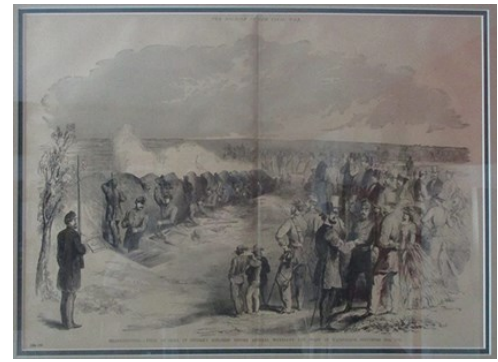
I stepped forward and began to bring my gun to my face when he said,

"What point are you going to fire at?"

"The head", I replied.

"Fire at the right eye" he shouted.

I was then taking aim and made no reply, and it is hardly necessary for me to say, that at that distance - 600 yards - I did not aim at the eye, but I did fire at the head. The target was brought in and as good luck would have it, I cut out the pupil of the right eye. No man knew better than President Lincoln how to turn what he knew to be an accident to good account. He began to laugh, and kept laughing until he got in his carriage and said, "Colonel, come down tomorrow (to the White House) and I will give you the order for your breech-loaders."



SHARPSHOOTING - Trial of skills of Berdan's riflemen before General McClellan and staff at Washington City. (original Harper's Weekly page from Bruce's personal collection)

For their first campaign, "Big Bethel," in March/April of 1862, the War Department issued the Colt Revolving cylinder rifle as a 'fill in' until the Sharps arrived. The regiments, except for two companies keeping their own target rifles, were armed with these five shot weapons. These proved not only as accurate as the sharps, but were dangerous to use. Chain firing often occurred when all of the cylinders' black powder ignited after one shot was struck, causing powder burns and injuries. But the 1859 Sharps Rifle with double set triggers finally found their way to the Sharpshooters.

From Big Bethel on, the two USSS regiments carved their way with a fear inducing reputation, so much so that they were touted as "Ungentlemanly Man Hunters" and given names such as "Widow Makers" by the Rebels. Some sharpshooter began wearing black cock feathers in their hats to signify to the Confederates that they were in fact, hunters and 'widow makers'. By the time of the Battle of Gettysburg, Sharps rifles in hand and reputation solidified, both regiments found themselves assigned to the Army of the Potomac's (AOP) Right Wing, commanded by Gen. John Reynolds.

At Gettysburg:

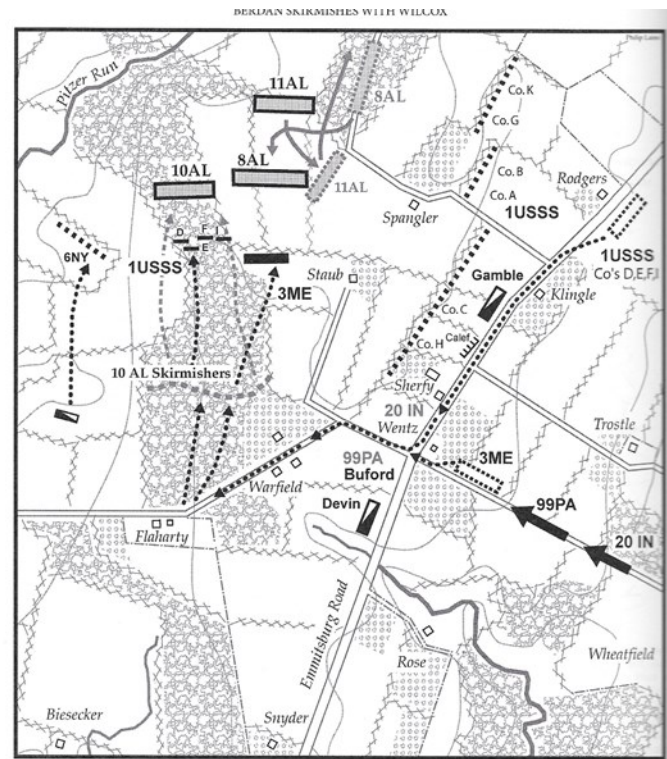
General Reynolds' Right Wing was made up of the 1st, 3rd and 11th Corps of the AOP. General Sickles' 3rd Corps was further south of town than the 1st and 11th had been at the beginning of the battle, and Sickles and his men didn't arrive at Gettysburg until most of the first day's fighting had ceased. In this aftermath, General Meade had some time to organize his forces for the battle in which he was currently engaged, greatly affecting the sharpshooter regiments. Directing, and again redirecting, General Sickles to have his 3rd Corps attach itself to the left flank of General Hancock's 2nd Corps on Cemetery Ridge to extend his line from there toward the Emmitsburg Road, General Meade gave orders for General Buford's and his 1st Cavalry Division to move toward the rear of the AOP lines for resupply and rest. (continue on page 12)





