

Our Patron Saints



John Ford



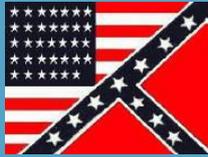
Shelby Foote

MARCH 2017. NUMBER 496

OUR MOTTO: *Don't use a big word where a diminutive one will suffice*

MINIE NEWS

Official Newsletter of the American Civil War Round Table of Australia Inc.



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Come to the Conference and learn about Native Americans in the Civil War

Stand Watie

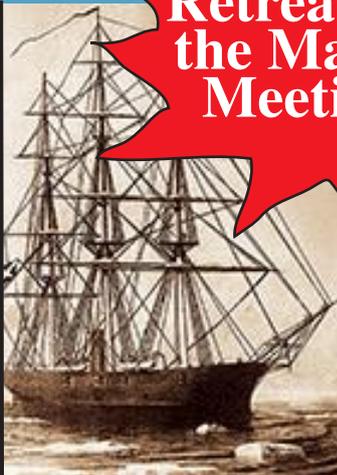


Ely Parker



Back to the Retreat for the March Meeting

CSS Shenandoah



Our Next Meeting

WEDNESDAY 22ND MARCH 2017

Meeting to be held at the Retreat Hotel 226 Nicholson Street Abbotsford. Drinks and congenial talk at the bar with meals 6.30 to 8.00. Formal proceedings kick off at around 7.30pm sharp (approx) thereabouts! Upstairs in the still magnificent Carringbush Room. Our meetings are scheduled for the 4th Wednesday of each month except December.



Lecture: -

"Fame and Celebrity in the Civil War"-Barry Crompton

QUOTABLE QUOTES

"Poor Andy Nave was killed. He refused to surrender and was shot by Dick Fields. I felt sorry as he used to be quite friendly towards me before the war, but it could not be helped."

Stand Watie



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Henry Fonda as Young Mr Lincoln (1938)

As Frank would sing...One for my baby and one more for the road...

from the editors
Warren & Ross



Welcome to the March 2017 edition of MN.

It looks like we are back at the Retreat for our March Meeting. Hopefully the transition back to normalcy will be seamless. God will be in his heaven and all will be right with the world.

But before our return to the Retreat, the Conference at the Yarraville Club will have been done-and-dusted. At this stage our attendance numbers are on the light side so the conference may turn out to be more of a select salon for those participating. Your editors are looking forward to the conference because the topic is very appealing and the quality of the presenters is impressive. So, three cheers to the organising committee and everything should come together on the day. The venue is a ten minute walk from the Yarraville railway station and for those travelling by car there is an off street carpark and street parking around the Yarraville Club.

The month of March has five Wednesdays and as we always meet on the fourth Wednesday in the month it brings our March meeting within a few days of the conference. Barry Crompton will be speaking at the Retreat on his topic "Fame and Celebrity in the Civil War". Like most conflicts and wars there always arise individuals who by accident or intent place themselves above the ruck and garner a certain celebrity (whether good or bad) that follows them for the rest of their lives. Bravery, courage, cowardice and stupidity all work towards the burden of celebrity. Celebrity can be the making of a few strong individuals, but, it can also be the destroyer of the many who do not have the moral strength to carry the heavy burden. It will be intriguing to discover who Barry places in this "Civil War Celebrity Class".

Included in this MN is a book review of a strange confection dealing with Abraham Lincoln and his reaction to the tragic death of his son Willie during his Presidency. Not a book for the masses but the novel has been universally well-received and it should be worthwhile reading for its creative insight into the mind of Abraham Lincoln, "the Presidential celebrity".

We hope to catch up with a good swag of members and friends at the conference next Saturday, 18th March and the usual reprobates back at the Retreat Hotel on the following Wednesday. Cheers.

