

Kentucky

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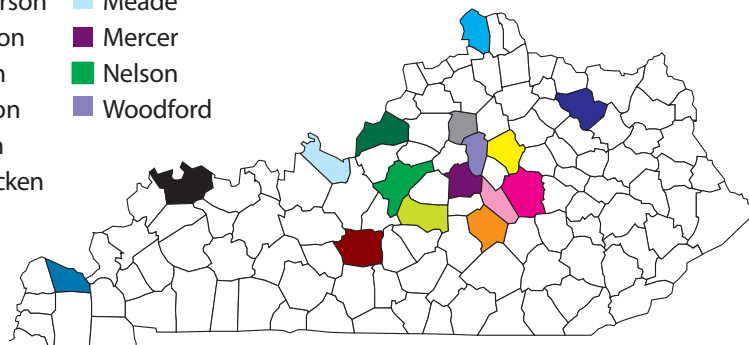
How the Run for the Roses Became America's Premier Sporting Event

By James C. Nicholson



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Celebrating People of the Past

It is that time of year for roses and the Twin Spires of Churchill Downs. Each May, while all of Kentucky bursts with the display of nature's beauty, Louisville puts on a "You ain't seen nothin' yet" show, giving outsiders a look into the Commonwealth's storied past and sacred traditions. In addition to introducing the world to Secretariat and Big Brown, the Kentucky Derby gave the world's stage to "Colonel" Edward Riley Bradley and Stephen Foster's "My Old Kentucky Home." James C. Nicholson's book, *The Kentucky Derby*, explains how our very own Kentucky Derby grew to become America's premier sporting event. We have an excerpt on page 32.

Kentucky's history is full of colorful characters. We're delighted to share some of their stories with you in this issue of *Kentucky Humanities*.

James Claypool shares the story of Richmond, Kentucky native Cassius Marcellus Clay. A prominent and outspoken political figure, Clay was an active participant in the movement to abolish slavery. Clay's adamant opposition to slavery led to a life of controversy and adventure in politics and the military.

The story of George "Lightning" Ellsworth is often overlooked. Recorded as just another Confederate in John Hunt Morgan's band of men, the gifted telegraph operator was essential to helping Morgan and his men elude those who actively pursued them. Eastern Kentucky University professor Dr. Marshall Myers tells his story on page 20.

Ulysses S. Grant is best known as the commander in chief of the Union army who accepted General Robert E. Lee's surrender at Appomattox, ending America's Civil War, and as the man who then served two terms as president of the United States. Few know, however, what came next for Grant. Kentucky author Charles Bracelen Flood shares a portion of his in-depth research and writing about Grant the man, and the important, quiet heroism during the last years of Grant's civilian life.

The meeting of Lee and Grant at the Appomattox Court House on Palm Sunday, 1865, was of great national import. America would never be the same afterward. But what else might have been exchanged between the two great generals if given the opportunity? We are grateful to Mercer County writer, Charles Semones, for permission to reprint his poem, "Lee and Grant Have Coffee Together at Starbucks after the Surrender at Appomattox." Be prepared for an unexpected treasure.

We are also grateful to you, our readers, for the opportunity to introduce or re-acquaint you with these Kentucky stories. We encourage you to share them with your fellow Kentuckians in print or online at www.kyhumanities.org. To share your Kentucky stories as well, please contact our editor, Marianne Stoess, Marianne.Stoess@uky.edu.



Virginia G. Carter
Executive Director
Kentucky Humanities Council

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Virginia G. Carter".

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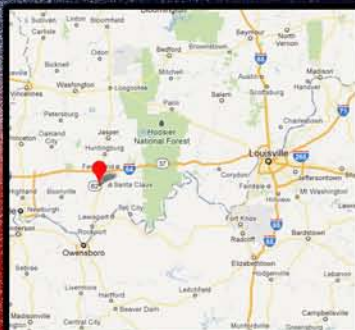
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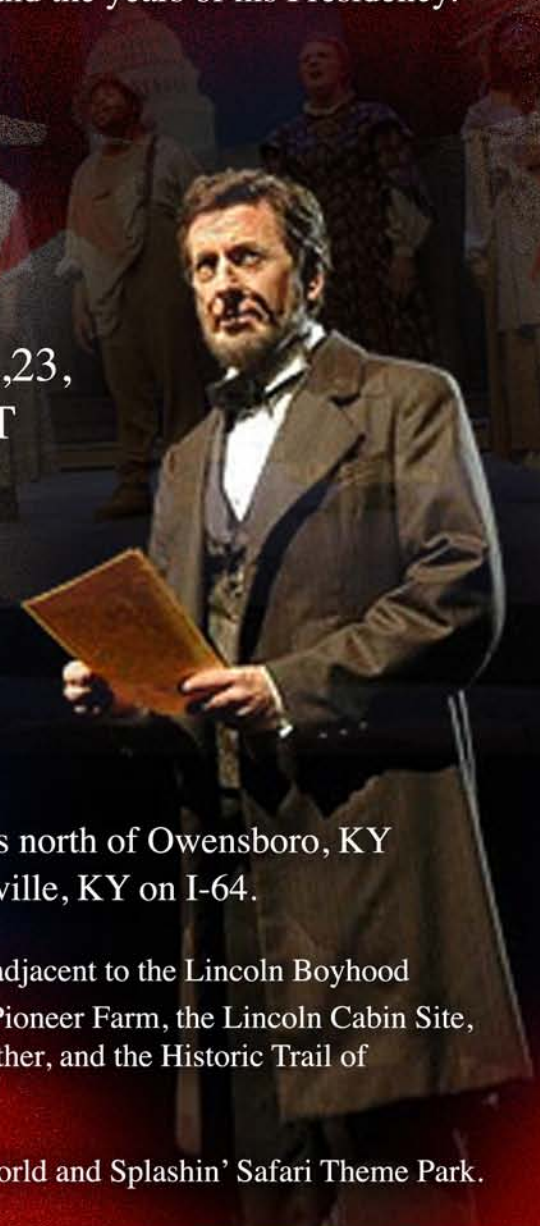
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Six new members join the Kentucky Humanities Council Board of Directors



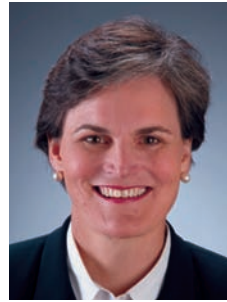
Brian Burton



Ken Jones



Mary Hammond



Tori McClure



Nathan Mick



Kris Williams

Brian Burton, Ken Jones, Mary Hammond, Tori Murden McClure, Nathan Mick, and Kristin Williams have joined the Kentucky Humanities Council Board of Directors. As members of the twenty-three-person volunteer board of directors, Burton, Jones, Hammond, McClure, Mick, and Williams will help set council policies, award project grants to community organizations, and participate in fund-raising to help the Council meet the growing demand for its programs.

Brian Burton and Mary Hammond were appointed to the Kentucky Humanities Council Board by Governor Steve Beshear for four-year terms. Ken Jones, Tori Murden McClure, Nathan Mick, and Kristin Williams will serve for six years as elected members.

Brian T. Burton currently is an investment advisor and vice president at PNC Bank in Lexington. Prior to that he spent several years working for the BB&T Corporation as a business services associate and portfolio management associate. A graduate of Georgetown College, Burton was a three-time captain of the Tigers' men's golf team.

Ken Jones is the chair of the Northern Kentucky University department of theatre and dance. He holds the Rosenthal Endowed Chair in his department and is a past recipient of the Frank Sinton Milburn Outstanding Professor Award and the College of Arts and Sciences Outstanding Junior Faculty Award. More than 460 productions of Jones' works have been produced around the world. He has nine published plays, three soundtrack CDs, and two Critics' Choice selections in *Time* magazine.

Mary Hammond is the executive director of the Paducah Convention & Visitors Bureau. She has worked in various roles at the PCVB since 1986 including: executive assistant, group sales director, and sales director. A graduate of the University of Kentucky, Hammond returned to western Kentucky where she served as a volunteer at the Market House Museum, the Paducah Beautification board, the Dogwood Trail Celebration, and the Paducah Summer

Festival. These experiences introduced her to the tourism and hospitality industry and developed her love for Paducah's cultural attractions and special events.

Tori Murden McClure is the president of Spalding University. Before being named president, she served as the vice-president of external relations, enrollment management, and student affairs at Spalding. Her nonfiction book *A Pearl in the Storm* recounts her journey as the first woman and first American to row solo across the Atlantic Ocean. Prior to joining Spalding University in 2004, McClure served as the director of development at the Muhammad Ali Center, project manager for Empowerment Zone Initiatives at the Louisville Development Authority, project coordinator for public policy in the Office of the Mayor, and director of the Women's Center of Volunteers of America.