Gettysburg Battlefield 1st USSS Monument on Berdan Avenue

This left the 3rd Corps solely responsible for the entire left flank of the Union line. To General Sickles' mind, he was left unprotected and in a poor position for his artillery. He protested, demanding relocation, which Gen. Meade denied, directing him to meet instead with Gen. Hunt, Chief of Artillery of the AOP. This prompted an agreement between Sickles and Hunt, based upon reports from skirmishers west of the Emmitsburg Road and toward Seminary Ridge, to have the area probed for enemy troops movements and locations. General Sickles planned on moving forward to assure his artillery platform in the event of a Confederate attack but neither General was prepared to issue an order to allow such a move. This brings in the entry of the 1USSS into the battle.



Above map shows the movement of the 1st USSS with the 3rd Maine probing the Confederate right

Around noon on July 2nd, Gen. Sickles gave orders to send Col. Berdan and six companies of men from the 1st USSS along with men of the 3rd Maine infantry to reconnoiter the area west of the Emmitsburg Road after the departure of General Buford's Cavalry.

Upon crossing the Emmitsburg Road and moving northward, the force saw Confederate skirmishers in the wooded area ahead, most likely the 10th or 11th Alabama Infantry. General Birney's report on this movement during the Gettysburg Campaign stated,

"I received permission from Major General Sickles to send 100 of Berdan's Sharpshooters, with the Third Maine Regiment in support... They advanced from the Peach Orchard out the Millerstown Road and entered the woods in order to flank the enemy. The skirmishers of the enemy were driven in, but three columns of their forces were found marching to our left. The force sent by me was driven back by overwhelming numbers, with the loss of about 60, killed and wounded.

The force encountered by the 1USSS were the skirmishers of the 10th Alabama and the rest of the advancing Alabama regiment, but the sharpshooters held the 8th and 10th at bay before falling back when they encountered Alabama's vast reserves.

Later in the day on July 2nd, as the action had subsided, General Hancock recognized how instrumental the sharpshooters had been to their victory. Captain C.A. Stevens, 1USSS, Company G, Regimental Historian, noted:

"The heroic deeds of Leonidas and his 300 Spartans, betrayed and slaughtered by the Persians hosts, has for ages been recounted in verse and story. But no greater display of heroism, no more self-sacrificing spirit of patriotism can be cited in the annals of war, than was this courageous attack of Berdan's 300 on marching columns of 30,000 foes. And surely, it may be fairly said to be a turning point in the rebellion."

Stevens, accurate or not on the count of their foes, showed that the 1USSS did their job and did it well that day. *

- ◆ By Bruce Form
- ◆ Edited for space by Abby Belcastro



Resources & Further Reading Guide:

Berdan's United States Sharpshooters in the Army of the Potomac, by Captain C.A. Stevens
Letters from a Sharpshooter: Civil War Letters of William Greene

Gettysburg Campaign Atlas; Revised Edition, Map p.174, #2-11 - Berdan Skirmish with Wilcox.