Financial Membership 2017

Ian Caldwell, Bill Dunkley, Paul Spencer, Maurice Kissane, Laurie Charleson, Andrew Cooper, Bruce Dodd, Byard Sheppard, Juliette Peers, Chris Hookey, Mike Hall, David Johnston, Margaret Lee, John Mathieson, Laurie Walsh, Ken Hayes, David Cutler, Graeme Cardillo, James Murray, Anton Kovacevic, Guy Lee, Mike Derum, Lesley Dixon, Barry Monument, Keith Wilson.



Editors



Send ACWRTA Subs/fees to our Treasurer:

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The President's Blog

Byard Sheppard



March 2017

We had a small, but successful AGM on February 22nd at the East Malvern RSL, all the committee were re-elected unopposed. This was followed by a most informative talk by Bill Dunkley discussing the various commanders and subordinates during the life of the Army of the Potomac. Bill as usual presented a forthright view of all the commanders both good and bad.

A big thanks to Hugh Jordan, for organising a replacement venue for the meeting. The RSL is an excellent venue, it is just a little disappointing that so few regulars turned up.

Now we get into a couple of weeks of mayhem, with the Conference this Saturday March 18th at the Yarraville Club. We have a good line up of speakers, including Rod Essery from South Australia who did his Phd under Warren Ellem, and knows much about the Native Americans at the time of the Civil War.

There is still time to let me know that you can attend, I can extend the cut off till Thursday afternoon, but I then must let the venue know final numbers.

The following Wednesday is our normal March meeting, with our ever enthusiastic Secretary Barry speaking.

The venue is the Retreat, under it's new management, and I have been assured by George that we will be made most welcome, so I do hope that we have a big turn out.

Thanks to those who sent me birthday wishes for last Thursday when I turned 60, I do appreciate the kind thoughts. I am now also, again, working full time, having taken up the position of Operations Manager for Doncaster Mitre10. If you need some timber or hardware, call in and I'll see that we look after you.

See you at the Conference.

Byard

Cheers

Byard

CONFERENCE-

NATIVE AMERICANS IN THE CIVIL WAR SATURDAY MARCH 18, 2017 at the YARRAVILLE CLUB

1. **Warren Ellem:** An overview of US Native American policy from the Revolution to the Civil War
2. **Dr Roderick (Rod) Essery:** Native Americans in the Civil War
3. **Margaret Lee:** Native American attendance and representations at the 1863-65 Sanitary Fairs: Financial and Political Support or Racial exploitation
4. **Dr Dale Blair:** Stand Watie and the Confederacy
5. **Byard Shepherd:** Ely Parker: Seneca General
6. **Chip Henriss:** The Civil War and its impact on Native Americans in the post war era





Nights at the Round Table

With
Barry Crompton

As noted we have our symposium at the Yarraville Club on Saturday, March 18, if you haven't already lodged your name with Byard, please let him know before this weekend so the caterers know how many plates to organise. The following week (Wednesday, March 22) we're back at the Retreat Hotel and I'm organised to speak at the podium on "Fame and Celebrity in the Civil War".

I assume that we will also be invited again to attend Memorial Day ceremonies at the Melbourne Shrine of Remembrance on the last Sunday in May and June sees another visit by Robert "Mick" Bedard to Sydney and then Melbourne, depending on availability we hope to be at the Retreat on either Monday the 19th or Tuesday the 20th of June for a presentation on the visit of the USS Kearsarge to Sydney in 1868; Mick has asked to join him in the presentation and we'll be performing the same at the Sydney RT meeting the previous week.



The reason why we have moved the symposium to the Yarraville Club was due to the sudden closure of the Williamstown Returned Servicemen's Club as in January they announced that due to debts they had sold the site however there now appears to be an historical overlay on the site and redevelopment plans may not go ahead. Frank Noonan posted an article from his local newspaper on the demise of the Williamstown RSL which is most appreciated and gives the background to this story.



BARRY'S GRIPES

At the height of my accumulation of magazine subscriptions I had about a dozen journals, magazines and newsletters arriving from historical societies, most were a welcome addition

to the library and some had very useful articles.