Nathan Mick is the director of economic development for Garrard County. He is a board member at the Center for Rural Development in Somerset, the Kentucky Association for Economic Development Public Policy Co-Chair, serves on the Lancaster Higher Education Advisory Board, Heart of Kentucky United Way Board, Ephraim McDowell Health Care Foundation Board, as vice president of the Lancaster Grand Theater Board, a Commissioner on the Kentucky Commission on Community Volunteerism and Service and a member of the Garrard County Historical Society. Mick previously worked as Deputy Chief of Staff for United States Senator Chuck Hagel from Nebraska in Washington, D.C., where he was a liaison for the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Nebraska Humanities Council.

Dr. Kristin Williams became the president of Henderson Community College in January 2011. Prior to her appointment as Henderson Community College president, she served as the interim president at Hazard Community and Technical College. She joined the Kentucky Community and Technical College System as the chief academic officer at Hopkinsville Community College in 2007 after several years at Santa Fe College in Gainesville, Florida.



Thank You Kentucky Transportation Cabinet Division of Equipment



The Kentucky Department of Transportation Division of Equipment has been a wonderful friend to the Kentucky Humanities Council. These employees have transported the Smithsonian Institution's Museum on Main Street exhibits, hosted by the Council, to museums across the Commonwealth. We are grateful for their partnership! From left to right: Gary Becknell, Eddie Hall, Gene Brown, Larry Downey, Lovall Jones, and Larry Pearson. Not pictured: Everette Sudduth and Eddie Harrod.

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Thanks to a very generous contribution from the Cralle Foundation, more Kentucky classrooms and community organizations will have the opportunity to experience Kentucky Chautauqua this year. We are grateful for the support of the Cralle Foundation and look forward to sharing our living history dramas with communities throughout the Commonwealth.

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Yes, they too were Kentuckians

A look at some well-known, and not-so-well-known, people in Kentucky history

Cassius Marcellus Clay

By James C. Claypool

1810-1903 • Madison County, Kentucky

Cassius Marcellus Clay (the name shared by the boxing champion later known as Muhammad Ali) lived a life as controversial as it was colorful. Characterized by a biographer as being the “Firebrand of Freedom,” he was born on a plantation near Richmond, Kentucky, the son of General Green Clay and Sallie Lewis Clay. General Clay, a successful politician and capable American commander during the War of 1812, was one of the richest men in Kentucky, having accumulated over forty thousand acres of Madison County farmland as well as owning a number of slaves, gristmills, distilleries, toll roads, a resort and two large warehouses.

Cassius Clay would become one of Kentucky’s most prominent and controversial political figures. Educated at Transylvania University in Lexington, Kentucky, and later at Yale University in Connecticut (where he came under the influence of leading abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison) Cassius inherited the family’s Madison County plantation and sumptuous house, White Hall, in 1832. Just twenty-two at the time, Clay freed his slaves and dove into politics as a Whig, favoring the so-called American System of internal improvements for roads and canals, protective tariffs, promotion of American-made goods and products and support for a national bank, all policies enunciated by Clay’s cousin, Whig Party leader Henry Clay.

Never shy about expressing his opinions, Cassius’s outspoken stance against slavery alienated the proslavery supporters within the Whig Party in Kentucky, and on one occasion this led to a duel in which neither he nor his opponent, Kentuckian Robert Wickliffe Jr., was injured. Two years later, Clay stabbed and nearly killed a man who had attempted to assassinate him at a political rally in Kentucky. Cassius Clay campaigned throughout the North in 1844 for Henry Clay in his cousin’s unsuccessful bid for the presidency. A year later, Cassius began publishing an antislavery paper in Kentucky, the *Lexington True American*. While Clay was lying ill with typhoid fever, a posse that included Clay’s son, James B. Clay, went to the newspaper office, dismantled the press and shipped it off to Cincinnati. For a short time, Clay continued publication of his paper in Cincinnati.

Clay next served as a captain in the Mexican War, after which he



Photo courtesy of University of Kentucky Archives

returned to Lexington and continued to agitate against slavery. Putting his money where his mouth was, so to speak, Clay deeded ten acres of land in Madison County to fellow Kentuckian and abolitionist preacher John Fee, who used it to found Berea College, a school designed to help forward the cause of abolitionism in the upper South. Clay next became a Republican, campaigning vigorously for that party’s candidates in the 1856 elections. Although Clay was mentioned in 1860 as being one of the nine potential Republican candidates for president, he threw his support behind Kentucky-born Abraham Lincoln. After being elected president, Lincoln made Clay minister to Russia.

Clay spent two years serving in Russia before being recalled by Lincoln in 1862 and being made a major general in the Union army. This appointment was political in intent, not military. Lincoln instructed Clay to return to Kentucky and to ascertain if loyalists in the state would support a proclamation freeing the slaves. Clay returned to Washington and reported that the loyalists were firmly behind Lincoln; on January 1, 1863, Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation freeing the slaves in the seceded states of the South and, in effect, in Kentucky as well, even though Kentucky was not one of the secessionist states.

In 1863, Clay returned to Russia as a minister. In January 1862, during his first posting to Russia, Clay's wife had left and returned home to care for their children. When Clay returned to Russia in 1863, she refused to come with him. Clay was lonely, but not for long. Rumors abounded that Clay, who was wealthy, dashing and in the prime of his life, had many romantic liaisons during these years in Russia. At least two well-known Russian ballerinas were said to have been Clay's paramours, and one, Anna Petroff, likely bore him the son Launey (Leonide Petroff) Clay, whom Clay later brought to Kentucky as his "adopted" son.

Clay greeted the assassination of Lincoln, a man with whom he had had a close affinity, with rage, but far removed from America there was nothing he could contribute to ease the political conflicts that soon erupted between Lincoln's successor, Andrew Johnson, and the Senate's Radical Republicans. William Seward, who would serve in both Lincoln's and Johnson's cabinets, had always disliked Clay, and as Johnson's secretary of state, was content to see him remain in Russia, where Clay would remain as minister until 1869. Clay involved himself

in politics after returning home, often speaking out against the Radical Republicans while politicking in the South in favor of the Democrats who opposed them.

White Hall, Clay's ancestral home near Richmond, Kentucky, was the scene of the last great drama of his life. At age eighty-three, Clay divorced Mary Jane, his wife of forty-five years and the mother of their ten children, to marry the orphaned fifteen-year-old sister of his tenant farmer. "The Lion of White Hall," as Clay was known to locals, had stepped over the line with regard to community sensibilities. The local sheriff and a posse of seven men came out to persuade Clay that what he had done was wrong and that he needed to correct the problem. The old fighter was ready for them. He had filled an antiquated single-bore cannon he owned with nuts, bolts, broken horseshoes, nails and an assortment of other sharp pieces of metal and waited their approach. When the sheriff and posse showed up, they took cover behind a dried-up willow tree in Clay's front yard, but to no avail. Clay lit the cannon's fuse and unleashed a mighty fuselage on his adversaries, scattering them to the wind, licking their wounds, never to return. Clay's new wife, Dora Richardson Clay, divorced him after just one year of marriage. Cassius Marcellus Clay was demonstrably "a one-of-a-kind" and we may never see his likes again.

Adapted from James C. Claypool's book, *Our Fellow Kentuckians: Rascals, Heroes and Just Plain Uncommon Folk*, and the subject of a talk offered by Claypool through the Kentucky Humanities Council's Speakers Bureau.



Thinking about College?
Think big about a small school. Think Union.



Lee and Grant Have Coffee Together at Starbucks after the Surrender at Appomattox



By Charles Semones

Wait up, General. I'd hoped we could go into Appomattox for a cup of coffee when that official folderol was put to rights for our secretaries to make final copies of. As I think I told you earlier, I've got the mother of all migraines, and coffee is about the only thing that gives me any ease. Besides, I think you and I ought to talk, somewhere private, away from all that orchestrated politeness back there in McLean's parlor. Of course, I know how it is. You can't end a war as quick and easy as saying Amen when you get done praying. There's got to be a big to-do, such as we've seen this afternoon—men bent over fancy-looking documents, getting them ready for us to sign in triplicate.

Listen! Is that a mockingbird I hear over there
in that clutch of trees in the corner of the yard?
Nice sound, isn't it? Do you think? . . . Oh, couldn't be . . .
Why would the Almighty tell a bird something
so important? Still, it makes a body wonder.
I see the word's already made it into the village.
I hear the sexton at one of the churches
giving the bell rope all he's got. Apt as not it's the Methodist.
Those folks tend to get the news out as soon
as something happens. But you can bet
the Presbyterians and Episcopalians will wait
and announce it at meeting come next Sunday.
And what's funny is by then everyone
will have heard it anyway.
But that's how they are—never given to excitement.
Now as far as those saintly souls over yonder
at the Baptist church, well, they're apt to throw
one of their protracted meetings, claiming the Lord
should get the credit for what happened.

