

# SMITHSONIAN

IN YOUR CLASSROOM

FALL 2010



## FINAL *Farewells*



SIGNING A YEARBOOK ON THE EVE OF THE CIVIL WAR



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GEORGE W. McNEEL

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## **NATIONAL STANDARDS**

The lesson in this issue addresses NCSS National History Standards for Expansion and Reform and the Civil War, and for the analysis and reconstruction of the past.

## **STATE STANDARDS**

See how the lessons correlate to standards in your state by visiting [smithsonianeducation.org/educators](http://smithsonianeducation.org/educators).

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## **ILLUSTRATIONS**

**Cover, inside cover, pages 4–5, yearbook poster, and back cover:** Smithsonian National Museum of American History. **Pages 2, 7, 12 (right), and 13 (lower):** Special Collections and University Archives, Rutgers University Libraries. **Page 3:** Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum. **Pages 8 and 10:** Brazoria County Historical Museum. **Page 9:** Mystic Seaport Museum (upper) and Peabody Essex Museum (lower). **Page 11:** McNeel family. **Timeline poster:** Brown, Buchanan, Davis, Howe, Lee, and Pierce portraits, National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution. All other images, Library of Congress.

## **CREDITS**

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## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

Thanks to Shannon Perich of the National Museum of American History; Jamie Murray and Beverly Stimson of Brazoria County, Texas; Emily Allen Hornblower, Matthew Fox, and Thomas Frusciano of Rutgers University; and Robert E. L. Krick of the Richmond National Battlefield Park. Special thanks to McNeel-family descendant G. Warren Thomas.

# CLASS

## *1860*



In the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History are thousands of artifacts that represent what curator Shannon Perich calls "the intersection of private and public history." Some of these were the private possessions of public figures: a buckskin coat worn by George Armstrong Custer, for example, or a trumpet played by Dizzy Gillespie. Others were the possessions of people not recognized by history, which take on their meaning precisely because they were part of the everyday world.

In this issue's lesson, students examine an artifact that fits into the latter category: a book of "autographs and photographs" commissioned by the graduating class of 1860 at Rutgers College in New Brunswick, New Jersey. It was acquired by Perich and fellow curators of the museum's Photographic History Collection, mainly because of its place in the development of what we know today as the school yearbook. The photographer was George K. Warren of Boston, who came up with the idea of selling such albums at the colleges along the East Coast. We might call him, then, the inventor of the yearbook and the yearbook business. The curators had a choice between several examples when they decided to purchase one of Warren's works. They chose this one because of a deeper layer of historical interest. It was owned by student George Washington McNeel of Texas, a southerner at a northern college. The "autographs" are farewell messages to a classmate whose southernness was one of the more salient things about him by the year 1860.

As you and your students read the messages, you will see McNeel only in reflection. He did not, of

course, sign his own yearbook. What we learn of him is what his friends write. Your students can use these scraps of information to piece together an image of the owner and the friends, the school they were about to leave, and a country itself on the verge of separation.

The issue contains as much background information as could be found, a great deal of which came to light only after the acquisition of the book. In February 2009, for instance, the Smithsonian Center for Education and Museum Studies held an online conference to mark the bicentennial of Abraham Lincoln's birth. One of the presenters was Perich, who displayed pages of the book as examples of Civil War-era photography. One of those who saw the presentation was a researcher in Texas who had been working with a descendant of the McNeel family in Georgia. The two got in touch with Perich and were able to fill in blanks, not the least of which was the identification of McNeel's photograph. The pictures are identified only by accompanying messages, and not all of the classmates signed the book. The Smithsonian, therefore, could not give a face to McNeel until this meeting of museum and audience.

"The past is not dead," William Faulkner famously wrote. "It is not even past." The yearbook is just one of thousands of artifacts in the museum that continue to take on new shapes of meaning. It seems not too much to hope that its presentation in *Smithsonian in Your Classroom* will reach others who can add to the story because the story is, in whatever way, their own.