Several lasted for a couple of years before their demise and others have stayed the course – Civil War Times Illustrated has been operating since the early 1960s and Civil War History Journal has been printed since the 1950s. Others which I had a fondness included Civil War Regiments published by Ted Savas which only lasted a couple of years as a quarterly journal with three or four in-depth articles per edition; Civil War News has been a monthly tabloid-shaped newspaper style which carries up-to-date news of re-enactments, Civil War shows, preservation activities, book reviews and columns by Civil War enthusiasts on various subjects.

Over the years the problem of being a resident of Australia has gradually become worse – partly driven by the decision by the U.S. Postal Service that as of May 2007 they would no longer send parcels via surface mail. Jeff Yuille and I happened to be in Richmond, Virginia, on that day and we loaded up the rental car, drove the post office and off-loaded all of our purchases in padded bags before the day finished – after that it was a big decision to decide what to buy. Previously I had been able to get postbags full of books sent for about \$40 a bag, which would hold maybe 10 books, now it was costing me \$10 a book at a minimum; Butternut & Blue Books would only post them overseas with insurance so that cost even more.

I even bought an incomplete set of the Official Records from a dealer in Gettysburg who wrapped the books in brown paper & cardboard and sent them two or three at a time and the local postie would knock on the door with another delivery – the incomplete set cost me less than \$10 a book and I gradually filled in the missing volumes and compared to a full set going for \$2,000 or more, the price and effort was well worth the wait.

I subscribed to half a dozen glossy magazines up until the global recession hit in 2008 – several of them went under when the lack of advertising forced to the wall; others like Civil War Times & America's Civil War had the strength and numbers to continue though I remember than CWTI in its heyday was printing something around 100,000 copies per edition and the current rate is far less than that. "North & South" folded as did a couple of the others.

The Civil War Journal of the Ohio Genealogical Society lasted about 16 years for their quarterly journals; the Museum of the Confederacy put out a nice glossy journal every two months and the Abraham Lincoln Association had a journal published twice a year. Amongst other journals I subscribed to were the Lincoln Herald from the Lincoln Memorial University, the Confederate Historical Society in England, the Confederate Stamp Alliance (two-monthly booklets), as well as Civil War Press Corps, Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War, the Association for the Preservation of Civil War Sites (now the Civil War Trust); Civil War Round Table Associates run by Jerry Russell); the American Civil War Wargaming Society, the Lincoln Museum, the Civil War Society and the United States Civil War Center. Grave Matters was a quarterly newsletter which published articles about the cemeteries and resting place of the Civil War generals; another publication lasted two years called "Monitor" which catalogued Civil War articles in historical journals.

All in all there was a rush of information and a difficult time to actually read it all in a given month; the Australian dollar=U.S. Dollar was fairly good and even overseas bank drafts or international cheques to the Confederate Historical Society of Belgium or the Club Confedere de France was not difficult. But by the time of the Global Financial Crisis things had changed – the

Confederate Stamp Alliance didn't take credit cards and the cost of an international bank draft was almost worth the same as the annual fee, the alternative was to become a life member at US\$500 which I blanched at the thought though I did pay up as a life member to the Company of Military Historians and the Surratt Society – the later at US\$100 gives me still a monthly newsletter sent via air mail and I can't seem to get them to change their approach by reducing costs with an email version of the same thing.

The Abraham Lincoln Association is US\$50 for the lost membership – that equates to Aus\$70 for two six-monthly journals; the Society of Civil War Historians charge one year membership at US\$65 but one year foreign is US\$97 and that makes Aus\$150 for the quarterly journals. (You can also be a subscriber and not a member of the society – the University of North Carolina has an option to pay US\$92 as a non-U.S. individual subscriber.

I reasoned after a couple of years that rather than be a member I'd just buy the quarterly journal off Amazon as an ebook and they were about \$10 a copy but haven't been produced for public sale for a couple of years.

