

“Rise Superior to the A Civil War Broadside

Melinda Marsden

On July 14, 1863, a little over a week after the Battle of Gettysburg, a broadside appeared on the streets of Hagerstown, Maryland, asking the residents of the city to “obey the laws” and to be kind to each other, “even those who may have wronged you or your country.” The authors of the broadside were the most prominent ministers in the area, including the rector of nearby St. James School. One of the original broadsides is stored in the archives of the Washington County Historical Society in Hagerstown, and a copy is on display in the Civil War Room of the Society’s Miller House Museum. Why was this broadside written?

The Civil War was a divisive event for not only the country but also for families and communities. Washington County was no exception. The presidential election of 1860 revealed the divisions in the county, as moderate Constitutional Unionist candidate John Bell and pro-Southern Democrat John C. Breckinridge split the vote almost evenly, with Democrat Stephen A. Douglas and Republican Abraham Lincoln picking up only a handful of votes.¹ These results mirrored those for the state of Maryland as a whole.² Based on resolutions passed by a meeting of citizens at the county’s court house on January 15, 1861, the overwhelming sentiment seemed to be a feeling that the South had grievances that needed to be redressed but that this should occur within the Union.³

As events progressed to armed conflict, positions hardened and by 1862 the majority of Washington County enlistees were joining the Union side by a margin of ten to one.⁴ In general, Confederate sympathizers had a hard time in Washington County. Dr. Charles MacGill, for example, a prominent Hagerstown physician and outspoken Southern sympathizer, was imprisoned

TO THE LOYAL CITIZENS OF HAGERSTOWN!

The undersigned have always avowed themselves as hearty and thorough Unionists; as men who from duty to their country and to themselves, could allow no mistake on this point among their fellow citizens. As such they desire now, earnestly and respectfully to appeal to those with whom they may have any influence. The appeal is made to the hearts and consciences of christian men in this community, who are thoroughly loyal to the United States.

If you would win from God the triumph of law, the real and permanent restoration of order which we now anticipate,—*obey the laws*, rise superior to the passions of the hour, be kind and forbearing to those who differ from you, even to those who may have wronged you and your country. The open condemnation of rebellion as a sin, as well as a great folly; the heartiest reprobation of real though unconfessed disaffection in any to their country’s cause in this crisis, are consistent with words and deeds of kindness, forbearance and protection to individuals.

Those in Military and Civil Authority have the duty and right to prevent or punish the wrongs done to the country, to society or to individuals. But no unauthorized acts of violence, nor any angry threats can be either right, wise, or loyal. The Charity which Religion enjoins, the cause of the Union is strong enough to afford. As the Teachers among you of Religion, as loyal fellow-citizens, we humbly, earnestly adjure you,—*obey the laws and maintain the charity which others seem to you to reverence too little.*

JOHN B. KERFOOT,
Rector, &c., College of St. James.

HENRY EDWARDS,
Rector of St. John’s Parish.

J. EVANS,
Pastor of Lutheran Church.

J. H. WAGNER,
Pastor of 1st Ger. Ref. Church.

MALACHY MORAN, R. C. P.
W. C. STITT,

Pastor of Presbyterian Church.
GEO. SEIBERT, Pastor 2d Ger. Ref. Church.

H. B. WINTON, Pastor U. B. Church.
GEO. W. HEYDE, M. E. Church.

July 14, 1863.

in Fort Warren in Boston for refusing to swear allegiance to the Union. MacGill’s determined stand created tension within his own family. In July 1862, his wife wrote to him, “If you were only here, where all your friends think you ought to be, I do not think any man ought to

let his family suffer if he can prevent it.” In a later letter she wrote, “You are right in your views, but they are useless when we are in bondage, perfectly so in our cases, but I will not say any more, you think one way, I another....”⁵ Dr. MacGill was permitted to return to his

Passions of the Hour”

family in November 1862 without signing the oath. Other Confederate sympathizers were not so lucky. There were instances of barn burnings; a tavern was smashed; and the office of one of the local newspapers, the *Hagerstown Mail*, was pillaged due to its pro-Confederate editorials.⁶

The incursion of the Confederate army into Maryland in 1862, culminating in the Battle of Antietam, further exacerbated tensions in the region. Hagerstown, unlike neighboring Frederick and other local communities, was home to a vocal contingent of Southern sympathizers. “There is secession here,” wrote one Confederate soldier. “I was not a little surprised at the enthusiasm shown by many of the citizens...” General Robert E. Lee informed Jefferson Davis, “The army has been received in this region with sympathy and kindness.” Union supporters were of a different mind, however. “Soldiers were encamped all around us,” recalled Angela Davis of nearby Funkstown, “and we were completely hemmed in and cut off from the rest of the world. You can have no idea what a terrible feeling this is.” A South Carolina soldier recalled one young lady in town boldly waving the Union flag at the passing Confederates.⁷ As occupation of the region passed from one army to the other, loyalists of both sides took opportunities to express their views, often antagonizing neighbors of the opposite persuasion.