Now, General, I know you're a religious man—but riddle me
this, will you? How exactly did the Lord have a hand
in putting an end to the butchery we've been going at
tooth and nail for the last four years?
Well, I guess it's a matter of interpretation,
how one chooses to look at it. So let them
get themselves built up into a frenzy if that
will put the icing on their cake. To each his own
is what I say. That's what I try to live by,
though I fail miserably at times. And when I get it right
I credit it to luck. To change the subject,
isn't this as fine an April as any mortal ever looked upon?
I notice the lilacs are especially forthcoming
this year—the bulging panicles dripping their
white and lavender, fragancing the air, making it
smell the way that heaven must on its best days.
Makes me think a poet might sit down
and write a poem about the lilacs as sure as I'm hearing
your bootsteps on these cobblestones.

I'd be remiss, General, if I failed to tell you
that your ragtag bunch of men and boys
gave us all we could say grace over—and then some.
I know for a fact that Lincoln thinks the same way too.
But what you've done was best, sir,
even though I know it took the hide. Of course,
I don't have to tell you the odds were stacked
against your pulling off a victory,
that it was a case of two plus two adding up to four,
which any shirttail schoolboy who can cipher knows.

Here we are.
I'd hoped we'd find it open. General, I see a table
over by the window. We'll take it if that suits you.
I like to look at lilacs. There's nothing more pleasing
to the eye on an afternoon like this one.
They are especially lovely to gaze upon here
in your Virginia, just as they are up in Washington.
And, General, has it crossed your mind
that it's Palm Sunday? I feel sure it has. It occurred to me
this morning when I was doing my ablutions.
Now that makes these proceedings almost sacred,
like a piece of scripture or some old hymn
we've always known. When the war was at its worst,
my Julia was always sending me a new one.
I've got a number of them tucked inside my head.
But I can't sing a note. By the way, I hope you feel
that I was fair with you in our settling up
by letting your men and boys keep their horses and mules.
They'll soon be needing them for putting out their crops.
It's getting to be that time.

I hope you know
I wish them well, General, and that goes doubly so for you
after all you've been through—the loss of your
right-hand man they called Stonewall being such a blow,
to name one calamity, just one of many.
But now, thank God, the spilling of blood is ended
and the wounded land and hearts can start their mending.
You know, I don't think that before the war, we were
as much different as we were alike.
It was the barrel-bellied politicians
with their fancy watches and fobs
that mostly got our particular Armageddon going.
They were jawing war-talk before the first shot was fired
on Sumter. Dirty money changed hands
and palms got greased aplenty like those not in the know
would not believe. They think
it was entirely the business about the slaves.
Well, General, I could tell them a thing or two,
and so could you. Though, truth be told, I've noticed you're not
big on words, not one to say more than's necessary.
But I know you want to tell your men good-bye,
so, if you'd like, we'll head back to where we hitched our mounts.

I declare, it does look like that fellow's going
to ring the bell the livelong afternoon
till full dusk comes and puts an end to it.
And that mockingbird—it's still at it too.
Isn't it a wonder? But, come to think of it,
looked at another way, it is no wonder. To be honest,
it's not sinking into me as easy as I'm letting on.
It'll take some getting used to. But I believe
my migraine's letting up, thanks to some decent coffee
and the certainty of stress slacking off.
Just think—we have delirious birdsong
instead of rifle-clatter on this day
when Christ rode into Jerusalem on a borrowed donkey.
I figure the Almighty's up there smiling.
Wouldn't surprise me if he doesn't have heaven's
congregation playing their banjos and fiddles,
raising a sprightly song because of what happened
at half-past two or so this afternoon.
I declare, that mockingbird's breast is fixing
to burst wide open. It seems to me that beauty's
made a comeback, no doubt about it.
Maybe in time—after our time,
yours and mine—the Shenandoah will be abloom
with the light of stars death snatched
from the eyes of our doomed boys.

About the Author

Charles Semones was born at Deep Creek in rural Mercer County, Kentucky, in 1937. His poems have appeared in numerous literary journals, general magazines, and religious publications. In 2003, he was given the inaugural Kentucky Literary Award for Excellence in Poetry. He lives in historic Harrodsburg, Kentucky.

GRANT'S FINAL VICTORY

Kentucky writer Charles Bracelen Flood is the author of *Grant's Final Victory: Ulysses S. Grant's Heroic Last Year*. Since his book was published last October, he has given this talk in many places, including the Boston Book Festival, where his fellow panelists included Tony Horwitz, author of *Confederates in the Attic*, and Harvard's president Drew Gilpin Faust.

My book begins in May of 1884, twenty-nine years after Appomattox. Ulysses S. Grant is sixty-two years old, and the most famous man in America. He's also on his way to being the most photographed man of the nineteenth century. In addition to his enormous contribution to winning the Civil War, he has served two terms as President of the United States.

Grant was not in good health — among other things, this man of slender build had gained forty pounds since his wartime weight of 146 pounds. He used crutches as a result of falling on an icy New York sidewalk. However, no one, including Grant, had any idea that he had only fourteen months left to live.

As we open on Grant, he and his wife Julia are living very comfortably in New York City. They are able to afford this lifestyle because of the generosity of rich New Yorkers, including J.P. Morgan, Andrew Carnegie, and William H. Vanderbilt. These men and others like them saw in Grant the same kind of vision and determination that had brought them success in their own fields. Vanderbilt, then the richest man in the world with a fortune of \$194,000,000, said of Grant, "He is one of us."

My plan now is to take you back to the beginning of Grant's life, and give you some of the highlights on his way through to 1884. I want to give you the man as he really was, rather than as he has often been portrayed. Grant has been described as humorless, a person who would never laugh at himself.

He was tone deaf, and said: "I know two tunes. One is 'Yankee Doodle,' and the other isn't."

Prior to serving two terms as President of the United States, Ulysses S. Grant was a key figure in the Civil War. Grant worked his way up the military ladder to become the general in chief of the Union Army, responsible for more than a million troops.

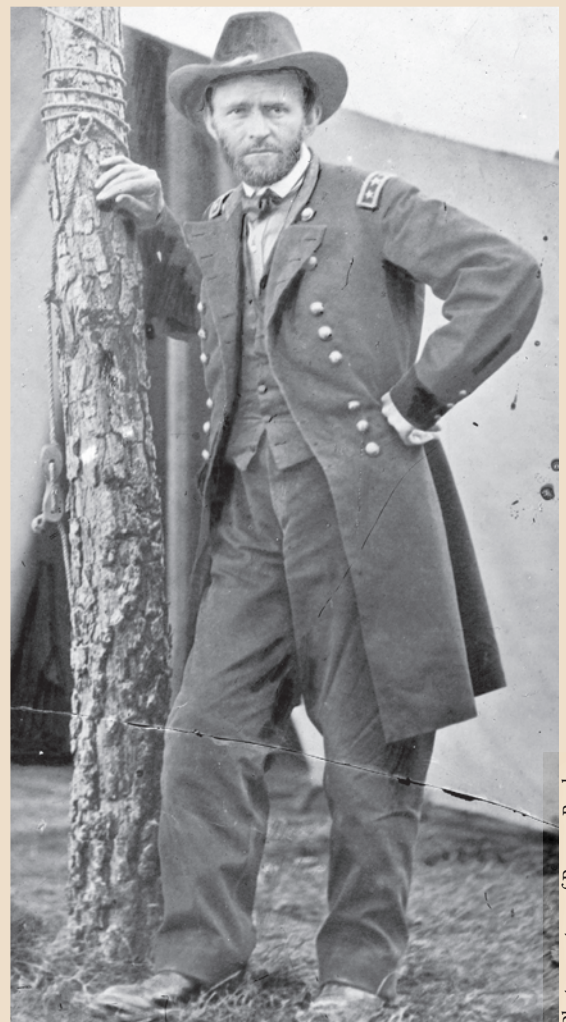


Photo courtesy of Perseus Books

Grant was the son of the operator of a small tannery in Ohio, and graduated from West Point. After serving with distinction in the Mexican War, he married Julia Dent, the highly intelligent, vivacious, cross-eyed daughter of a pre-war slaveholding family in Missouri. The Civil War historian Bruce Catton called their marriage “One of the great romantic American love stories.”

Separated from Julia while serving in a remote Army post on the Pacific Coast, he became desperately lonely and was drunk on duty during a payday. His colonel gave him the option of facing a court martial, or resigning from the Army. Grant resigned.

Seven years later, when the Civil War began in 1861, he returned to the Army. Starting as commander of a regiment with less than a thousand men, he rose to become general in chief of the entire Union Army, a force of more than a million. In the process, and here is a point that so many have missed, he became a transitional figure in the history of warfare. At Shiloh in 1862, he was riding back and forth right behind the lines of his infantrymen who were firing at the nearby Confederate ranks. By the time that Abraham Lincoln brought him east in 1864 to command the entire Union Army and to oppose Robert E. Lee in Northern Virginia, he was communicating with his corps commanders *by telegraph* from his headquarters miles behind the front. Contrary to the myth that he was often drunk, at no time during the war was he incapable of effective action due to consuming alcohol.