Similarly I had been a subscriber to Civil War History since the early 1970s (they had been in operation since the last 1950s under the State University of Iowa but since the 1970s with Kent State University Press. I paid every year for nigh on 30 years and now in its seventh decade, it's available for US\$120.50 for one year (4 issues) or US\$230 for two years (eight issues) which included US\$35 per year for shipping – which works out to Aus\$40 per issue – again that's a monstrous charge for a good publication not one printed in gold. I got around that for a couple of years by becoming a subscriber to Questia, an educational library online but it appears that Kent State severed their agreement as they no longer carry the new volumes nor any new Civil War tile in the last couple of years.

I also stopped my subscription to Civil War Times and America's Civil War after 30 years – the six issues per year were getting more expensive and they came out with a better choice – go through Zinio magazines and read them on-line and that is much cheaper and quite agreeable to me.

Similarly Civil War News which I had been receiving since the beginning was available for on-line reading. One year print only US delivery US\$38.50 for 12 issues (they no longer have international postage) but the digital edition is US\$29.95 a year and that sounds much better to me.

I've also stopped magazines "Blue & Gray", "Civil War Monitor" and "Military Images" from being a subscriber though the latter two are now available digital only, though Monitor wanted to renew at a charge of US\$39.95 for 4 issues or US\$69.95 for eight issues (or Aus\$25 per issue).

Some of the good titles I'd like to be digitised haven't been done – "Blue & Gray" don't do it and maybe in time they will go forward although the argument against it is that you cannibalise your print sales by offering digital but no doubt the saving in ink and postage can be considerable.

The big problem still lies in digital rights management issues; Military Images is available as a PDF download; Civil War Monitor, Civil War Times and America's Civil War only allows you to print two pages at a time (Civil War News can be printed to a PDF file and saved so that's a bonus).

That brings me to ebooks and I've just signed up to Amazon Kindle Unlimited for aus\$13.99 per month which allows me to read one of their 1.4 million books (you can only keep ten items at a time) but they do have over one thousand Civil War books included in that range out of the 6,000-plus Civil War titles on their index. Most of the major publishers aren't included and the majority appear to be those author-publishers who agree to have their books available. On the plus side, it also includes The History Press and Arcadia Publishing who have both published a large number of books on Civil War topic between 120 and 190 pages each book and also Big Byte Books who have re-edited those titles in the public domain prior to the 1930s and they have been annotated and digitised at a good price.



The Civil War Trust has their latest quest to protect Fort Donelson and Parker's Cross Roads in Tennessee. The two parcels have a combined total of US\$645,000 in purchase price but with matching grants the sum required to raise

is reduced to US\$111,500.

The Fort Donelson tract is located near the park entrance and the visitor center and is part of the Confederate outer defense line.

At the same time there is a need to get a parcel of land at the eastern edge of the nearly complete battlefield at Parker's Cross Roads, the scene of one of Nathan Bedford Forrest's actions in late December 1862.



MAKE SURE OF OUR FACTS

I'm sure that I'll be buying this ebook for its accuracy:

Generals In Gray - On Canvas

(Generals A - K Book 1) Kindle Edition by D. Hill (Author)

The Confederate Press, First edition, 22 March 2014, Aus\$10.80 on Kindle:

Product Description

VOLUME 1: A thru K listing of Confederate Generals - alphabetically by last name. L thru Z are included in Volume 2. Compilation of Oil Paintings, on canvas, of the Generals in Gray. Vivid, full color paintings display original artwork from author and illustrator D. R. Hill; Famous names, such as Robert T. Lee; Stonewall Jackson, A. P. Hill, D. H. Hill, J. E. B. Stuart, Joseph E. Johnson - and the not so famous names of the other Confederate General Officers. The Generals' images are set on historical backgrounds circa 1861 to 1865 - depicting a plethora of battles, such as Gettysburg, Antietam (or Sharpsburg) First and Second Battle of Bull Run, Williamsburg, Yorktown, Seven Pines, Seven Days, Mechanicsville, Gaines' Mill, Frazier's Farm, Malvern Hill, Cold Harbor, Shiloh, Chickamauga, Bentonville, Franklin and many more.



