The front cover contains a picture of the Bennett Building, home of the Upsilon-Upsilon Chapter of Phi Alpha Theta and the History and Political Science Department of the University of the Cumberlands. Built in 1906 as part of Highland College, the University of the Cumberlands assumed ownership in 1907. The building underwent extensive renovation in 1986-1987.
Journal of the Upsilon-Upsilon Chapter
of Phi Alpha Theta

THE UPSILONIAN

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As another year passes for the Upsilon-Upsilon Chapter of Phi Alpha Theta, we have accumulated many great experiences. We have met goals and made ourselves more successful students. I have enjoyed my time with the Upsilon-Upsilon chapter and tradition this year. Our winning tradition continues through the perseverance of the students and the support of the History and Political Science Departments’ professors. I hope to pass on the tradition to the next editor and next group of students that will continue this tradition of excellence.

Our students search and yearn for knowledge and will stop at nothing to present the truth. The papers that were presented to The Upsilonian were excellent pieces that were diverse in topics. From the evolution of guns to the Great Northern War, the material enclosed is interesting and above all, of the highest standard of research. Although these three papers were not the only ones submitted, the other papers were no less in quality.

I have had tremendous involvement with the History and Political Science Departments and am aware of the extensive support and expertise of these professors. If I may extend a personal thanks to Dr. Eric Wake, a mentor of mine in my own endeavor to write research papers, for his commitment to Phi Alpha Theta and his demand for excellence from both himself and every member of the organization.

I would also like to extend a thank you to Mrs. Fay Partin, who in my experience is the reason that the Departments run as smoothly as they do. I would like to extend a personal thanks to her for everything that she has done for the organization, the department and for me personally.

With everything that has gone into this publication of The Upsilonian, I hope that you will enjoy the research and the information contained within these pages.

Gregory Olsen
Student Editor, Upsilon-Upsilon
2013-2014
Nestled here in our nook of the Appalachian Mountains, we often forget our chapter’s place in the significance of the national organization of Phi Alpha Theta, but it is immediately apparent when we join our fellow chapters at national meetings. The remarks of importance and praise towards our chapter for its prestige in winning awards, its contribution towards the understanding of history, and the outstanding career and dedication of our advisor, Dr. Eric L. Wake, is something that is truly remarkable. It makes me and the other members of the Upsilon-Upsilon chapter here at University of the Cumberlands truly grateful and proud of our place in the organization. It also makes me proud as president over such an organization to see the impact our members make, not only in our department, but across campus.

The 2013-2014 academic year was definitely a busy one for our chapter. Thanks to the help of Elizabeth Davis, my predecessor as president of Phi Alpha Theta, we have also been growing as an organization. We were able to induct several new members at the end of the fall semester and two at the end of the spring semester. Our main goal this year was fundraising money to attend the biennial Phi Alpha Theta convention in January 2014. As part of our fundraising, we held our always successful book and bake sale in both the fall and spring semesters along with a barbecue held in the fall. The goal was met and we were able to go and represent our chapter of the organization in Albuquerque, New Mexico. We were able to send four students along with Dr. M. C. Smith. Dr. Smith was our faculty attendant this year as Dr. Wake was unable to make the journey with us and was greatly missed by the members of the national organization. We sat through many committees and I presented one of my papers which is also present here in this copy of The Upsilonian. Later on in the school year, we were also able to send three students along with Dr. Wake and Dr. Nathan Coleman to the regional convention in Richmond, Kentucky. I want to thank all of our members for their time and hard work as part of the Upsilon-Upsilon chapter, especially those members who are graduating. In addition, I want to thank all of those that contributed in the making of this edition of The Upsilonian, including our readers and editor. A very special thank you goes out to Dr. Wake, whose time, patience, and guidance have molded this organization into the greatness it is today.

The articles presented here are just a small amount of the success that has been accomplished by our organization and I hope that they are testament for future success.

Matthew E. Kelley, President
Upsilon-Upsilon, 2013-2014
I can finally say that our chapter, Upsilon-Upsilon, has grown this year. We inducted five in our two initiations and only lost two members through graduation. Next year we hope to add even more initiates.