During his meteoric rise among Union generals, Grant not only developed enormous administrative skills, but became a great strategist. More than any other general on either side, he understood that the rivers of the South were an integral part of a vast battlefield area, and could be used as avenues for penetrating and cutting up the Confederacy. Lincoln described him this way: “Once Grant gets hold of a place, he acts as if he had inherited it.”

Among the great mistaken impressions of Grant is that he really wasn't very bright. During the last year of the war, he created and incorporated into his headquarters at City Point, Virginia, what he called the Bureau of Military Information, a sophisticated and highly effective sixty-four-man intelligence-gathering unit that surpassed anything that the Confederates organized.

While it's true that Grant spilled a lot of blood in his frontal attacks on Robert E. Lee's stalwart forces, it's also worth remembering what Lee thought about that. When Lee's subordinates were telling him about the way that Grant was recklessly piling up casualties, Lee replied, “I think General Grant is managing things very well.”

II

Virtually every American knows the story of the way in which Ulysses S. Grant set new standards of military honor by the kind and gracious way in which he accepted Lee's surrender at Appomattox Court House, but many are unaware of what came next.



Photo courtesy of Perseus Books

Ulysses, Julia (Dent), and their youngest son, Jesse Root Grant. The Grants' marriage has been described as “One of the great romantic American love stories.”

Lincoln's successor Andrew Johnson intended to have Lee tried for treason, a crime punishable by death. Grant walked into the White House and told Johnson that Lee was protected by the parole that he, Grant, had given Lee and all his men at Appomattox. Grant added that if Lee were arrested, he would immediately resign from the Army in protest. Johnson and his Federal prosecutors did not intend to argue with the immensely popular victorious commanding general of the United States Army. They quietly halted the treason proceedings. Lee was never arrested. (For the remaining five years of Lee's life, he never allowed a word against Grant to be spoken in his presence.)

In 1869, four years after the war ended, Grant was sworn in as President of the United States, a position he held for two terms. His first term was a success, and his second was not. During his second term, his political opponents launched thirty-seven investigations into corruption in his administration. Despite their efforts, they could not demonstrate that he was involved in any of the scandals, many of them resulting from the politically naïve Grant's misplaced trust in those he believed to be honest men.

Taking an action unique in American presidential history, in Grant's final Message to Congress (later called the State of the Union Address) he apologized to the nation's legislators, and through them to the American people, for his inadequacies as president.

Grant began with this: “It was my fortune, or misfortune, to be called to the office of Chief Magistrate without any political training... it is but reasonable to assume that errors in judgment must have occurred.” He added that he claimed “only that I have acted in every instance from a... desire to do what was right, constitutional within the law, and for the very best interest of the whole people.”

As for ending slavery, Grant paid this tribute to the enactment of the Fifteenth Amendment, which was designed to protect the rights of blacks to vote. With a stately eloquence equal to some of Lincoln’s best phrasing, Grant wrote:

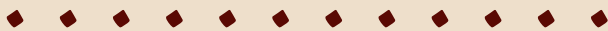
A measure which makes at once four million voters who were heretofore declared by the highest tribunal in the land to be not citizens of the United States, nor eligible to become so... is indeed a measure of grander importance than any other act of the kind from the foundation of our free government to the present day.

It’s worth noting that in the recent and long overdue movement among biographers and historians to restore Grant to his rightful place in American history, Professor Sean Willentz of Princeton takes the position that Grant did more for civil rights than any other president between Lincoln and Lyndon B. Johnson.

Once more, I want to bring the less-known side of Grant to your attention.

After his White House days, in 1879 Ulysses S. Grant and his wife Julia embarked on a two-year trip around the world. Planned as a private sightseeing journey, it turned into an immense international tribute to Grant. He symbolized the burgeoning post-Civil War America, an industrial and military power to be reckoned with.

He and Julia dined with Queen Victoria at Windsor Palace. In Berlin, he spent two hours with Germany’s “Iron Chancellor” Prince Otto von Bismarck, who Grant characterized as “the greatest statesman of the present time.” Bismarck treated him with great respect as a military and national leader who possessed firsthand knowledge he was eager to acquire.



All this brought Grant and Julia to what neither of them thought would be the last chapter of his life. The year of 1884 found them living in Manhattan in a handsome town house just east of the fabulous millionaires’ mansions on Fifth Avenue. This was the era in our history known as “The Gilded Age.”

Grant and his son Ulysses S. Grant Jr. had become partners in a Wall Street investment firm known as Grant & Ward. The moving spirit of this enterprise was Ferdinand Ward, known as “The Young Napoleon of Wall Street.” Trustingly, Grant had put all his money under Ward’s management, and had encouraged all of his immediate family to follow his example. At that

moment, Ward was showing prospective investors papers indicating that the firm had a capitalization of sixteen million. On that basis, Grant had reason to think he was personally worth, as he put it, “nigh on to a million” — this at a time when household servants were paid five dollars a week.

The financial catastrophe struck swiftly. Overnight, in May of 1884, Ward’s fraudulent financial house of cards collapsed. He had been running what a later generation would call a Ponzi scheme. Grant and his family lost all their money.

A description of Grant as he was at this juncture was left by Robert Underwood Johnson, a brilliant young editor on the staff of the *Century Magazine*. Johnson met with Grant at his and Julia’s summer cottage in Long Branch, New Jersey, to discuss the possibility of his writing articles about his famous battles and campaigns.

Johnson found a man far different from the gruff warrior he expected to encounter. He wrote:

The man who, we had been told, was stolid and reserved showed himself to me as a person of the most sensitive nature and the most human expression of feeling. Grant gave me the impression of a wounded lion. He had been hurt to the quick in his proud name and his honor... He told me, frankly and simply, that he had arrived at Long Branch almost penniless. (At Long Branch, Julia, who for eight years had the White House staff at her disposal, did all the cooking for her “Ulys,” as she called him, and their family and guests.)

With Johnson guiding him, Grant began to write about Shiloh, the first of four articles describing his victorious battles. He found that he enjoyed it, and Johnson was the first to discover that the same man who could write the clearest, most direct military orders and after-action reports was capable of descriptive writing that transported a reader into the middle of gunfire and the neighing of cavalry horses. As Grant focused his prodigious powers of concentration on his four articles for the *Century*, he began to think of expanding this initial effort into what became his massive and powerful *Personal Memoirs*.

It was now that Grant’s friend Mark Twain entered the picture. Twain, already greatly famous for his *Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and other works, was about to publish *Huckleberry Finn*. He made Grant an offer that was both generous to Grant and, although speculative, potentially very lucrative for himself. He would publish Grant’s memoirs through a small publishing firm run by Twain’s nephew Charles Webster, and give Grant \$200,000 as an advance on the venture. Twain, always a man for images, described the arrangement this way: “If these chickens should ever hatch... General Grant’s royalties will amount to \$420,000, and will make the largest single check ever paid to an author in the world’s history... If I pay the General in silver coin at \$12 per [English] pound it will weigh seventeen tons.”

IV

As Grant continued writing in the summer of 1884, he suffered increasing pain and discomfort in his mouth. By late October, this had been diagnosed as cancer, primarily of the tongue — the result of smoking literally thousands of cigars. This was in fact a death sentence. The dramatic question now facing Grant, and the American public when they later learned of it, was, could he complete his memoirs before he died? During the spring of 1885, as Grant pushed himself ever harder as he wrote in his house in Manhattan, the people of both the North and the South, while still divided concerning postwar political issues, began to come together in an example of the American respect for courage, and the native instinct to pull for the underdog.

Mark Twain had been right in thinking that Grant could recount his Civil War experiences effectively, but he was bowled over by what he now saw and read. Averaging a production of 750 words a day while in a condition in which he likened a drink of water to “molten lead,” Grant was putting on paper a work of remarkable literary quality. Twain compared these memoirs with Julius Caesar’s *Commentaries*, saying:

“The same high merits distinguished both books — clarity of statement, directness, simplicity, manifest truthfulness, fairness and justice to friend and foe alike and avoidance of flowery speech... General Grant’s book is a great, unique, and unapproachable literary masterpiece.

There is no higher literature than these modern, simple memoirs. Their style is flawless... no man can improve upon it.”

During these months it became evident that Americans, not only in the North but the South, had come to have a special feeling for Grant. He had always had his critics, but, other than during his White House years, he was referred to and thought of as “General Grant.” Learning of his grave illness, crowds often gathered outside his house on East 66th Street. When he sometimes appeared to go for a carriage ride in Central Park, the reactions would range from applause to solemn silence, with men in the crowds taking off their hats.