HORSE RACING IN THE CIVIL WAR

Interesting that when the Shenandoah arrived in Melbourne in January 1865 a number of the members of the Melbourne Club who welcomed them were also part of the Melbourne horse-racing fraternity (remember that the first year of the Melbourne Cup was 1861 when Archer won – as he did the following year).

The Victorian Racing Club was already in existence as was the Victorian Turf Club and many of the participants in the Buccaneers Ball were committee members of the Ballarat Turf Club.

We also know that the Victorian Derby

was first raced prior to the Melbourne Cup as the colony was over-run with immigrants due to the finding of gold. It there comes as a surprise that America didn't have the same regard for the "king of sports" during the civil war and whether that was a result of the differing of opinions between America and England from the 1770s onwards remains to be seen. Similarly the playing of cricket was common prior to the civil war and even during it while baseball, supposedly invented by Abner Doubleday (the civil war Union general and now this myth has been debunked) didn't come into its fame until after the war.

Other than horse races written about on St Patrick's Day commemorations by members of the New York Irish Brigade, I haven't researched a great deal yet but will delve into diaries and soldiers letters to see what I can find.



The first known written report on horse racing in England is dated 1174. And it wasn't long before racing horses appeared in the colonies. The first shipment of racehorses arrived in Jamestown in 1610. Racing began in earnest in 1620. The early colonists established a uniquely American style of racing-quarter horse racing. Quarter-of-a-mile long, all-out sprint races took place on straight roads or on level land cleared of trees.

The first American racetrack was built in Salisbury Plains (now Garden City, Long Island, New York) in 1666. The track was the scene of horse races conducted by and for New York's aristocratic upper class. The lower classes were excluded from attending or betting on horse races. In 1767, a York County, Virginia, judge imposed a fine on a tailor stating, "it being contrary to Law for a Labourer to make a race, being only a sport for Gentlemen." These early horse races involved wagers among the participants and spectators. The first professional bookmakers and a parimutuel system of betting did not appear at tracks until the end of the nineteenth century.

From Publication information:
 Book title: *Jokers Wild: Legalized Gambling in the Twenty-First Century*.
 Contributors: Thomas Barker - Author, Marjie Britz - Author. Publisher: Praeger.
 Place of publication: Westport, CT.
 Publication year: 2000, page 21.

Lincoln in the Bardo

Hari Kunzru

Wednesday 8 March 2017 23.00 AEDT

Since the days of the beats, the Bardo Thodol has been known in the west as The Tibetan Book of the Dead. A more accurate if less catchy title is "Great Liberation on Hearing in the Intermediate State". Waking life, dreams, meditation and in particular the period between death and rebirth are all "bardos", states of consciousness sandwiched between other states of consciousness. We are always in transition, from dreams to wakefulness, from life to death. When someone dies, Tibetan Buddhists believe that they enter the bardo of the time of death, in which they will either ascend towards nirvana, and be able to escape the cycle of action and suffering that characterises human life on earth, or gradually fall back, through increasingly wild and scary hallucinations, until they are born again into a new body. The Bardo Thodol is intended to be read to them during this journey, an instruction manual to assist them on their way.