## RUTGERS COLLEGE



Now the state university of New Jersey, with 50,000 students on three campuses, Rutgers is the eighth oldest institution of higher learning in the United States. It was founded as Queen's College in 1766, two years after Brown and three years before Dartmouth. Like most of the early schools, it began with a church affiliation. Its chartered purpose was for education "in true religion and useful knowledge, and particularly for providing an able and learned Protestant clergy, according to the Constitution of the [Dutch] Reformed Churches." By 1860, Rutgers



THE RUTGERS CAMPUS IN THE 1860s

had all but broken its official ties to the Dutch Reformed Church, but it still drew the majority of its students from that denomination, by tradition and by geography. The Dutch colony of New Netherland was surrendered to the English in the 1600s, but the Dutch settlers remained in what became New York and New Jersey. Names in the yearbook like Voorhees, Van Vranken, and Bogardus reflect the same regional history as names like Van Buren, Vanderbilt, Roosevelt, and even Springsteen.

And Rutgers was still a college of choice for those on their way to the clergy. Of the twenty-eight students who graduated in 1860, eleven went on to become Dutch Reformed ministers. Two others became Presbyterian ministers. The Presbyterians shared Calvinist roots with the Dutch church. This may be one reason that the Scottish-descended, Presbyterian-raised George W. McNeel chose Rutgers.

A look at a Rutgers course catalog of the time gives a good idea of what then constituted "useful knowledge." The requirement for freshman admission—in addition to "testimonials of good moral character" and \$45 for tuition—was a firm grounding in the classics. Students were expected to arrive with a knowledge of Xenophon, Cicero, Caesar's Commentaries, and Virgil's *Aeneid*. "The preliminary studies," says the catalog, "are substantially the same as those of the other colleges of our country." Coursework at Rutgers, done by the whole class at the same time, was largely devoted to a deeper study of Greek and Latin literature.

The classical education shows itself in the farewell notes. Here there is nothing of the offhand sentiment of a modern yearbook (*Stay as awesome as you are!*) or the inside jokes that become incomprehensible, even to the owner, in a few years. The tone is oratorical, as if Cicero himself were signing a yearbook. Most of the classmates included quotations from poetry and even their own poetry. All of them tried to give the highest language to the poignancy of parting with a friend. It is as though they were writing for some larger audience, and writing for the ages. Which, as it turns out, they were.

## GEORGE W. McNEEL



The Rutgers commencement ceremony on June 20, 1860, included addresses from all twenty-eight graduates, along with musical interludes that ranged from American folk tunes to Verdi arias. The *New York Times*, which covered graduations at area colleges, singled out four of the young men for addresses that were "short, sensible" and "quite eloquent." One of these was

George W. McNeel of Texas. After a performance of "Lone Star Twostep," he gave an address titled "Success, the Offspring of Effort." The records do not show if he had his own family's business success in mind, and it may be impossible to know what he thought about the involuntary effort that went into that success.

The McNeels came from Kentucky in 1822 as members of the "Old Three Hundred," the first American families to settle in Texas after Stephen F. Austin obtained a land grant from the Mexican government. George W. McNeel grew up at Ellerslie, his father's sugar and cotton plantation in Brazoria County, on the Gulf Coast south of Houston. The twenty-one-room brick house at Ellerslie was described as "baronial in its magnificence" by one who saw it. It had all the features that went into a romanticized view of plantation life: white Doric columns, upper galleries, mahogany staircases, Italian marble, furnishings from Paris. A rather un-Calvinistic sportiness announced itself at the gates, which were topped with carved-oak representations of a heart, a diamond, a spade, and a club. On top of the house was a widow's walk used as an observatory.

The McNeels sold hundreds of thousands of pounds of sugar a year and controlled much of the movement of Texas sugar and cotton to ports on the coast. The 1860 census showed that they owned real property valued at \$100,150 and personal property valued at \$216,400. The property included a brick sugar mill, brick slave quarters, and 176 slaves. One wing of the house was occupied by domestic slaves.

After graduation from Rutgers, George W. McNeel married Maria Pell Brower of Brooklyn, New York, and continued his studies at Princeton. The nature of those studies is not known, and the farewell notes in the yearbook contain only a few hints of his undergraduate interests. Two notes tell us that he was an editor of a school magazine. Another gives strong indication of a high esteem among fellow scholars: the classmate wishes him no less than that he "become one of the brightest beacon lights upon the intellectual heights of the nineteenth century."

But in 1861 he returned home and joined the Confederate 8th Texas Cavalry, which became better known in Lone Star lore as Terry's Texas Rangers. When it was formed, a Galveston newspaper wrote: "If this regiment does not make its mark on the Lincolnites, there is no virtue in strength, courage, patriotism and thorough knowledge of the use of horses and arms." McNeel was elected first lieutenant and rose to the rank of major. Records indicate that he was at the Battle of Shiloh in Tennessee in April 1862, a victory for Union commander Ulysses S. Grant that cost a total of 23,746 casualties.