Our lecture series have had huge attendance this year. One reason was due to the University changing its system of Convocation, so we had to change our lecture locations from the Bennett Building Auditorium to the Gatliff Chapel which seats about five hundred people and our four lectures ranged in attendance from 200 to 500. This is a good break for the Chapter because it allowed more people to hear our lectures. Our lectures were also streamed live across campus and can be seen on demand. These lectures will also be shown on University of the Cumberlands television station.

Our chapter also sent four students and a faculty member to the national conference where one student presented a paper and the faculty member moderated a paper session. We also sent three students, two presented papers, to the regional conference in Kentucky. One faculty member and I also accompanied this group and I moderated a paper session.

So the chapter has had a busy year. And the end of the year is always bittersweet as we lose some of our members. We know that they will be successful, and they will remember that they are always a part of the Upsilon-Upsilon tradition. Those of us who remain will carry on the tradition as we know that our alumni expect it.

Eric L. Wake, Ph.D
Advisor, Upsilon-Upsilon Chapter
2013-2014
AUTHORS

**Elizabeth Davis** will graduate from University of the Cumberlands in December 2014 with an area in social studies and Special Education. The original draft of her paper was written for the Issues in History course.

**Matthew Kelley** will graduate from University of the Cumberlands in May 2015 with majors in history and political science. The original draft of his paper was written for the Russia course.

**Cameron Miller** will graduate from University of the Cumberlands in May 2015 with an area in Social Studies. The original draft of his paper was written for the Historical Methods course.
Stick to Your Guns: The Influence of the Romanticized American Past on Gun Perceptions
By Elizabeth Davis

Throughout recorded history, men have been searching for ways to kill from a distance. Whether this was for hunting game or protecting land from enemies, long distance weapons were seen as a necessity for an abundant life. As armaments developed over the course of history, and the use of gunpowder came about in the early first century,¹ the gun became an inevitable creation. Great Britain is known to have had fire powder as early as the fourteenth century,² and as it expanded its empire into the new world, the explorers brought their weaponry with them. Early American men were eventually required by British Colonial law and common sense to possess guns in order to combat attacks from Native Americans. The need for guns was so essential to early American colonization that the British government would provide such weapons if the men could not afford to buy a gun outright.³ As the expansion across the Appalachian Mountains continued and America’s growing discord with Britain worsened, America declared independence; the idea of free, white males owning rifles and other guns was already an integral part of American culture and identity. This idea was so embedded that the first Congress passed the Bill of Rights with protection of gun rights, whether in a militia or individually, as the Second Amendment to the Constitution. As expansion across the continent to the West grew throughout the nineteenth century, the idea of gun rights remained on the forefront of American conscience, ever maturing and adapting with the times. The present day use and view on guns in America is a long standing tradition brought from the founding of the nation, the movement for Manifest Destiny, and the country’s ever present desire for self-preservation and self-fulfillment.

War in Europe was used to extend one’s reign over specific land areas rather than to have an all-out brawl on the battlefield in order to vanquish enemies.⁴ Over the centuries, as man developed and became more and more “civilized,” war matured into a gentleman’s game. At least, this was the idea of those in Europe as they spread throughout the continent and rulers sought to gain conquest over one another.

Upon arriving to the new continent, settlers found themselves in a world most strange from their home lands. Everything was large in America. New animals, such as the bear, deer, elk, and coyote, presented a need for new hunting techniques. The hills and mountains toward the west were difficult to traverse. Storms were more ferocious and consisted of larger
snows and terrors such as tornadoes. Not only was nature more intense, the natives had a different skin color and lived not in houses, but in tent-like homes or ones made from mud and stick. They wore the skins of deer or other animals for clothing rather than cloth. And they spoke languages completely unknown to the civilized world. Nevertheless, the newcomers stayed and tried to live among the natives, at the same time trying to help them become civilized. While all of this was functional in the beginning, settlers from Great Britain, Spain, and other colonizing countries continued to travel and plant their homes in America. Eventually, the Native Americans felt invaded and decided it was time to fight back.