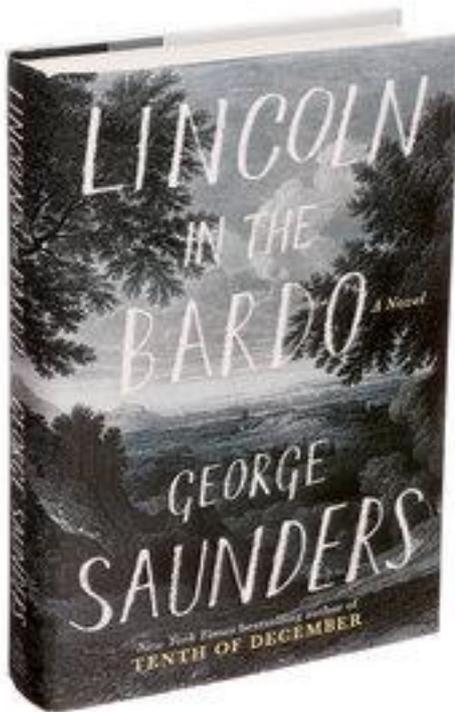
George Saunders has long been accepted as one of the masters of the American short story. In this, his first novel, the Lincoln trapped in the bardo is Willie, the cherished 11-year-old son of the great civil war president. As his parents host a lavish state reception, their boy is upstairs in the throes of typhoid fever. Saunders quotes contemporary observers on the magnificence of the feast, trailing the terrible family tragedy that is unfolding. Sure enough, Willie dies and is taken to Oak Hill cemetery, where he is interred in a marble crypt. On at least two occasions – and this is the germ



George Saunders

of historical fact from which Saunders has spun his extraordinary story – the president visits the crypt at night, where he sits over the body and mourns. The cemetery is populated by a teeming horde of spirits – dead people who, for reasons that become an important part of the narrative, are unwilling to complete their journey to the afterlife and still hang around in or near their physical remains. This is not a straightforwardly Tibetan bardo, in which souls are destined for release or rebirth. It is a sort of syncretic limbo which has much in common with the Catholic purgatory, and at one point we are treated to a Technicolor vision of judgment that seems to be drawn from popular 19th-century Protestantism, compounding the head-scratching theological complexity. Like Dantesque damned souls, the spirits manifest with hideous deformities, physical analogues to their various moral failings, or the concerns that keep them tethered to the world of the living: a woman who can't let go of her three daughters is oppressed by three glowing orbs; a miser is "compelled to float horizontally, like a human compass needle, the top of his head facing in the direction of whichever of his properties he found himself most worried about at the moment". The novel is told through their speeches, the narrative passing from hand to hand, mainly between a trio consisting of a young gay man who has killed himself after being rejected by his lover, an elderly reverend and a middle-aged printer who was killed in an accident before he could consummate his marriage to his young wife.

Willie, like other children, is expected to pass on quickly to the afterlife proper, instead of remaining in the cemetery, but because of his father's grief he is tempted to stay. Children who don't move on are tormented by a sort of horror movie amalgamation, their bodies becoming welded to their surroundings by painful and hideous demonic growths. The narrating trio – Bevins, Vollman and the Reverend Early – make it their business to save Willie from this appalling fate, and much of the action centres on their



attempts to influence Lincoln to let his son go. The polyphonic narrative of the spirits is interleaved with constellations of artfully arranged quotation from primary and secondary sources about Lincoln's life, which Saunders uses to show that observers can be unreliable about the motivations and mental state of the president, and that even such questions as whether the moon shone or not on a particular night can be distorted by memory. The torrent of quotation, set against the torrent of spirit voices, gives Lincoln

in the Bardo the feel of the parts of the Bardo Thodol where the soul is beset by wrathful demonic hordes. This cacophony, and the grotesquerie of the deformed spirits, lends the novel a texture that is superficially unlike the work that has made Saunders popular, stories that often play off the tension between a casual vernacular voice and a surreal situation. *Lincoln in the Bardo* feels like a blend of Victorian gothic with one of the more sfx-heavy horror franchises. But in many ways, Oak Hill cemetery has a lot in common with the theme parks and office spaces readers have come to expect from the author of *Pastoralia* and *CivilWarLand in Bad Decline*. The spirits (I hesitate to call them ghosts, since they don't manifest to living people) are trapped in a space that is fundamentally inauthentic and unreal, much like a theme park. Unable to accept the fact of death, they have endless euphemisms for their condition (coffins are "sick boxes", and so on) and employ all sorts of mental gymnastics to avoid confronting the reality of their situation.