In the spring of 1864, he was fighting closer to home, in a counteroffensive against the Union's Red River Campaign, a failed attempt to divide Texas from the already-fractured Confederacy. A correspondent for a Houston newspaper was with Texas troops as they met the Union force in northwestern Louisiana. The reporting mentions



MEN OF THE 8TH TEXAS CAVALRY, McNEEL'S REGIMENT

McNeel by name: he had two horses shot from under him in the Battle of Pleasant Hill, but survived to carry a flag of truce to the enemy, who wished to send medical supplies to their captured wounded. A month later, on May 7, with the Union in retreat and the Confederates advancing to a victory that would do it little good, he was shot and killed by a picket while reconnoitering the lines. His stepmother, a northerner like his young wife, marked his death in the family Bible: "Aged 26 years, 7 months and 10 days. His life has been given in noble sacrifice in his country's service."



## FRIENDS/ENEMIES



At Rutgers, McNeel had one southern classmate, Charles Ridgely Goodwin of Savannah, Georgia, who was another of the four mentioned by the *New York Times* for the eloquence of their graduation addresses. Goodwin also went to war, but survived until 1894, dying of natural causes just days after being appointed surveyor of the Port of Baltimore by President Grover Cleveland. Said the *Times* in an obituary:

“When the war broke out, Mr. Goodwin’s sympathies being strongly with the South, he entered the Confederate service as private, joining Wheaton’s Light Battery. For some time he was stationed at Fort Sumter....Subsequently he served as Inspector on Gen. Alexander’s staff, and was on the staff of Gen. Mahone just before the close of the war.”

General William “Little Billy” Mahone was with Robert E. Lee’s retreating army just before the close of the war, and was present at the surrender to General Grant. If Goodwin was also there, his Civil War career was associated with the two bookend place-names, Fort Sumter and Appomattox.

Of the twenty-six northerners in the Class of 1860, five joined the Union service. The best documented of their careers is that of Josiah J. Brown of Newark, who later became a Presbyterian minister and a lawyer. In 1885, he wrote a forty-page memoir for family and friends,

“Record of Experiences During the Civil War,” which is now in the archives of the New Jersey Historical Society. (See page 12.) All of his fighting was done with the Army of the Potomac, beginning with the Second Battle of Bull Run in 1862. He was captured by Confederates in the Shenandoah Valley in the summer of 1864, held in prisons in Danville and Richmond, Virginia, and released in February 1865 in a prisoner parole.

Like fellow Newarker Stephen Crane in *The Red Badge of Courage*, Brown shows the reader of his narrative only what a private saw before his eyes. Often this is little more than what a blinkered mule would have seen. Maneuvers that end in places consecrated by history—Fredericksburg, Gettysburg, Spotsylvania—are for him a matter of weary treks toward a sudden horror. Word of the movements reaches his ranks as orders to march. It seems that he is no more privy to the meaning of the orders than when he is moved around as a prisoner of war.

The graduate with the shortest Civil War experience was David Abeel Williamson of Long Island, New York, who left the most startling farewell note in the yearbook. Revealing in one sentence a great deal of the complexity of northern sentiment, Williamson wrote to McNeel: “That you may live to see all abolitionists turned to dust and the ‘Union’ saved, is the wish of your friend and classmate.”

Spotty records show that Williamson traveled to the South after graduation and took a job as a tutor on a plantation in Natchez, Missis-



**CHARLES R. GOODWIN**  
CONFEDERATE ARMY.  
ENLISTED AS PRIVATE,  
1862. DISCHARGED 1865.

**JOSIAH J. BROWN**  
UNION ARMY. PRIVATE,  
2ND AND 15TH NEW  
JERSEY INFANTRY.  
ENLISTED 1861.  
DISCHARGED 1865.

**ALEXANDER M. BISHOP**  
UNION NAVY. ENLISTED  
1862. DISCHARGED  
1865. SERVED ON  
SHIPS ENFORCING THE  
BLOCKADE OF THE  
SOUTHERN COASTS.

**WILLIAM R. TAYLOR**  
UNION ARMY. COLONEL,  
29TH NEW JERSEY  
INFANTRY. ENLISTED  
AS PRIVATE, 1862.  
DISCHARGED 1863.