Native Americans were not accustomed to fighting a “gentleman’s war;” however, for they had never seen or heard of Grotius’ *De Jure Belli ac Pacis* and the laws and rules concerning war and other engagements. The tactics the natives employed were developed with the intent of function over form. Often times, this meant striking without warning and at night, when the newcomers were most vulnerable. Under the cover of darkness, Native Americans could move stealthily in areas they knew whereas the colonists were still learning the environment and how to protect themselves. Joseph Doddridge who observed attacks from the Indians stated:

> The Indian kills indiscriminatingly. His object is the total extermination of his enemies. Children are victims of his vengeance, because, if males, they may hereafter become warriors, or if females, they may become mothers. Even the fetal state is criminal in his view. It is not enough that the fetus should perish with the murdered mother, it is torn from her pregnant womb, and elevated on a stick or pole, as a trophy of victory and an object of horror to the survivors of the slain. If the Indian takes prisoners, mercy has but little concern in the transaction. He spares the lives of those who fall into his hands, for the purpose of feasting the feelings of ferocious vengeance of himself and his comrades, by the torture of his captive.

According to Cotton Mather, the settlers were “assaulted by an unknown number of devils in flesh on every side.” In order to guard themselves against these attacks, the American settlers picked up their arms to defend themselves. There was no keeping guns locked away in an armory where they could be drawn in a time of need. Those living on the outskirts of settlements especially, needed to be armed and ready for any impending
attack. It was not until 1876, after the last of the Native American tribes were in permanent relocation settings that the threat of attacks dissipated.  

Not only were the Native American attacks an imminent threat to the well-being of the settlers, especially those from Great Britain, but the French, Spanish, and Dutch lurked as well, waiting for a moment of weakness in the colonies that they might forcibly gain control over the Americas. As a result of the constant attacks from either the Europeans or the Native Americans, towns began to develop garrisons. These garrisons became safe houses where women and children could travel and remain protected while the men went to defend the colony. While these safe houses existed, the people still needed to be armed and at the ready in a moment’s notice, for all were to be soldiers; all were living on the battlefield facing attack each and every day.

Guns and weaponry became a part of American daily life throughout the eighteenth century due to the dangers of living in a practically wilderness society. Boys of this time enjoyed the pastime of taking their muskets and rifles to practice shooting small game animals. This gave them experience and practice with shooting, reloading, and aiming the guns correctly. Typically, “at the age of twelve or thirteen years, [young men were] furnished with a small rifle and a shot pouch.” While there were positives to the young men in the society practicing with these weapons, there were also many dangers as well. Some of these boys decided that shooting small animals with pistols and other guns was not quite challenging and thrilling enough. There were often accidents from boys, not yet fully experienced with the weapons, shooting at carriages as they passed by homes on their way in or out of town. Other accidents occurred as well during this time and were fairly common. Gun powder was stored in schoolhouses after the repeal of the Stamp Act. The surplus and excitement of no longer having the high tariffs caused excitement in the towns, and unwittingly, led to the explosion of a school house in Hartford, Massachusetts. Dangers were very common among the colonists, either from nature or from their own mishaps, but nevertheless, firepower was a significant portion of their lives.

The abundant need for guns during the Colonial period led to many innovations in America. Americans sought faster, more accurate guns rather than the traditional muskets that were in use in Europe and England during the time period. The ingenuity of rifling and the concurrent development of the rifle was the most prominent of these innovations. The Pennsylvania/Kentucky long rifles had much better accuracy and a better firing speed than muskets. Rifles, which tended to be lighter, offered more efficient use of gunpowder and lead, while also maintaining consistent
accuracy. Whereas muskets needed to be fired from a still position, American rifles could be fired from a standing or moving position. The musket did have advantages, though, as it was able to be fired more rapidly, about four times per minute, compared to the rifle which had to have both projectile and gunpowder replaced upon each fire.13

Upon the approach of the American Declaration of Independence and the Revolution, the colonists practiced their marksmanship in broad daylight in order to put fear into the British troops already stationed in America. The British Army manual issued to these soldiers had yet to even include the word “aim” when discussing weaponry.14 It was no doubt that when it came time to face the Americans, British troops were fearful of American deadly accuracy, speed, and ballistic range.