Saunders is not usually thought of as a religious writer, though his concern with the inauthenticity of a certain kind of human experience seems consistent with the Buddhist doctrine that worldly phenomena are a sort of veil or illusion masking the truth. One of his great strengths is compassion, a quality that

infuses his wilder conceits, making them land emotionally in a way that wouldn't necessarily be true of another ludic postmodernist. In *Lincoln in the Bardo*, the immense pathos of the father mourning his son, all the while burdened with affairs of state, gives these sections of the book a depth that isn't always there when Lincoln is off stage. The busy doings of the spirits are entertaining, and Saunders voices them with great virtuosity, but the tug of Lincoln's grief is sometimes too strong for them not to feel like a distraction.

One of the novel's conceits is that by occupying the same space, the spirits can experience a dissolution of interpersonal boundaries, understanding and feeling sympathy for each other in a mystical way. It is hard to be specific without spoiling the plot, but Saunders uses this device to imply a cause for Lincoln's later signing of the emancipation proclamation, a move that seems glib and reductive, a blemish on a book that otherwise largely manages to avoid sentiment and cliché. This is a small quibble. *Lincoln in the Bardo* is a performance of great formal daring. It perhaps won't be to everyone's taste, but minor missteps aside it stands head and shoulders above most contemporary fiction, showing a writer who is expanding his universe outwards, and who clearly has many more pleasures to

Willie Lincoln's death: A private agony for a president facing a nation of pain

By Brady Dennis October 7, 2011

The wind and rain swirling outside the White House on Feb. 24, 1862, seemed fitting given the darkness that had descended inside its walls. The Civil War was gathering steam. Jefferson Davis had just been inaugurated president of the Confederacy. Bloody battles and long months of uncertainty lay ahead. On that dreary Monday afternoon, however, those troubles took a back seat to a more personal tragedy that had befallen the first family. The body of Willie Lincoln, 11 years old, blue-eyed and good-natured, the

most treasured child of Abraham and Mary Todd Lincoln, lay downstairs in the Green Room. He had died days earlier after a struggle with typhoid fever, probably contracted from contaminated water that supplied the White House. It had been an agonizing stretch for the president and his wife, who had kept vigil day after day after Willie and his younger brother, Tad, fell ill. (Tad eventually would recover.) "The days dragged wearily by, and he grew weaker and more shadow-like," Elizabeth Keckley, a former slave who had become Mary Lincoln's seamstress

and confidante, later wrote. "He was his mother's favorite child." Keckley recalled one particularly poignant evening when the president and Mrs. Lincoln hosted a lavish reception in the White House. The first lady repeatedly left the party and traipsed upstairs in her white satin dress to check on her dying son. The worried president forbade dancing. Keckley, who sat by Willie's bedside, recalled how "the rich notes of the Marine Band in the apartments below came to the sickroom in soft, subdued murmurs, like the wild, faint sobbing of far-off spirits."

offer his readers.

Within days, Willie succumbed to the disease.

Gone was the only Lincoln child who possessed the amiable demeanor of his father, the one a family friend called “the most lovable boy I ever knew, bright, sensible, sweet-tempered and gentlemanly.”

Gone was the boy who had shown his father’s command of language in a poem he had submitted to the National Republican newspaper about the death of a family friend who had died in battle. Gone was the boy who had romped around the White House with his younger brother, devising mischievous pranks and building a play fort on the mansion’s roof.