**CORNELIUS VAN DERBILT**  
UNION ARMY. PRIVATE,  
1ST NEW JERSEY  
INFANTRY. ENLISTED 1861.  
DISCHARGED 1864.

**DAVID A. WILLIAMSON**  
UNION ARMY. PRIVATE,  
7TH NEW YORK INFANTRY.  
ENLISTED 1862. DIED 1862.

Mississippi. After war broke out, back in the North, he enlisted as a private in the 7th New York Volunteer Infantry. He fought and was wounded at Antietam, a battle that was close enough to a Union victory to give President Lincoln the confidence to strike at the institution of slavery. No friend of abolition, at least when in college, Williamson died of his wounds on September 22, 1862, the very day Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation.

## THE PRECIPICE YEAR



The school year that ended in 1860 was the last in which a northerner could offer a southerner the hope that “future occupations may be crowned with abundant success,” as future Union Colonel William Remsen Taylor wrote to McNeel in the yearbook. McNeel’s younger brother and a younger cousin followed him to Rutgers and were there for the year 1860–61. The school was on spring vacation when Confederate troops bombarded Fort Sumter. When classes resumed, according to a history of Rutgers, the two Texans were made to feel so unwelcome that they promptly went home. The cousin followed George into the 8th Texas Cavalry. He died in Tennessee in 1863.

The McNeel yearbook contains many mentions of a dramatic and even “fearful” future that awaited the students, as opposed to the quiet idyll of college. In a yearbook from 1861 or one of the subsequent years, such thoughts would be clearer in their meaning. But in the early

months of 1860, how much of this referred to national events? How much was simply an expression of a timeless feeling—that the end of schooldays is the end of the most carefree period of life? These questions are open to the speculations of you and your class. Your students might themselves be at the end of their days at your school, and so might be in a good position to make judgments. The more they know about events leading up to the Civil War, the better their judgments will be.

Less controvertible than history—less open to question—is beauty. Throughout the yearbook are sentiments that, though they might have seemed a bit flowery at the time, become achingly beautiful in our hindsight. In one message, classmate F. W. Bogardus speaks of the time when “the few fleeting years of our life shall end.” Reading it, we must allow for the probability that this future Dutch Reformed minister was merely taking the spiritual long view of things. And yet his message could not have been a better epitaph for his generation. He began with a quote from the Scottish epic of Ossian:

“Friend Mack

““Our youth is like the dream of the hunter on the hill of heath. He laid him down and slept; he awoke amid a storm.”★

# History

## PUBLIC AND PRIVATE



As early as 1820, when debates over slavery led to the Missouri Compromise, some could see the outlines of the future with great clarity. John Quincy Adams, for one, could write in his diary: “I take it for granted that the present question is a mere preamble—a title-page to a great, tragic volume.” But as late as 1860, who could see the tragedy in its full enactment? How many could have imagined a war that would take four years and leave more than a million men—about one in thirty people in the country—dead or wounded?

Students might keep this question in mind as they examine the inscriptions in the McNeel yearbook. Here they will find a classmate wishing McNeel well “if future days be for us.” Another imagines McNeel approaching his grave “with step unfaltering.” Is this some special insight, or is it only in keeping with the context—the diction and serious intent of the other classmates’ messages?

The messages are nearly all the context the yearbook provides. After a title page and a decorative engraving, there are only photographic portraits of the faculty and the senior class—one to a page—and interleaving blank pages for writing. On this issue’s pullout poster are seventeen of the messages by classmates and two by professors. The reverse of the poster, which you might examine after the lesson, contains a timeline of national events during these students’ four years at college, 1856 to 1860.

### STEP 1 THE SCHOOL

After sharing background, present the yearbook material in whatever way is best for your class. Students might gather around the poster, or you might make copies from a PDF version of this issue at [smithsonianeducation.org/rutgers](http://smithsonianeducation.org/rutgers).

Begin with basic questions: *What kind of school was this? What kind of students were these?* One clue is obvious in the pictures: it was an all-male school. Other clues may be found in incidental details. For example, the recurring word *natus*, for birthdates, might tell something of the education at Rutgers. If students have trouble with this word, mention others with its root, such as *natal* and *nativity*.