New signs of trouble appeared in the early summer of 1863, when Confederate troops again entered Hagerstown, this time on their way into Pennsylvania. The Southern army occupied Hagerstown in June and again in early July, as it retreated after the Battle of Gettysburg. A skirmish ensued on July 6 between the occupying Confederates and Union cavalry. Fighting spilled into side streets and alleyways, with hand to hand combat in the town square. Hager-

stown resident Mary Elizabeth French later wrote in a letter to her aunt, “they had a schumage here for three hours from two oclock to five oclock the balls was wisling pirty rapid the shells went wus past the house.” In her postscript she added, “we had to go to the cellar for shelter.”⁸

Claggett D. Spangler, fourteen years old, kept a small diary during this period. On July 7th he wrote, “Gen Lee’s army have been passing throug last nite and nearly all day to day marchin south. The camp fires which are now burning to the south of the town is one of the moste magnificent sight I ever saw.” He was quite taken with the soldiers and wrote on July 9th, “Lee’s army still encamped around the town; I was one camps this evening and eate super with some of them they are very clever and gentelmenly indeed.” Federal troops reentered Hagerstown on July 12. Spangler noted in his diary the next day, “Federal forces entered this town yesterday and serched our house. Confederate line of Battle weste of town skirmishing yesterday and today, alone the western end of the town. Some cannon a firing this eavening.”⁹

During the Confederate occupation of the region, particularly during the army’s retreat, the troops foraged among the farms and stores of Washington County. Mary Elizabeth French noted that “we got our cows and hogs and some of our chickens yet they robbed a great many people of their horses at some places got in the houses stole peoples meat eatings of all king that they got their hands on took all bed clothes the rebels broke in our garden and stole some of our onions after night one rebel came here and made us give him a chicken.”¹⁰

Union supporters in the region were particularly upset that their Confederate-leaning neighbors had not done more to help protect them from the depredations of the Southern troops during the occupation. After two years of war, two

major military campaigns through the region, and civic nerves frayed by competing loyalties, there was intense concern among many in Hagerstown that violence would erupt over the recent troubles. In an effort to prevent retaliation by Union supporters, several ministers in Hagerstown issued a broadside on July 14 urging peace and moderation among the citizens of the town.¹¹ “If you would win from God the triumph of law, the real and permanent restoration of order which we now anticipate,” the ministers counseled, “*obey the laws*, rise superior to the passions of the hour, be kind and forbearing to those who differ from you, even to those who may have wronged you and your country.” Violence was avoided, in this instance, but Hagerstown and the region continued to experience the divisive effects of a civil war for two more long years, and even beyond.

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- 1 Thomas J. C. Williams, *A History of Washington County, Maryland* (Baltimore, MD: Regional Publishing Company, 1968 [Reprint of 1906 original]), 304.
- 2 Website, “History Central, Presidential Elections, 1860,” (<http://www.multied.com/elections/1860.html>).
- 3 Williams, *A History of Washington County*, 305.
- 4 S. Roger Keller, *Events of the Civil War in Washington County, Maryland* (Shippensburg, PA: Burd Street Press, 1995), p. A-7.
- 5 Letter, Mollie MacGill to Dr. Charles MacGill, July (n.d.), 1862, and August (n.d.), 1862. Originals are in the Charles MacGill Papers, Duke University.
- 6 Dennis E. Frye, “Introduction,” in Keller, *Events of the Civil War*, p. A-5.
- 7 Kathleen A. Ernst, *Too Afraid to Cry – Maryland Civilians in the Antietam Campaign* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1999), 79-84.
- 8 Letter, Mary Elizabeth French to Mrs. Harriet Stephey, July 26, 1863, Washington County Historical Society.
- 9 Claggett D. Spangler Diary, Washington County Historical Society.
- 10 Letter, Mary Elizabeth French to Mrs. Harriet Stephey.
- 11 Williams, *A History of Washington County*, 353.