The Lincolns had lost another son, Edward, in 1850, just before his fourth birthday and only months before Willie was born. But the loss of Willie plunged them into an altogether deeper grief and cast a pall over the White House that would linger throughout the war. President Lincoln often turned inward, concealing his sadness and carrying on with the job at hand. Mary Lincoln wore her pain outwardly, like an albatross. Upon first seeing his dead son, President Lincoln murmured, “My poor boy. He was too good for this earth. God has called him home. I know that he is much better off in heaven, but then we loved him so. It is hard, hard to have him die!” He buried his head in his hands, Keckley recalled, and his tall frame convulsed with emotion. “I stood at the foot of the bed, my eyes full of tears, looking at the man in silent, awe-stricken wonder,” she wrote. “His grief unnerved him, and made him a weak, passive child. I did not dream that his rugged nature could be so moved.”

The first lady fared even worse.

“Mrs. Lincoln’s grief is inconsolable,” Keckley wrote. During one of her fits of grief, the president led her to a window and pointed toward the insane asylum, later known as St. Elizabeths Hospital. “Mother, do you see that large white building on the hill yonder?” he said. “Try and control your grief, or it will drive you mad, and we may have to send you there.”

On the day of the funeral, “a great many friends of the family called to take

a last look at the little favorite, who had endeared himself to all guests of the family,” reported the Washington Evening Star. “The body was clothed in the usual every-day attire of youths of his age, consisting of pants and jacket with white stockings and low shoes — the white collar and wristbands being turned over the black cloth of the jacket.” His right hand held a small bouquet of flowers that later would be given to his mother, who remained upstairs to grieve in solitude. His plain metallic coffin bore a simple inscription on a square silver plate: William Wallace Lincoln. Born December 21st, 1850. Died February 20th, 1862.

At 2 p.m., the crowd gathered for the funeral in the East Room, where the mirrors had been covered and the frames draped with black mourning crepe. Government offices were closed. Cabinet secretaries filed in, along with generals and foreign dignitaries, members of Congress and family friends. They stole glances at Willie’s weary father. “There sat the man, with a burden on his brain at which the world marvels — bent now with the load at both heart and brain — staggering under a blow like the taking from him of his child,” recalled the writer Nathaniel Parker Willis. “Men of power sat around him .??. all struggling with their tears — great hearts sorrowing with the president as a stricken man and a brother.”

In his eulogy, Phineas D. Gurley, pastor of the New York Avenue Presbyterian Church, called Willie “a child of bright intelligence and of peculiar promise. .??. His mind was active, inquisitive and conscientious; his disposition was amiable and affectionate; his impulses were kind and generous; and his words and manners were gentle and attractive. It is easy to see how a child, thus endowed, would, in the course of 11 years, entwine himself around the hearts of those who knew him best.” Afterward, the mourners joined the long procession through unpaved streets and up a slope to Oak Hill Cemetery, off R Street in Georgetown, with two white horses pulling the hearse. Willie’s body was placed in a vault belonging to the family of William Carroll, a clerk of the Supreme Court, who had offered to let

the Lincolns use the tomb as a temporary resting place until they returned to Illinois.

The remains of Willie Lincoln lay in the marble vault, locked behind an iron gate, for more than three years. On numerous occasions, author James L. Swanson wrote, “his ever-mourning father returned to visit him, to remember, and to weep,” even as he tried to hold the country together.

Today’s Headlines newsletter After Lincoln’s assassination in April 1865, Willie’s casket was exhumed and placed aboard the presidential funeral train for the journey back to Illinois. Father and son headed home together. To walk through the gates of Oak Hill today is to slip back in time. Down the winding stone paths, past towering oaks and faded headstones, on a hilltop overlooking Rock Creek sits the weathered vault in the farthest corner of the cemetery. There is no sign that Willie Lincoln ever was here, no name carved into the marble, no marker to commemorate the dark days of winter 1862.

But the black iron gate still guards the entrance, and just beyond it lies the darkened vault where a president dealing with a nation’s sorrows could come and be a father dealing with his own.



https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/willie-lincolns-death-a-private-agony-for-a-president-facing-a-nation-of-pain/2011/09/29/gIQAv7Z7SL_story.html?utm_term=.e9213856c545