### STEP 2 THE TIMES

As you look for what the messages tell us of the year 1860, begin with a discussion of the general times—the nineteenth century—and what your students see in contrast to their own times. *How does the language differ from what you would write in a yearbook? Are the sentiments different as well?*

As you focus on the messages that address the world beyond Rutgers, consider the positions that the writers are taking. The Constitution and “Union” are mentioned several times. *Does it seem that the two were the same thing to these northerners? How might a southerner have viewed the Constitution and constitutional rights differently?*



Students will probably notice that the central question of the day, slavery, is mentioned just once, and in a surprising way. Classmate David Abeel Williamson of New York expresses his wish that “all abolitionists turn to dust.” It is worth pointing out to students that the environs of Rutgers—northern New Jersey and New York City—were among the most conservative parts of the North on the issue of slavery. (See page 8.) Worth mentioning, too, is that Williamson, a volunteer, was the only graduate to die for the Union.

### STEP 3 THE YEARBOOK'S OWNER

The messages tell us that McNeel was an editor of a school magazine and a member of a fraternity. Otherwise, who was he? Eight of his friends mention his home in the South. You might ask: *Does it seem that McNeel often talked about home?* As you look at the messages that make political points, consider: *Are the writers addressing someone who agrees with them? Or are they arguing with some position taken by McNeel?*

Unfortunately, McNeel can't speak for himself—very little of his own writing has been found. Letters of his may have been lost in a fire at his home (see page 10) and Rutgers University has no records of the magazine he worked on. All that has turned up is related to the yearbook itself. In a letter to George K. Warren, the photographer, he made a selection between two poses: “Don't mount up more than five of the full face—I don't like it near so well as the profile.” What follows suggests that he had a hand in hiring Warren to

do the yearbook: “Prof Cook (Chemist) as well as all speak *most* highly of you as an artist. It's gratifying to exclaim *veni vidi vici*.”

And recently another of the 1860 Rutgers yearbooks has been discovered. It belonged to student J. W. Beardslee of Connecticut and was signed by McNeel.

“Our revels now are ended,” McNeel began, quoting Shakespeare in *The Tempest*. Then he addressed Beardslee directly: “When floating on the stormy sea of life, steer for the harbor of Truth and let drop as your anchor Honor. All else will be well.”

### EXTENSION IDEA

As a research assignment, students might look for other yearbooks—in your school's library, at a local college, or at home—that offer glimpses of the country or the world at large. In books from the World War II years, world events may be at the very fore. There may be pages dedicated to alumni who have died and pictures of war-bond drives and scrap-metal clubs. But in most cases, students will have to peer more closely. For example: looking at a run of books from, say, 1965 to 1972, they might consider the unseen forces that are urging hair to grow ever longer.

And because we all live in someone else's historical period, they might even turn to their own yearbooks and ask: *What can this artifact say about me in a hundred and fifty years?* ★

IMAGES FROM RUTGERS  
YEARBOOKS THROUGH  
THE YEARS



# NEW YORK & TEXAS



A year after graduation, George W. McNeel married Maria Pell Brower of Brooklyn, New York. Seven years before, his widowed father, J. Greenville McNeel, married a woman who was also from Brooklyn, Alma Amelia Blydenburgh. This might seem a strange coincidence made even stranger by the national climate before the war. But the McNeels' connections to the New York area were more extensive than attendance at Rutgers College. George's bride was the daughter of a cotton merchant who founded the New York and Texas Packet Line, John H. Brower. His stepmother was the daughter of the merchant's business partner.

Then as now, New York was the country's center of global trade. In the prewar United States, global trade largely meant southern commodities—sugar, tobacco, rice, and especially cotton. In some years, cotton accounted for more than 60 percent of exports. It's been estimated that New York took in 38 cents of every dollar made in the business, whether by finance, insurance, or shipping through such firms as the New York and Texas Packet Line.

Along with these connections came a politics that made New York "virtually an annex of the South," as a New York friend of Abraham Lincoln wrote after the war. Early in 1861, in perhaps the most extraordinary address ever heard by a city council, Mayor Fernando Wood suggested that Gotham, too, should secede and exist as an independent city-state.