American men resorted back to old European ways of war. Their style, instead of marching in lines with dignity until the battle was over like the British troops, was closer to that of the Assize of Arms from 1181, a militia of able-bodied men.15 Militia men did not fight like the standing army. They would find the area around them needing protecting, rise up to complete the task, and as soon as they came together would disappear back to their ordinary lives.16 This was an issue the British found in trying to get the colonists to join the standing army on the continent. Many would serve a small part of their term of service and leave, while others would stay until their term was almost up before leaving. Still others would join, leave for a few months, and then return to continue fighting. The American colonists had a militia mindset from the very beginning. They did not have any desire to be a part of the standing army, nor did they want a permanent army as part of their government system.17

All of the innovations and experiences the American colonists faced upon entering the new lands helped to develop their ideas concerning weaponry and self-protection, especially where as the use of guns was involved; eventually leading to the developments of defined gun rights in the constitutions set by each colony and each state after the Revolution.

To trust arms in the hands of the people at large has, in Europe, been believed…to be an experiment fraught only with danger. Here by a long trial it has been proved to be perfectly harmless…If the government be equitable; if it be reasonable in its exactions; if proper attention be paid to the education of children in knowledge, and religion, few men will be disposed to use arms, unless for their amusement, and for the defence of themselves and their country. The
difficulty, here, has been to persuade the citizens to keep arms; not to prevent them from being employed for violent purpose.\textsuperscript{18}

Violence was not the purpose of owning firearms, but rather self-protection and self-preservation. It proved evident that many of the Founding Fathers saw the need to protect this right in the legislation and constitutions they formed. Eight of the thirteen states, prior to the adoption of the Constitution, developed their own versions of a Bill of Rights. Virginia, Delaware, Maryland, and New Hampshire protected the militia, in that time meaning any able-bodied man within a proper age range who could fire a gun and use a weapon. Pennsylvania, North Carolina, Vermont, and Massachusetts gave the right to bear arms directly to the people for both the defense of the nation and the defense of themselves.\textsuperscript{19} In addition the listings in each state’s Bill of Rights, at least eight of the thirteen ratification conventions held discussions over the concerns of being disarmed by a strong government. New Hampshire stated, “Congress shall never disarm any citizen, unless such as are or have been in actual rebellion.”\textsuperscript{20} The fear of losing the right to bear arms, something so engrained in the newly formed country’s heritage, was a contending point to the ratification of the American Constitution in 1789. While not every citizen exercised his right to own a gun, the importance of self-protection from a tyrannical government and impending natural dangers was seen by all. Thomas Jefferson summarized the view of guns in America the best saying,

A strong body makes a strong mind. As to the species of exercises, I advise the gun. While this gives moderate exercise to the body, it gives boldness, enterprise and independence to the mind. Games played with the ball and others of the nature are too violent for the body and stamp no character on the mind. Let your gun therefore be the constant companion of your walks.\textsuperscript{21}

After the ratification of the Constitution and the foundation of the United States of America was complete, men began to look at the expansion of the nation. Jefferson’s purchase of the Louisiana Territory and the acquisition of the area around the Mississippi helped grow the nation. Men began moving into these areas, some legally and others “squatting.”\textsuperscript{22} As more moved, the desire for the country to stretch across the continent from the Atlantic to the Pacific grew, and in 1845, John O’Sullivan developed the term “Manifest Destiny” to verbalize the ideology of the time period.\textsuperscript{23} The
idea of a Western culture composed of rugged individuals set on conquering nature was formed, and Americans were thrown into a frenzy looking for their way to grab a piece of the excitement.