At the time of Grant’s sixty-third birthday, on April 27, 1885, twenty years after the nation’s great redemptive moment at Appomattox Court House, it was clear that a new generation, not born at the time of the surrender, was growing up with an inbuilt feeling toward a man who, like Lincoln, had preserved the Union. Typical of the letters he received from young people was this one, from Maggie Irving of Louisville, Kentucky, a Border State during the war, who said in part: “I am a little Louisville girl who likes you so much... Old General Grant, please, please get well... I don’t write you to get your autograph or anything of the sort. I only write to let you know how we all love you. I hope you won’t suffer a bit. General Grant please accept the best wishes and love of this little Louisville girl.”

He also received this birthday greeting from the Confederate Survivors’ Association, meeting in Augusta, Georgia: “Remembering him now as the generous victor who, at the ever memorable meeting at Appomattox, conceded liberal and magnanimous terms of surrender, do we, standing by the graves of our Confederate dead... respectfully tender to General Grant assurances of our sincere and profound sympathy in this the season of his direful extremity.”

Because of the coming summer heat in Manhattan, arrangements were made to take Grant to a cottage high in the hills above Saratoga Springs, in upstate New York. At what was known as Mt. McGregor, a big new resort hotel named the Balmoral had been built, and this cottage was down a slope some two hundred yards from it.

Here Grant dug in for what was literally a do-or-die effort. Finding that writing with a pen and ink exhausted him in his weakened condition, he resorted to dictating as he neared the end of his massive two-volume work. At one point he had a brief discussion with his oldest son Frederick, concerning the dedication. Grant had it as, “These volumes are dedicated to the American soldier and sailor.” Frederick suggested that this should be changed to specify that he meant the soldiers and sailors who had fought for the North. Grant replied, “It is a great deal better that it should be dedicated as it is... As it is, the dedication is to those we fought against as well as those we fought with. It may serve a purpose in restoring harmony.”

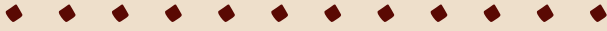
Grant felt a quiet passion for the nation he had fought to preserve. In what proved to be the last weeks of his life, his mouth and throat choked with mucus and bleeding from cancer, he sometimes dictated in a barely audible hoarse whisper, revised his manuscript with a pencil, and finally resorted to writing his thoughts on pieces of paper. On one of these, he wrote a summation of his feelings to former Confederate general Simon Bolivar Buckner of Kentucky, who came to see him at Mt. McGregor:

I have witnessed since my sickness just what I wished to see since the war; harmony and good feeling between the sections... I believe myself that the war was worth all that it cost us, fearful as it was — Since it was over I have visited every state in Europe and a number in the East. I know, as I did not know before, the value of our inheritance.



Photo courtesy of Perseus Books

Grant spent the summer in upstate New York at Mt. McGregor working on his highly anticipated manuscript.



On July 20, 1885, Ulysses S. Grant finished the last changes he wished to make in his manuscript. Three mornings later, with his family surrounding his bed, his last moments began. He died with Julia holding his hand.

A temporary resting place for Grant had been selected in Riverside Park, on Manhattan's cliffs high above the Hudson River, and a circular brick mausoleum had been built there. On the day that Grant's coffin, now closed, was brought up there from where he had lain in state downtown in Manhattan's City Hall, the largest crowd ever to assemble on the North American continent — estimates ranged from half a million to one and a half million people — lined the five-mile route of the funeral procession.

What they witnessed was the United States showing the world how to honor a national hero. Thousands of carriages followed the massive horse-drawn catafalque on which Grant's coffin rested. The crowds saw President Grover Cleveland, past presidents Rutherford B. Hayes and Chester Arthur, and the justices of the Supreme Court. The governors of every state went by, in the order in which their states had come into the Union. On the military side, there was a galaxy of generals; 40,000 troops passed, including the West Point Corps of Cadets, wearing black armbands. Music was provided by 250 bands and drum corps.

Proof of how Grant had brought the nation together was the fact that Confederate generals Joseph E. Johnston and Simon Bolivar Buckner were among the honored participants. The last large segment of the enormous parade, a democracy's tribute to the tanner's son from Ohio, was a column of 8,000 elected and appointed officials from all over the United States. The parade's combination of military strength and the representatives of constitutional law would have pleased Grant, who believed so firmly in the prosperous future he foresaw for the country he had served.

In addition to the public outpouring of respect and affection, those who knew Grant well had their more private reactions. On the day Grant died, Mark Twain wrote in his notebook, "He was a very great man and superlatively good." On their own, many citizens, North

and South, realized that they already knew that it was possible to be a sometimes ineffective president, but a great man nonetheless.

What has Grant's legacy been? Despite the rise and fall of historical schools of thought that obscured and diminished his role in our history, he and Lincoln remain the two men who did the most to ensure that our country would remain one nation, rather than to become two nations, one of which was committed to maintaining slavery as a legal institution. His memoirs were published to great acclaim, and the sales that Mark Twain had hoped for guaranteed that Julia would live very comfortably for the rest of her life.

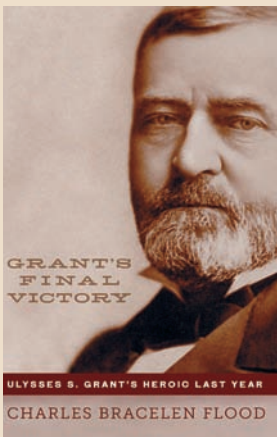
One hundred and twenty-six years after Grant finished it, in 2011 *The Personal Memoirs of Ulysses S. Grant* sold close to 50,000 copies, in three hardback and two paperback editions. That figure is even more impressive when one considers that the copyright has long since expired, and unknown numbers of copies are downloaded free from the Internet.

How do we sum up this unique life?

In a speech given fifteen years after Grant's death, Theodore Roosevelt placed him in the very first rank of Americans. Agreeing that men like Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson deserved to be regarded as enormously valuable citizens, he saw Grant as something more than that, and spoke of him this way:

"As we look back with keener wisdom into the nation's past, mightiest among the mighty dead loom the figures of Washington, Lincoln, and Grant... *these three greatest men* have taken their place among the great men of all nations, the great men *of all time*. They stood supreme in the two greatest crises of our history, on the two great occasions when we stood in the van of humanity and struck the two most effective blows that have ever been struck for human freedom under the law."

Of all that was ever written about Grant, nothing would have pleased him more than Julia's heartfelt and lyric memory of the man she called "Ulys." Julia said, "I, his wife, rested in and was warmed in the sunlight of his loyal love and great fame, and now, even though his beautiful life has gone out, it is as if when some far-off planet disappears from the heavens; the light of his glorious fame still reaches out to me, falls upon me, and warms me."



About the Author

Charles Bracelen Flood was born in Manhattan, and graduated from Harvard, where he was a member of Archibald MacLeish's noted creative writing seminar, English S, and was on the literary board of the *Harvard Lampoon*.

Love is a Bridge, Flood's first novel, received nationwide critical attention, and was on the *New York Times* Bestseller list for twenty-six weeks. It won the Houghton Mifflin Literary Fellowship Award. The twelve books he has written include the novels *A Distant Drum* and *More Lives Than One*.

Flood's journalistic experiences have taken him to many countries, including being a reporter for the Associated Press at the Olympics held in Melbourne, Rome, Tokyo and Mexico City. He has been a Senior Fulbright Scholar in Taiwan, and taught World Literature for two years at Sophia University in Tokyo.

Charles Bracelen Flood is a past president of the American Center of PEN, the international writers' organization, and has served on the governing bodies of the Authors League and Authors Guild. He and his wife Katherine Burnam Flood live in Richmond, Kentucky.



GEORGE “LIGHTNING” ELLSWORTH

*The Mysterious Man behind the
Telegraph Keys*

Dr. Marshall Myers

Arguably the most venerated figure from the Civil War in Kentucky, Confederate General John Hunt Morgan has been the subject of scores of books and popular and scholarly articles: a dashing, romantic figure, an emblem of southern chivalry.

His star is bright for many scholars, not only those in Kentucky. He is viewed as a seminal figure and innovator in the guerrilla warfare that haunted the state for much of the internecine conflict. Countless others outside the Commonwealth have praised the general from Lexington, but many scholars have pointed out a number of glaring flaws in his portrait as a military tactician and leader. His most fair-minded biographer, James Ramage, sums it up well: “The people loved him, but the Confederate high command considered him dangerous.”

It isn't only Morgan who has attracted so much attention, for the assembly of men from cutthroat killers to strong military leaders like his brother-in-law and successor, General Basil Duke, have also received considerable interest from both the public and scholars.

There was the crafty and daring Captain Thomas Hines, labeled by his enemies as the “Most Dangerous Man in the Confederacy.” He was the brains behind Morgan's clever escape from an Ohio penitentiary, and the instigator of the bold, but unrealized plan to organize the old Northwest behind the Southern banner.

There was also the crazed and monomaniacal Champ Ferguson, who used the war as an excuse to slaughter innocent

citizens in southern Kentucky and northern Tennessee, with apparently no conscience, and no other purpose than raging, murderous mayhem.