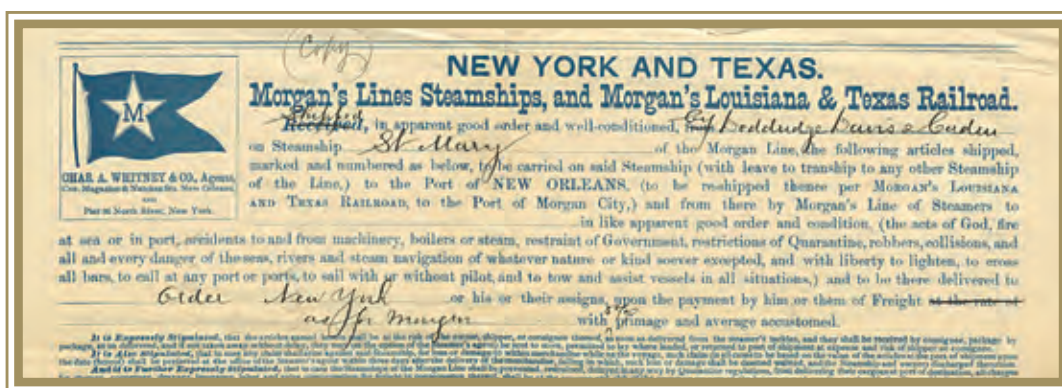
"With our aggrieved brethren of the Slave States, we have friendly relations and a common sympathy," the mayor said in the address. "We have not participated in the warfare upon their



ELLERSLIE FOUNDER J. GREENVILLE McNEEL IN FRONT OF THE PLANTATION'S LIVERY STABLE. THE THREE YOUNG MEN ARE ALMOST CERTAINLY GEORGE W. McNEEL (LEFT) AND THE BROTHER AND COUSIN WHO FOLLOWED HIM TO RUTGERS.

constitutional rights or their domestic institutions. While other portions of our State have unfortunately been imbued with the fanatical spirit which actuates a portion of the people of New England, the city of New York has unfalteringly preserved the integrity of its principles."

A BILL OF LADING  
FROM THE PAPERS OF  
JOHN H. BROWER



Mayor Wood was a Tammany Hall Democrat with ties to the sort of street politicians depicted in the movie *Gangs of New York*. He had already earned a reputation for wild words, and his proposal was in no way taken seriously. But the sentiment behind it struck chords with both the merchant class and an immigrant constituency

York businessmen affirmed their commitment to the Union but sought to reassure the South of their support of slaveholder rights. The many signers included William B. Astor, Samuel J. Tilden, and the founder of the New York and Texas Packet Line, John H. Brower.



CSS NASHVILLE BURNING THE SHIP HARVEY BIRCH  
BY DUNCAN McFARLANE, 1864

The feelings of the other class came to a head with the passage of the Enrollment Act of 1863, the first federal draft law, which allowed those with means to avoid service by paying a \$300 commutation fee or by hiring a substitute soldier. When the first names were called in Manhattan, protests against the draft turned to attacks on the free black population. Citywide rioting included streetlamp lynchings and the looting and burning of the Colored Orphan Asylum at Fifth Avenue and 43rd Street, which was cheered on by a crowd of two thousand. To battle the rioters, the War Department ordered a detachment of soldiers who had just fought at Gettysburg.

During World War II, it became a convention of combat movies to feature a wiseacre from Brooklyn and a laconic type with a nickname like "Tex." Brooklyn and Texas were easy shorthand for the diversity of backgrounds bound together by the war—northern and southern, eastern and western, ethnic and native, tenement stoop and wide open spaces. In the Civil War, on both sides of the line, diversity was not an easy thing to reconcile. Sometime in 1861, George's wife Maria came with him to Texas and set up house at the plantation, Ellerslie. That same year, her father gained a place in Civil War naval history: one of his ships, the *Harvey Birch*, was the first vessel seized and destroyed by the Confederates.★

who associated the antislavery movement with Protestant, nativist values and the prospect of freed slaves with competition for work.

The views of the merchant class had been expressed in the "Pine Street Resolutions" of December 1860, in which a committee of New

# ELLERSLIE *and Its* SURVIVORS



In 1935, President Franklin Roosevelt created the Federal Writers' Project (FWP) as part of the Works Progress Administration. Like other New Deal programs, it had a twofold purpose. It gave jobs to out-of-work writers and editors, and it recorded details of local history across the country. One of its legacies is a collection of oral histories of some 2,300 former slaves. FWP interviewers listened to voices that had never before received such attention and that would soon pass into silence. In taking down the stories, they tried to reproduce the sounds of southern African American speech with phonetic spelling.