American men expanded into what today is considered the West with the expedition of Meriwether Lewis and William Clark in early 1803. Shortly after the exploration, Americans entered the fur trade that had developed among the Indians, British and French in the eighteenth century. From the men involved in the fur trading business came a select breed: The Mountain Men. These men, bearing long rifles, traps, and other weaponry, sought to earn money by trading furs, specifically beaver, and other goods along the Mississippi River and throughout the West. Manuel Lisa was one of the main organizers of these men. His men, in particular, were raised to use the “Kentucky” rifle. The “Kentucky” was eventually innovated by Jacob Hawken to kill bigger game, such as buffalo and contained a flint-lock mechanism. This changed guns throughout the country as the design persisted, even though the size and caliber of the gun were reduced. The Mountain Men, the first American settlers in the West, were known for the firearms they carried, which were as vast as the men themselves. Rifles, muskets, and handguns all had different styles and structures from the individualization sought after by these men. Epitomizing the ideas of the country at the time, the Mountain Men were strong, toughly built, rugged individuals who found peace, solitude, and fortune in the beaver-occupied areas.

Not only were the guns of the time needed for occupations; they were also used for protection, as they had been in the Colonial Period. New tribes of Native Americans were found in the Louisiana Purchase area, as were those who had originally been pushed out of the East upon arrival of the “White Man.” The Native Americans, as well as the Mexicans in the southern sections of the land, did not welcome the new pioneers. “Without their guns the Mountain Men, guides, emigrants and soldiers would have been powerless – their weapons were inseparable companions.”

No matter the price, Americans still believed it was their right, granted by God, to control all of the land between the two oceans. However, the journeys made were not for the light of heart. Those who were weak usually did not make the trip across the Appalachian Mountains and the Great Plains, and did not survive in the Rocky Mountains. If some did make it to their destination, there was a large variety of dangers waiting for them. The larger conquests at stake, the greater the risk of death. Grizzly bears were a main predator to the early settlers. When antagonized, they became
ravenous in nature and unless he was accompanied by a small band of merry men, the offender was in the face of near certain death. With the use of a rifle or other firearm, though, the Grizzly found itself defeated and no longer the top of the food chain. Black bears presented a similar problem. Eventually, with fear over these typically peaceful animals rising and a bounty on their heads, the bear population was decimated. Western pioneers also faced large threats from the grey wolf and foxes. The cattle farms and herds tended to be easy prey for the wolf and coyote populations. In order to protect the livestock, men on the Western frontier kept their rifles close by.

It is no doubt that the theory of Darwin’s “Survival of the Fittest” came into play in the West. While the strong fought for their lives every day against overwhelming odds, the weak stayed at home in the East. However, “by the end of the century, expansionists were employing quasi-Darwinist reasoning to argue that because its 'Anglo-Saxon heritage' made America supremely fit, it had become the nation's 'manifest destiny'...” to expand to the Pacific coast. Part of the “survival of the fittest” attitude came from the innovations and uses of guns on the frontier. Native Americans were placed on reservations to prevent wars and attacks on white Americans. A war with Mexico under President James Polk solidified the American border in the West. Polk sent troops under John Slidell to buy California and New Mexico. When the Mexican government would not sell the land, Polk had the troops invade. America won the war, again proving their idea for Manifest Destiny and conquest of the West, and bought the land for $10 million. With tensions between the Americans and the Mexicans still a factor, those living in the West saw a need to bring their guns. Land in California and New Mexico was certainly not easy; however, the work on railroads and in the gold and silver mines rarely needed such instruments as the rifle. The weapons the Americans used to spread across the continent had a lasting effect. Cowboys and ranchers would come soon after the expansion to the coast, and prospects followed in the California Gold Rush of 1849.

Men and women on the frontier had their work cut out for them. Frontier women spent time caring for the family, but many times they had to shed the “Victorian” lifestyle of the Eastern life in order to survive. This allowed them to become interdependent with the men, further solidifying the idea of rugged individualism to the nation as a whole, not just the men. Frontier women were at home with horses, guns, and violence. No longer was it just the man’s job to protect the home, but the woman’s as well, for the men were often gone on cattle runs or taking care of business somewhere other than on the homestead. While the Eastern way of life had seemed to
be lost, those who were in the West had still established an aristocracy for themselves. However, there was camaraderie between men and stability in the relationships one had. In order to help survive, there was a small connection between those on the frontier that almost turned into a family unit. Still, life was tough and those living there faced new challenges every day. 