And there was Colonel St. Leger Grenfel, a British soldier of fortune, who for a time imbued Morgan's men with a better understanding of military tactics. Later, imprisoned for covert activity, he helped Dr. Samuel Mudd, accused Lincoln assassination conspirator, treat the victims of yellow fever in a Dry Tortugas prison. He most likely met his end trying to escape these torturous, swampy, sweltering confines off the coast of Florida.

Certainly, there were many others.

But one member of Morgan's band, George “Lightning” Ellsworth, is often mentioned for his trickery, but seldom explored for the sheer genius he possessed and his less than admirable seedier side. His contribution to Morgan's limited success singles him out for special interest. In fact, recently published documents make him an even more fascinating study. In the end, he was much more an enigmatic figure than just a droopy-eyed telegraph operator who created mass confusion for the Union forces who were the object of his devilry.

His recently re-issued autobiography often glosses over disturbing discretions like cold-blooded murder, yet the work delivers insight into just how adroit he was not only with his much-storied telegraph skills, but also helping Morgan and his men cleverly elude the Federals who pursued them.

Early Life

While most biographies agree on the major details of George Ellsworth's life, Stephen E. Towne and Jay G. Heiser, editors of Ellsworth's re-issued autobiography, offer much more insight into just what made the man.

George A. Ellsworth entered the world July 24, 1843, in what is now Prince Edward County, Ontario. Ellsworth, in the fashion of the day, romanticizes his birthplace, describing it as "the North side of East Lake (a beautiful body of water about five miles long and one mile in width)." When he was eleven, the family moved within thirty miles of Toronto. Of note, Towne and Heiser say that Ellsworth's parents may have been in that number of loyalists who fled the United States about the time of the American Revolution. Not much else is known about his parents' lives, except his father's name was Caleb.

Interestingly, Ellsworth had a brother and a brother-in-law who were also telegraph operators, raising speculation that the family itself was composed of telegraph operators. This suggests that Ellsworth may have seen telegraphy as more than just a job, and more as a calling. He learned at an early age to operate the telegraph key.

His most extant photographic image strikes many as almost comical, with Emmett Kelly eyes that seemed to beg for sympathy or laughter (whatever the occasion called for), a

broad forehead that swept well-beyond the ordinary person's hairline, a small chin and pursing mouth, accenting the almost comic devilry that emanated from his deep-set eyes.

In his autobiography, he says that he became "enthusiastic" about leaving home in early adolescence and the "epidemic of 'going west'" landed him in Chenoa, Illinois, as a telegraph operator for an Illinois railroad company.

But his first stint was less than impressive, because he accidentally burned down the telegraph station. In characteristic droll understatement, Ellsworth assigns "the cause of the fire as a lamp and my going to sleep over it." His "subsequent blowing (breathing while sleeping)... [and] a very unsuccessful attempt of mine ... to trim the stubborn and burnt up wick" ultimately resulted in the conflagration. He concludes that "When I came to my sense again I noticed the entire office wrapt in flames."

Needless to say, Ellsworth's attempt at apologizing for the calamity to the president of the company was met with nothing approaching forgiveness. Ellsworth says dryly that the railroad official "was anything but cordial: his manner was very uncouth and abusive wishing me most kindly the warmest place spoken of in the Bible."

From upstate Illinois, Ellsworth lit first one place then another: St. Louis, Missouri; Brownsville, Tennessee; and then Galveston, Texas. How successful he was at those places

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and why he left are unclear, but his next stop reveals a side of Ellsworth that unfortunately showed itself in one form or another on many occasions.

For instance, while not included in his autobiography, Towne and Heiser find Ellsworth living in Evansville in 1860.

According to the *Evansville Daily Journal*, Ellsworth's reputation was less than shiny. The newspaper of the day charges that the telegrapher "skedaddled" out of town, leaving many "sundry little bills unpaid." While working as a telegrapher, he even feigned downed telegraph lines so that he could go on a "bender."

But even more puzzling was that while Ellsworth lived in the river city, he was a member of the "Wide Awakes," a paramilitary group, leading torch-filled rallies in support of the candidacy of Abraham Lincoln. This information, the editors of his autobiography note, he conveniently left out of his life story. To become later the Confederate hero who espoused such strong southern sentiment causes his editors to wonder about "Ellsworth's true ideological adherence or whether he adhered to any ideology or principles at all."

Meeting Morgan

Ellsworth says that after briefly serving in a unit in Houston, Texas, named the Bayou City Guards, he became "perfectly fascinated" with the stories of "daring deeds" attributed to John Hunt Morgan. He hopped a hand car, deserted the Texas brigade, and met Morgan in a Mobile, Alabama, hotel.

There he spelled out just what he could do to help Morgan: "I gave him to understand that as he operated almost entirely inside of the enemy lines that I was satisfied I could be of material assistance to him by the use of the telegraph in throwing the enemy off its track and their guard, give false reports of his whereabouts, countermand orders that would impede his progress into Kentucky."

Morgan was quickly persuaded and told Ellsworth "to get ready to accompany him to Chattanooga," Tennessee, to meet other Morgan men.

Ellsworth's service to Morgan generally fulfilled what he had promised, and with it ushered into the South the tactical use of the telegraph as a weapon of war. To Morgan's credit, he



A group of "Morgan's Men" while prisoners of war in Western Penitentiary, Pennsylvania (l to r): Captain William E. Curry, 8th Kentucky Cavalry; Lieutenant Andrew J. Church, 8th Kentucky Cavalry; Lieutenant Leeland Hathaway, 14th Kentucky Cavalry; Lieutenant Henry D. Brown, 10th Kentucky Cavalry; Lieutenant William Hays, 20th Kentucky Cavalry. All were captured with John Hunt Morgan in Ohio.

Photo courtesy of University of Kentucky Archives

quickly understood how powerful the telegraph was, and he made the best use of Ellsworth's skills.

On Morgan's First Raid into Kentucky, Morgan himself mentions several times how Ellsworth's talents were put to good use. At Crab Orchard, for instance, Morgan reported that the telegraph was used to "countermand all the previous orders that had been given by [Union] General Jeremiah Boyle to pursue me, and [we] remained here in perfect security all night."

Earlier at Lebanon, Morgan learned that a Colonel Owen and the Sixtieth Indiana had been dispatched to assist in defending the town. Morgan then dispatched a unit of his men to destroy a railroad bridge "on the Lebanon Branch ... to prevent the arrival of the troops."

Such a tactical advantage, along with Morgan's use of scouts to survey the enemy's location, proved invaluable throughout the war.

But the particulars of Ellsworth's clever subterfuges give a more detailed picture of just how Ellsworth worked his trickery.

Often Ellsworth began his ruses by what he called "put[ting] on my ground wire, cutting off all offices south" of that telegraph station. What this meant was that all messages

sent south of the ground wire would stop with Ellsworth and not be transmitted farther down the line. It was an adroit move because that meant Ellsworth could intercept messages intended for other places and gather information helpful to Morgan. It also allowed him to send fake messages to Union forces that appeared to come from legitimate Union sources.

At Horse Cave, for example, Ellsworth, with coaching from Morgan, sent a bogus message to General Boyle in Louisville that supposedly came from the Union command in Nashville, particularly Colonel James Fry, chief of staff for General Carlos Buell. The fake message was that Confederate General Nathan Bedford Forrest had attacked Murfreesboro, Tennessee, ending in a decisive defeat for Union forces there.

Morgan must have hoped that General Boyle, based on the spurious message, would overreact and make some kind of foolish move as a result. Boyle was quite bewildered.

"Strange to say," Ellsworth wrote, "three days after ... General Forrest did attack Murfreesboro, and routed the Federals, capturing and killing many men."

Boyle was surely thoroughly bewildered, confirming in Morgan's mind that indeed this telegraph operator could provide him with an effective tactical weapon using capabilities never really realized before.

Dreamers Welcome

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It was also at Horse Cave that Ellsworth acquired his sobriquet "Lightning." As several sources tell it, Ellsworth earned the nickname because he worked his ruse amid a heavy thunderstorm with bolts of lightning slashing dangerously close to the ground and the telegraph trickster waist-deep in water. Ellsworth's circumstances and dedication soon rendered him "Lightning" Ellsworth.

Ellsworth and Morgan were not above having a little fun with the telegraph, too: "[Then] Colonel Morgan also requested me to telegraph one J.D. Hunter, of Lexington, Kentucky, to send two barrels of whisky by express to Nashville and to sign the name of John H. Cogel to the message. Two months from this time, when we occupied Lexington, I found a copy of the identical message in the office, and Mr. Hunter's testimony that he forwarded two barrels C.O.D., and that, as they had been returned to him, he had to pay charges both ways...!"

Another time, Ellsworth sent a taunting message to George Prentice, influential editor of the *Louisville Journal*, a Union leaning publication often critical of Morgan and his men. After one of his most successful raids into Kentucky, Ellsworth in Morgan's name quipped, "I have passed through seventeen counties, captured 2,000 prisoners, 4,000 stands of arms, and destroyed \$1,000,000 worth of United States government stores. I am now off to Dixie!"