Three of the 2,300 were former slaves of the McNeel family, all still living on former McNeel land: Cinto Lewis, his wife Lucy Lewis, and Pinkie Kelley. Cinto's full name was San Jacinto Lewis. He was born, he said, during the Battle of San Jacinto, which led to Texas's independence from Mexico. If true, he was 101 years old when interviewed in 1937. Perhaps getting the date of the battle wrong, he believed himself to be 111.

His wife Lucy, described by the interviewer as "full of fun," did not know her age. She had lived on the plantation of an uncle of George W. McNeel before moving to Ellerslie, McNeel's home. Asked to recall the conditions of slavery, she mostly recalled the conditions of youth.

"We used to cut all kind of steps, de cotillion and de waltz and de schotty [schottische] and all de rest de dances of dat time," she said. "I was a right smart dancin' gal. I was little and sprite."

Pinkie Kelley, who spent her whole life at Ellerslie, had no such memories.

"Most I 'members 'bout them times is work," she said, "'cause we's put out in de fields befo' day



LUCY AND CINTO LEWIS. THEY ARE STANDING BEFORE ONE OF THE PLANTATION'S ORIGINAL BRICK SLAVE QUARTERS.

and come back after night. Then we has to shell a bushel of corn befo' we goes to bed and we was so tired we didn't have time for nothin'."

The experiences of Mrs. Lewis and Kelley differed on almost every point. Said Lewis: "We used to wear good clothes—real purty

She and me marry right after 'mancipation. We come long way and we goin' to die together.

clothes—most as good as dat Houston cloth you-all wearin'. And, sho' 'nough, I had some purty red russet shoes." Said Kelley: "We didn't have no clothes like we do now, jes' cotton lowers and rubber shoes."

The differences tell much about an economic system that allowed matters of Providence to fall into human hands. Lewis happened to be

Mrs. Lewis had keen memories of the war years:

"[Confederate] soldiers was around here thick as weeds. We had to give 'em a tith of corn and we makes clothes for 'em, and bandages and light jackets....One of dem Yank gunboats come up de river and shell around here. Right here. Dem shells come whistlin' through de trees and lop de limbs right off. Dem sho' was scare times."

Said Kelley: "I never heard much 'bout no war and Marse Greenville never told us we was free. First I know was one day we gwine to de fields and a man come ridin' up and say, 'Whar you folks gwine?' We say we gwine to de fields and then he say to Marse Greenville, 'You can't work these people without no pay, 'cause they's as free as you is.' Law we sho' shout, young folks and old folks too. But we stay there, no place to go, so we jes' stay."

Kelley could not give her age, she said, because her records were lost in a fire in the 1880s. The plantation was under new ownership. The children of the new family were playing with matches in the attic, lighting cotton bolls and stamping them out. They left the house without knowing that the cotton was still smoldering. Today, all that remains of Ellerslie are the brick foundations, which stand in a cattle pasture like a Roman ruin.

The McNeels lost their fortune after the war. The father of George's wife Maria resumed his prominence as a cotton merchant. Maria moved back to New York with two young children, one of whom was born after George was killed. George's father died a few years before the fire and was probably buried on the plantation he established. His grave has not been found.★



ELLERSLIE. IT WAS PROBABLY NAMED FOR THE VILLAGE OF ELLERSLIE IN SCOTLAND, HOME OF SIR WILLIAM WALLACE, HERO OF SCOTTISH INDEPENDENCE.

made a house servant. Kelley happened to be made a field worker. Lewis happened to have a master and mistress who, she said, "treated us real well." Kelley happened to have a master who, she said, "never give us nothin'."

# AMERICAN *Golgotha*



McNeel's classmate Josiah J. Brown went on to become the oldest living alumnus of Rutgers, dying in 1936 at the age of ninety-six. When he was in his forties, he wrote, "as a pastime," a recollection of "scenes and associations which formed by far the most eventful period of my life." Brown's intentions for this Civil War memoir were humble. He was writing only a personal history, as he makes clear on the first page:

It needs not that I speak of the occasion of my taking up arms in defense of the flag. Every child of to-day knows it. To be brief my resolution was formed on Oct. 1st 1861 in view of the Country's danger to enlist as a volunteer. The place of enlistment was Newark, N.J. I enlisted as a private in the 2nd Regt N.J. Vols—I was not alone. There was with me in this enlistment Edwin N. Brown, my cousin. I mention him now as we were together during much of our service.