The Official Records: Series I, Vol XXVII/1 Gettysburg Campaign

Report of General Birney

Report of Colonel Hiram Berdan

Report of Lt Colonel Casper Trepp

Notes from Battlefield Tour, "Sharpshooter's Actions on July 2, 1863" with Larry Koczyk, Gettysburg Licensed Battlefield Guide

Photographs, Sharpshooter Medal and Illustrations from Bruce Form's personal collection.

Coming soon!

Part 2, More on the life of Hiram Berdan and The Actions of the 2nd United States Sharpshooters at Gettysburg.



Why Green?

The green wool blended better into the foliage of the trees and grasses, making it easier for Berdans to stay hidden when searching out their targets.

While the uniform below (from the National Museum of American History) is shown with brass buttons similar to infantry uniforms, these buttons were later replaced with flat black rubber buttons to keep sunlight from glinting off the metal and giving away the sharpshooters' positions.



However, the Green stood out against the blue Union uniform on the battlefield, making sharpshooters easy targets for the Confederates.

By Gettysburg, many Berdans preferred the union blue coat to hide inside the battle lines.

RESEARCH, RESEARCH, RESEARCH

Books, Classes, Seminars, & Tours

Fast Facts on Elizabeth Keckley



Born into Slavery in 1818 in Dinwiddle, VA

Her biological father was also her master. This did not get her special treatment.

Learned sewing from her mother, Aggie, who, as a house slave, was forced to sew clothes for the 82 members of the household.

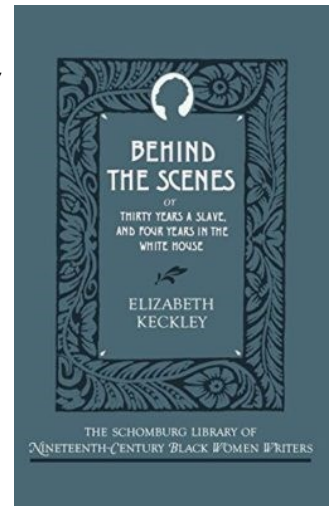
Was taught to read and write by her mother and stepfather, even though it was illegal.

In 1855, she purchased her own freedom for herself and her son for \$1200 (\$33,000 today), by receiving a loan from her wealthy lady clients. She paid the loan back through her dressmaking business.

Before the war, she was Varina Davis' (wife of Jefferson Davis) personal seamstress.

I try to read at least one Civil War book a year (for those that don't know, I'm much more of speculative fiction reader than a history reader), but this year, I ended up reading two that I'd recommend to literally everyone.

The first I found down a random rabbit hole on the internet. In looking for something entirely unrelated, I came across a little article about the first famous Black seamstress, Elizabeth Keckley. As I scrolled through, there was a link to her autobiography, published in 1867, where she recounted her work as Mary Lincoln's personal dressmaker. It was too intriguing to resist, and fortunately, my local library had a copy. *Behind the Scenes: Thirty Years a Slave & Four Years in the White House* chronicles Keckley's horrific early years where she was abused by her masters, raped by a neighbor, and forced to pay off her master's epic debts with her sewing abilities. As an adult, she was able to start building a clientele of wealthy southern debutantes as her skill with a needle got public, and through her unbelievable tenacity and a lot of her clients' goodwill, she bought her own freedom and escaped to Washington D.C. Once there, her story mostly focused on her unlikely friendship with Mrs. President and her intimate view into the private lives of the Lincolns during the tumultuous Civil War years.