Yet one of the most famous crafty stratagems took place in the Bluegrass involving Union troops in Lexington and Frankfort and the little town of Midway.

Morgan ordered Ellsworth and another Rebel to capture the telegraph office in Midway.

There Ellsworth found two telegraph wires, one for the military messages and another for the railroad. Ellsworth quickly cut the military wire, forcing all messages to be transmitted on the railroad line.

Ellsworth then discovered that a previously transmitted message from General John W. Finnell in Frankfort had determined Morgan's exact location.

Morgan knew he had to do something or he would face a formidable enemy.

Ellsworth sent a message to the commander in Lexington in Finnell's name: "My last telegram was founded on unreliable information. Morgan, with his combined force, had driven in our pickets, and will make a desperate effort to take the capital. Come to my assistance at once; do not come by railroad, as Morgan has undoubtedly destroyed it by this time."

With Union troops confusedly scurrying one direction and then another, supposedly to protect Lexington and Frankfort, the Union forces in both cities must have felt quite embarrassed when they later learned that they had been tricked. Ellsworth, in describing the ruse crowed, "When these 3,000 men found out that the message was from 'Morgan's Lightning' their whereabouts would not have been a healthy locality for that individual."

Other subterfuges, in other places and at other times, the product of Ellsworth's prodigious craftiness and creativity, brought more Union confusion and chaos, but his days as Morgan's crack telegrapher soon faded when Morgan was captured near the Pennsylvania border in eastern Ohio on the Great Raid of July of 1863. Ellsworth had earlier eluded capture at Buffington Island where most of Morgan's men were either drowned or imprisoned, and ultimately joined Kentuckian General Simon B. Buckner at the Confederate victory at Chickamauga, where Ellsworth was wounded.

He later assisted Captain Hines in the unsuccessful attempt to free Confederate prisoners of war at Rock Island and Camp Douglas, Illinois, while also trying to unite the Midwesterners with the South.

After the war, Ellsworth's reputation was substantially marred by what Towne and Heiser characterize as being "marked by crime and violence." He murdered a man in a street fight in Bath County, because, as James Ramage notes, Ellsworth didn't think he owed the hapless victim a dollar.

He was later captured and escaped from jails in Lexington, Flemingsburg, and one in Missouri, another of his talents. June of 1875 had him attempting unsuccessfully to rob a train in Houston. Five years later, he appeared in New Orleans, a responsible married man.

Several years after that, with a re-kindled interest in the Civil War, Ellsworth couldn't resist detailing his more storied days in several articles in *Confederate Veteran* magazine, and eventually penning his autobiography.

He passed away apparently from a heart attack while working as a telegrapher near Alexandria, Louisiana — according to a newspaper account — with "his hand upon the key."

Ellsworth's checkered past reflects a complex personality: clever and likeable, but also cold-blooded and rebellious.

For good or ill, the stories about him will be around awhile in the history of the Civil War: The first soldier to use the telegraph with such skill and daring, a wielder of one of Morgan's most powerful instruments of war, this sad-eyed, yet mysterious man.

About the Author

Dr. Marshall Myers is the coordinator of composition and full professor at Eastern Kentucky University in the Department of English. He has published more than 250 articles, scholarly pieces, poems, and short stories. Dr. Myers has authored two books on the Civil War in Kentucky, published in 2011: *Great Civil War Stories of Kentucky* and *Neither Blue Nor Gray*. In 2010, Dr. Myers was appointed to the Kentucky Civil War Sesquicentennial Commission by Governor Beshear. Raised in rural Meade County, near Battletown, Dr. Myers received a B.A. in English from Kentucky Wesleyan College, a M.A. in English from Eastern Kentucky University, and a Ph.D. from the University of Louisville.

The Kentucky Derby

*How the Run for the Roses Became
America's Premier Sporting Event*

An excerpt from James C. Nicholson's book

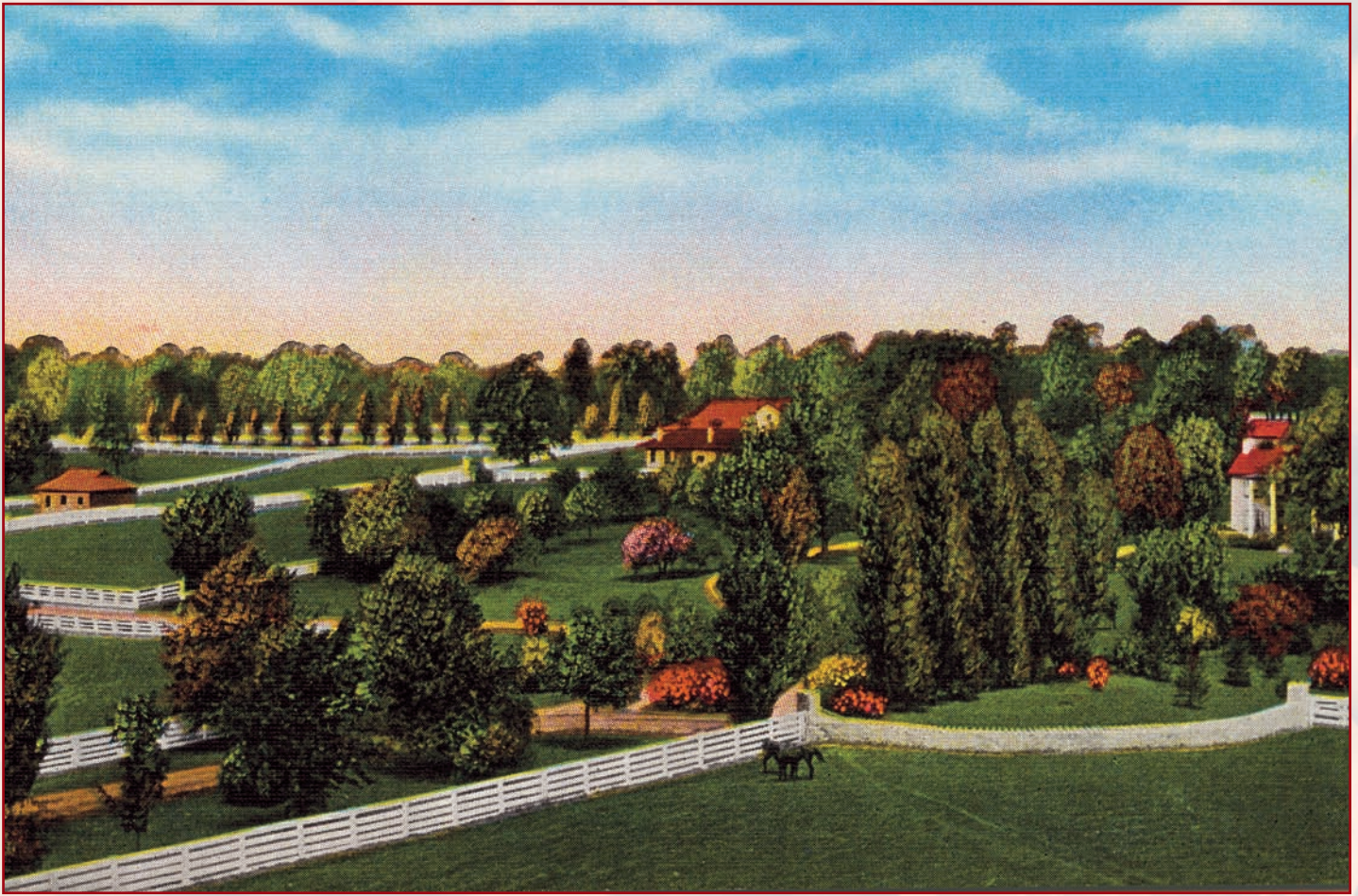
By 1920 the Derby had made great strides from relatively humble beginnings. The large crowds and journalistic fanfare that the Kentucky Derby attracted despite Man o' War's absence were testament to the fact that it was already more than just a horse race—it was a celebration of Kentucky, a place and an idea with deeply rooted historical and cultural meaning for Americans. But the fact that it was possible for the owner of America's greatest racehorse to choose not to run in the Derby shows that the event was still growing in terms of popularity and cultural cachet on its way to becoming America's greatest sports spectacle.

In the 1920s the rapidly moving and changing American cultural landscape included waves of restriction and rebellion in a conflicted atmosphere that produced jazz, flappers, women's suffrage, and bathtub gin—as well as Prohibition, the Scopes Monkey Trial, and the resurgence of the Ku Klux Klan. In the Roaring Twenties, Kentucky was a destination of escape from the realities and complexities of modern life for an apprehensive population that elected Warren G. Harding president on his campaign promise of a “return to normalcy” after an



Despite being considered one of the greatest Thoroughbred racehorses of all time, Man o' War did not participate in the 1920 Kentucky Derby.