*Brown never mentions his days at Rutgers. But in his description of his first encampment, outside of Washington, D.C., we can see his past experience as a kind of photo negative—an opposite of this new life.*

The regiment was arranged in Company streets—ten companies to a regiment of course....Acquaintances both pleasant and unpleasant were formed here. The soldier could not always choose his companions. And so the Army life became a severe ordeal for those who went out animated by right principles. Many a youth went out from the home of Christian parents to return, if permitted to return, with character blackened by the sins and vices of

camp life. The reigning vices of camp life I consider to have been, profanity and intemperance. To these may be added as perhaps not less frequent in its prevalence licentiousness. As a prime cause of the increased prevalence of these vices during the war I am of the opinion that the absence of woman may be mentioned. There was wanting that restraint upon the baser nature which comes from the wife, the mother and the home....But it was not all to be camp life. And we were not sorry. The majority though not spoiling for a fight, recognizing the high duty for which they had come, deprecated any unnecessary delay, and were anxious for action.

*Brown wrote most vividly of the Battle of Cold Harbor in June 1864, which was fought over the same ground as the Battle of Gaines's Mill in 1862, across piney flatlands still holding human remains. Cold Harbor was nowhere near the coast. It was a crossroads just ten miles from the prize city of Richmond, which would not be taken for another year. After a Confederate repulse, General Ulysses S. Grant launched an uncoordinated frontal assault, hoping to overwhelm opponent Robert E. Lee by the sheer force of two-to-one numbers. Lee, however, had the advantage of a firm entrenchment and ingeniously arranged guns. The two sides settled into lines seven miles long for fighting that foreshadowed the trench warfare of World War I. Between the lines, wounded men screamed for help and the dead lay unburied or shallowly buried. Grant and Lee sent notes back and forth in negotiations for a ceasefire to remove the wounded and the rotting corpses. By the time negotiations were completed, just three of the stranded wounded were still alive.*



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REMOVAL OF THE DEAD FROM COLD HARBOR,  
ONE YEAR AFTER THE BATTLE

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*In his account, Brown speaks only of his section of the line.*

It was a circumstance which I noticed frequently during the war that we were brought so suddenly into an engagement that very little time was allowed for reflection. Perhaps there was something providential in this considering the natural shrinking even the bravest must feel in the presence of danger and death. So here—We advanced in line of battle. Our course lay across an open field—a few rods ahead was a rise. As soon as we came in range the enemy opened upon us with his guns. We continued until we reached a knoll where we lay flat for protection and that night we commenced throwing up breastworks. The darkness of course favored this. The rebels did not often make an attack in the night. Here for three days at least we were engaged in throwing up the most extensive earthworks that our army ever constructed. There were several distinct lines of works. One regiment would hold the front line for say 24 hours and would then go to the 2nd line and be relieved by some other regiment. The duty was exhausting indeed, and not without danger. Our outer lines were I think but 100 yards from those of the enemy. Sharpshooters were continually at work and if a Yankee or rebel head showed itself above the works it was almost sure to attract a bullet from the other side. It was here that my cousin Edwin lost his life. He was passing over the works at a point where he was exposed to the enemy's view. I saw him

fall. The ball entered his brain, forcing a part of the same out of the wound. He never spoke again, and was soon gone. At nightfall a few of us took his body to the rear and gave him as decent a burial as we could, marking his grave with a slab. I recall incidents connected with this battle—the lines as I have said were quite near together. At night it was the custom to place videttes [sentinels] out at a certain distance from the first line of works. This was in the night and was to guard against sudden attack which was sometimes attempted. These videttes were regularly relieved. I was on this duty and have a very distinct remembrance of being posted at what I supposed was but a little hillock of earth and the shudder I experienced as my hand touched the clammy hand that protruded from the grave of some friend or foe. I shall never forget the sensation experienced at that time. Another scene of a different kind I will mention. It was the only one of which I was a witness during the whole of my service of nearly four years. During one of those days which this battle covered a flag of truce was declared. The object of it I am sure I cannot tell. It was I think about midday—am not certain as to its duration but I think it was one hour. There was a complete cessation of hostilities. Officers and men from the two sides mingled freely and conversed together. Newspapers were exchanged. It seemed strange enough. At the expiration of the hour, men fell back into their positions again and the brief season of calm was succeeded by the sights and sounds of war.★



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JOSIAH J. BROWN AT A RUTGERS ALUMNI EVENT IN 1925

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