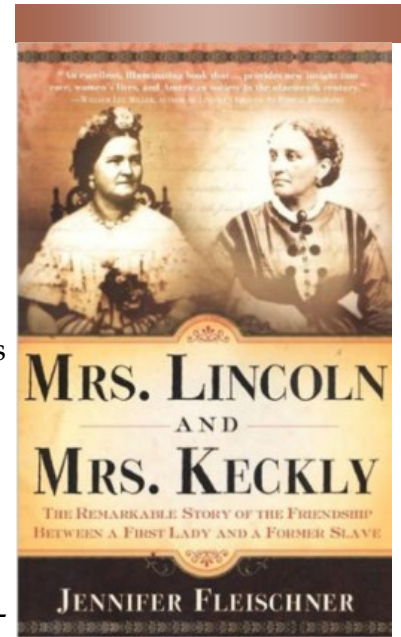


At it's core, Keckley wrote the book to prove that Mary Lincoln was a good woman who'd been misunderstood after the country's absolute vilification of her following the president's death. But the publication back-fired, as the editor published all the private letters between Keckley and Mrs. Lincoln in the book's epilogue after promising Keckley he would never do that. The book caused a serious rift in the women's friendship and Lincoln never spoke to Keckley again.

But the parts of the book I found most intriguing were the ways in which Keckley tries to paint Mary Lincoln as a misunderstood soul, and yet Mary still comes off looking like a loon. There was also the added questions for me, as a reader in 2020, about whether or not this friendship was true. Did Keckley just assume Lincoln was her friend because she didn't treat her like a slave? Or was there a real mutual affection between these women from such different backgrounds and social statuses?

I needed more information, and maybe Keckley was too close to her own story to tell me. So I went hunting, and found this exceptional research reference, *Mrs. Lincoln & Mrs. Keckley: The Remarkable Story of the Friendship Between a First Lady & a Former Slave* by Jennifer Fleischner.

This book was stunning, and not just for the way Fleischner unpacks the complicated facets of Keckley and Lincoln's relationship, although she does that deftly. Fleischner goes into immense depth about the Lincolns' family life in the White House, the legitimately crazy things that Mary was doing during her four years there, and how Keckley's presence probably kept Mary from going completely off the rails. In a deep-dive historical sweep, Fleischner's able to connect the interior lives of the Lincolns and Keckley with the social tumult and quickly changing societal landscape they all found themselves in.



Fleischner spends a decent portion of the book unpacking Lincoln's presidency and the true behind-the-scenes of what Washington and other non-war zone areas of the U.S. were like in the 1860s. As most of the books on the Civil War focus specifically on the battles and military components, this book was a refreshing new look at the less bloody, although no less dangerous, side of the Civil War. Watching Mary and Elizabeth navigate the social constructs and rapidly changing politics of the day is a sight to behold, and does beg the question for both women of whether or not they were simply misunderstood and ahead of their times.



While I wish Fleishner had more information on Keckley(we spent far more time on the Lincolns), there's only so many extant resources to work with when dealing with ex-slaves, so while Fleischner does her best with the information that's out there, much of what's written is speculation based on reading between the lines of Keckley's autobiography. However, I would highly recommend reading these two books back-to-back as the autobiography sketches the story, and Fleishner paints the full picture. *

- by Abby Belcastro, 2020

Dress attributed to Elizabeth Keckley. Made for Mary Lincoln, circa 1863.

“An act may be wrong, but unless the ruling power recognizes the wrong, it is useless to hope for a correction of it.” — Elizabeth Keckley, Behind the Scenes, or, Thirty Years a Slave, And Four Years in the White House

The 2D Board

Is there something you'd like to bring to the Board's attention? A new idea? A new impression? Something that can make the brigade better?

We'd love to hear what you have to say! Please contact your impression head and ask them to bring your idea to the Board's attention. Or, contact president Mike Milling, and ask if you can make a special presentation to the board at one of our meetings.

COMMITTEES

We have created three new committees as part of our Board this year:

Advertising:

Abby Belcastro
Paul Egbert
Amery Vasso
Brian Zilinski

Recruiting:

Brian Zilinski
Rich Walker
Lin Kaufer

Safety:

Matt Belcastro
Hans Artz
Michelle Catona
Rich Walker

Have ideas for how we can advertise our programming better, recruit more members, or work on our safety? Please contact our committee members with your ideas!

