

## Pennsylvania and the Civil War: Southern Sympathies

In reality, the 'stereotypical' American Civil War, never existed. Not everyone 'North of the Mason-Dixon Line' were lovers of freedom & equality for African-Americans, neither were all Southerners ardent slave-holding secessionists. Perhaps that is one reason why the Civil War continues to generate such a fascination to both scholars and the lay public, since there *were so many* 'exceptions to the rule.' Certainly, the state of Pennsylvania was not exempt from this phenomenon.

Pennsylvania's divergent role in the Civil War, runs the full gambit of 'pro-Confederate personalities,' from *Franklin Weirick*, 'copperhead' editor of the **Selinsgrove Times** in Snyder County, who wrote anti-Lincoln editorials and poems throughout the conflict, to famed Rebel soldier, *Wesley Culp*, who died on his family farm during the 'Battle of Gettysburg' in Adams County. Many Pennsylvanians were 'divided' across familial and ideological lines, though it was not a 'border state,' as were Kentucky, Missouri and Maryland, yet a number of its 'southern tier' counties, bordering near Maryland, such as Chester, Snyder and Union, were 'hotbeds' of pro-Southern sentiment.

*Pierce Butler*, a member of Philadelphia's famed 'City Troop,' had resigned in 1860, and by August of 1861 had been arrested and placed in Fort Hamilton in New York "on a charge of treason," for an attempt or at least suspicion, of supplying the Confederacy with armaments. Butler incidentally had actually owned, but sold in 1859, part of an estate on Butler Island in Georgia, containing hundreds of slaves.

In Philadelphia, *Pennsylvania Hall*, erected in 1837 as a meeting house by Philadelphia abolitionists, was destroyed by fire through the arsonist actions of an 'anti-abolitionist' mob on May 17th, 1838, only three days after the buildings dedication.

Dislike for African-Americans was not a prejudice reserved only for Southerners (a stereotype regrettably still portrayed in today's cinema and media), as revealed by the famed 'Street car controversy' in Philadelphia, of both the ante-bellum and post-Civil War eras, wherein "Colored People" were forbidden to ride on Philadelphia street cars with 'Whites.' This controversy was aptly revealed by an editorial printed in the **Philadelphia Sunday Dispatch**, for as early as October 1st, 1848, entitled, 'Black and White,' declaring that,

"there is no State where the distinction of color is maintained more determinedly and assiduously than in Pennsylvania.--The whites will not in any way even assemble with the negroes...In the south--in the very hotbeds of slavery, South Carolina & Mississippi--negroes travel in the same cars and carriages with whites, and are well treated. *Here, {italics added} such a thing would not be attempted by a 'gentleman of color,' or if he did essay it, he would be unceremoniously thrust out by the colorless inmates.*"

Neither was the politically charged idea of 'secession,' exclusively restricted or peculiar only to the 'South' or to 'Southerners' alone.

*Francis Wade Hughes*, of Pottsville in Schuylkill County, who served as the Chairman for the

central Democratic committee of Pennsylvania, and a delegate to the 'Democratic State Convention' at Harrisburg in 1861, stated that,

"I intend offering a resolution before that Convention, that *Pennsylvania secede from the Union, and join herself with the South*, and leave Rhode Island and Connecticut and Massachusetts, and them d---d little petty States, to Subsist on their codfish and Plymouth Rock." (**Forney's War Press**, Philadelphia, PA, October 4th, 1862).

Many individuals from multi-generationally descended Pennsylvania families, nevertheless 'fought for the Confederacy' once the Civil War began. For example, *John Clifford Pemberton*, a Mexican-American War hero and native Philadelphian of Quaker ancestry, would resign his Federal commission, only to enlist his services and allegiance to the Confederacy, rising to the rank of Brevet Brigadier-General.

*Josiah Gorgas*, a native of Dauphin County, by April of 1861, had become a Major in the Confederate Army, being assigned as the 'Chief of Ordinance,' with the responsibility of supplying the Rebel Army with its needed military munitions and arms, in order to carry out its conflict with his native North. Both Pemberton & Gorgas had married Southern or Virginia women, but such marital affiliations served only as partial reasons for their alliance with the Confederacy.

During the Civil War, Lieut. *Hugh H. McClune*, of Co. 'C,' 135th Penn. Vols., of Lancaster County, would be tried by a court-martial, and was "cashiered" and "deprived from ever holding any office or post of honor or trust under the United States," partly because of his "uttering disloyal sentiments," while U.S. Surgeon, *Levi Oberholtzer*, of the 147th PA Infantry Regiment, was "dismissed with disgrace from the military service of the United States...for disloyalty to the Government."

Oberholtzer was a resident of Phoenixville, in Chester County, an area of the state which was renown for pro-Confederate sympathizers and for men who had enlisted in the Confederate Army (see, **Germantown (Philadelphia) PA Telegraph**, December 24, 1862; March 25, 1863; see also, Douglas R. Harper's work, **IF Thee Must Fight: A Civil War History of Chester County, Pennsylvania**, West Chester, PA: Chester County Historical Society, 1990, specifically Chp.43, 'Copperheads of Chester County,' pp's.209-213)

Diaries and letter collections available at The Historical Society of Pennsylvania, written by Pennsylvania Federal or Union soldiers during the Civil War, acutely reveal the very diverse feelings which existed towards African-Americans, slavery and secession within the 'Keystone State,' as well as the wide-spread ideology of the 'copperheads,' or pro-Southern sentiments felt by many inhabitants living within the Commonwealth.

Such material as the above is only a very small 'sampling' of the rich resources available to researchers, which reveal the diverse and varied role Pennsylvanians played, during our tumultuous Civil War.

(A suggested source: Christine B. Keller, 'Keystone Confederates: Pennsylvanians Who Fought For Dixie,' in, **Making & Remaking Pennsylvania's Civil War**, edited by William Blair & William Pencak, University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press., 2001: pp's. 1-22, 262-266).