Photo courtesy of University of Kentucky Archives



“Colonel” Edward Riley Bradley purchased land outside of Lexington that became Idle Hour Stock Farm. The farm was home to one of the most successful American Thoroughbred breeding operations. Four Bradley-owned horses won the Kentucky Derby.

Photo courtesy of University of Kentucky Archives

internationally and domestically active Wilson administration and World War I. In an era of increasing commercialization and commodification in which President Coolidge famously declared that “the business of America is business,” the Derby itself was becoming a consumable commodity as an experience. A journalist’s description of the Derby as the “best advertisement [Kentucky] ever had” underscored that process.

In 1921 “Colonel” Edward Riley Bradley won his first of four Derbies as an owner when his colt Behave Yourself caught another Bradley-owned colt, Black Servant, in the stretch, but because of a sizeable wager he had riding on Black Servant to win, Bradley had mixed emotions over the outcome. Colonel Bradley had been a successful bookmaker in Hot Springs, Arkansas, and Memphis before opening a casino resort in Palm Beach, Florida, called the Beach Club. The club’s charter allowed Bradley to operate “such games of amusement as the managers and members may from time to time agree on,” which reportedly netted Bradley in excess of \$1 million annually. Acting on his physician’s advice to work less and spend more time outdoors, in 1906 Bradley had purchased the tract of land outside Lexington, Kentucky, that would become Idle Hour Stock Farm, one of the

most famous and successful American Thoroughbred breeding operations of the early twentieth century. The rolling hills, white fences, and grand mansion at Idle Hour embodied the archetypical Kentucky horse farm as imagined by outsiders.

While Behave Yourself and Black Servant were being lauded on the track, the black servants back at the farm were also celebrating. *The New York Times* reported that “every man and woman, white and colored, on Idle Hour Stock Farm received a bonus for ER Bradley’s success in [the] Derby.” The irony of a patronizing story about black employees celebrating the success of a pair of horses named Black Servant and Behave Yourself seems to have been lost on the press. The image of happy black workers back at the farm while the white owners were at the races reinforced the link between the Derby and the plantation-like horse farms of central Kentucky owned by goateed Kentucky colonels that evoked the romance of the Old South for many Americans. The appeal of these images was very much a part of the Derby popularity in its age of ascent.

Because of its allusions to idyllic plantation scenes and simpler times, Stephen Collins Foster’s “My Old Kentucky Home” served as an appropriate anthem for the Derby as an antidote to

the complicated, modern world of the 1920s. The first published reports of the playing of “My Old Kentucky Home” at the Kentucky Derby appeared in 1921. By the end of the decade, Colonel Winn had replaced “The Star-Spangled Banner” with “My Old Kentucky Home” as the song to be played as the Derby contestants made their way onto the racetrack. It soon became one of the most recognized traditions associated with the event, part of the emotional experience of the Kentucky Derby. As early as the 1930s, journalists covering the race were conveying an incorrect assumption that the song had been a part of Derby tradition since the very beginning.

The Commonwealth of Kentucky was also involved in the creation and promotion of the Old South imagery that had become associated with the state and with the Derby. In 1921 the descendants of its antebellum owners sold Federal Hill, the mansion and property in Bardstown, Kentucky, that was purported to be the source of inspiration for Stephen Foster’s “My Old Kentucky Home” to the Commonwealth of Kentucky. There is no real evidence that Foster ever actually laid eyes on his relatives’ estate, but Federal Hill was opened as a state historical shrine in 1923 before being taken over by the Kentucky Division of State Parks in 1936.

The house and property that constitute “My Old Kentucky Home” in Bardstown quickly became a major tourist attraction, and Foster’s song by the same name has been Kentucky’s official state song since 1928. The adoption of the song and associated imagery by the Kentucky Derby and the Commonwealth reflects the attractiveness of the “good old days” to Kentuckians and to the tourists who continue to patronize the Derby and Federal Hill in Bardstown.

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Located in Bardstown, Kentucky, Federal Hill is the purported source of inspiration for Stephen Foster’s “My Old Kentucky Home.” The song has been Kentucky’s official state song since 1928.

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Go Big Blue!

By Georgia Green Stamper

Every year, I come down with a case of March Madness®. You see, I absolutely love the University of Kentucky men's basketball team. If my Wildcats get knocked out of the running early for the championship, the salt goes out of living. If they do well in tournament play, euphoria lifts my flat feet until I fancy I could dance on rooftops.

The funny thing about this obsession is that I know next to nothing about other major sports. While my peers were paying attention and learning the rules of football, baseball, tennis, and golf, I had my head stuck in a novel.

I also have a low kinetic I.Q. That's educator-speak for the clumsy students who get chosen last for playground teams. I actually flunked the vocational-physical aptitude test that the state Department of Education administered to high school seniors. The Commonwealth of Kentucky declared me too uncoordinated even for unskilled factory work.

Remembering the old adage that those who can't do, teach, I set off for college to become a teacher. But for the mercy of C.M. Newton, I might not have graduated, at least not with my grade point average intact.

C.M. went on to fame and fortune as a Division I basketball coach and big-time athletics director, but he got his start at tiny Transylvania where he had to cope with the likes of me in mandatory physical education classes. Despite my dismal performance in four different sports over four semesters, he gave me A minuses. Extra credit, he said, for never cutting classes, showing up early and dressed to play, and for something he called my good attitude. That could be code for groveling, but I prefer to think that Coach Newton saw past my physical awkwardness into my basketball loving soul.

However, according to an article in *Psychology Today* by Dr. Allen R. McConnell my klutziness could be the reason I'm a Wildcat fan-atic. He writes that fans like me are Basking in Reflected Glory or as he phrases it, BIRGing. And I admit that when one of the Cats dribbles all the way down the court in a nano-second and slam dunks the ball, I BIRG quite a bit. For a moment, I feel "kinetically gifted" as if this old body had soared in the air too.

Although I don't have the degrees in psychology that Dr. McConnell has, I would suggest that BIRTHing, however, rather than BIRGing turned me into a Wildcat basketball fan. Daddy and his four tall, lanky brothers smudged my DNA with Kentucky Blue and claimed my heart for round ball long before I was born.

With a full family team, Daddy and the Uncles took on all comers in the barnyard league, playing pick-up ball wherever someone had hung a hoop. For a decade or more, the Green Brothers were also a force on the old New Liberty High School team, intimidating opponents each new season with yet another "Green boy."

Daddy and the Uncles came of age in the 1930s when a young coach named Adolph Rupp was beginning to build the University of Kentucky into a basketball powerhouse. Rupp led UK to four NCAA

championships and a bushel of other titles, and holds the second highest winning percentage in the history of college basketball coaching.

Following Rupp's teams on their radios, I suspect Daddy and the Uncles did do some BIRGing. Growing up poor during the Depression in one of America's poorest states, UK's success made Kentucky farm boys like them proud and gave them hope that they, too, could compete, not necessarily in basketball, but in life.

They became, literally, die-hard UK fans for the rest of their lives. Uncle Woodrow, in his 80s, lay in a coma for days waiting for death. The night he died, a UK game was playing on the TV in his hospital room, and it was a close one. Finally, UK made the winning basket at the buzzer. Five seconds later Uncle Woodrow coded. We all believe he put off dying until he knew how the game turned out.

My own earliest memories speak to me in the voice of Cawood Ledford who broadcast the UK games on radio for decades. Cawood's rapid-fire voice, pitched high with excitement one moment, filled with scorn for bad officiating or a player's error the next, brought Wildcat basketball into every holler in the state.

At our place, no obligation interfered with game-time. In the tobacco stripping room, in the car, or around our kitchen table, Daddy, Mother, and I would mark off the winter days listening to the Wildcats. I think I saw the games more clearly on Cawood's radio than I do on today's 100-inch screens.

Dr. McConnell worries about the flip side of BIRGing, the loss of self-esteem when a fan's team loses, as my Wildcats have been known to do in important games. I would tell him about the night in 1957 when Daddy and I had "standing room only" tickets in old Memorial Coliseum to see UK play Temple. It turned out to be what reporters then called "the longest game in UK history." Kentucky's Hatton hit an amazing forty-seven-foot shot at the buzzer to tie the game in regulation. UK eventually defeated Temple by two points in triple overtime.

Even though my feet were hurting, I learned a lot about not giving up that night. There's always a chance to prevail, if not now then next season, and that's not a bad way to live a life.

About the Author

Georgia Green Stamper is a seventh generation Kentuckian. A graduate of Transylvania University, Stamper is a former high school English and theater teacher and speech team coach. Her work has been published in the literary anthologies *New Growth*, *Tobacco*, *Daughters of the Land*, *Motif I & II*, and *The Journal of Kentucky Studies*. She writes a bi-weekly column, "Georgia: On My Mind," for *The Owenton News-Herald*. She has been a regular commentator for NPR member station WUKY affiliated with the University of Kentucky and a popular member of the Kentucky Humanities Council's Speakers Bureau.



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