The idea of the American cowboy as a hard, robust, and resilient human being is one to which nearly every young boy can attest. Culture in America, in the early days and the present, has continued to be a fight to see who can be the manliest. The lyrics to popular songs, such as “I’m a lover, I’m a fighter and a wild bull rider,” commercials displaying rugged individualism and “unadorned masculinity,” and heroism in fiction and film help to show just how deep-seated the strife for manliness is. The children play Cowboys and Indians, sporting toy guns or simple pistols made from a thumb and fore-finger. Nearly every picture of the American cowboy or of pioneers in the West features a gun. Sometimes these are revolvers, sometimes they are rifles, but nevertheless, they are guns. American culture revolves around fire power. It is in the movies, the literature, and everyday life.

While one may never have seen a gun in person, Westerns novels and movies, along with action movies and literature, are full of references to them. American idioms also contain a large number of gun allusions: calling “shotgun” to reserve a seat in a car, “stick to your guns,” “lock and load,” and “jump the gun.” It is no doubt that America has a culture infiltrated with guns. But how exactly did this culture come to be? As shown above, the history of guns in the country has been guided by their use and the need for development of faster, better, and quicker fire power. However, the country is now complete, and from this perspective, the need for these weapons should be no more. On the contrary, the leisure activities of the American populous, along with the eminent place of the gun in the country’s foundations, have caused the perception that the need for a gun is enduring.

In 1841, James Fenimore Cooper published the last book in his Leather-Stocking Tale, The Deerslayer. Following the character of Natty Bumpo, this novel shows the want for a frontier lifestyle of rugged, wilderness living. Bumpo sets out to save some of his fellow trappers and some frontier women from the Iroquois Indians. In the following passage from Chapter Three, Cooper highlights the proximity in which the characters kept their guns, allowing the reader to feel the intensity and ever-presence of danger around them:
The motion of the canoe had been attended with little or no noise, the frontiermen habitually getting accustomed to caution in most of their movements, and it now lay on the glassy water appearing to float in air, partaking of the breathing stillness that seemed to pervade the entire scene. At this instant a dry stick was heard cracking on the narrow strip of land that concealed the bay from the open lake. Both the adventurers started, and each extended a hand towards his rifle, the weapon never being out of reach of the arm.38

Cooper was one of the first to create tales of those on the Western frontier, but shortly after he began writing, dime novels exploded into being. These novels featured ostracized individuals who became heroes. The American public was captivated. In each and every story though, the hero had his gun at his side. While these stories have become romanticized over time, both in writing and in the early cinema depictions, they do still hold some truth to what the cowboy faced.39 Regardless of the truth of these stories, though, the impact they had on the American culture holds the most significance. Dime novels and Wild West shows proved to allow all Americans to relate with the frontier and become heroes and heroines. This was well evident even into the 1920s.40 After the dime novels seemed to dissipate, the idea of the West and the need for guns in order to protect oneself against evil continued. The presidents in the 1970s and 1980s brought the mid-western culture back to the forefront.41 It is problematic to state that the Western culture is no longer an integral part of American society, especially with the remake of True Grit and other western films.

The romanticizing of the West, the cowboy, and rugged individualism in American literature and film has helped to set the American ideology of guns in place of prominence.42 From the very roots of the country, Americans have relied heavily on their firepower in order to protect themselves. Sometimes their enemies have been other human beings seeking control, such as the British; sometimes they were Indians looking to reclaim their land; other times the enemies took the shapes of wild animals seeking to destroy livestock as an easy meal.

Weapons such as the Kentucky long-rifle outdid the British in the American Revolution. The development of the flint-lock rifle allowed for better protection in the West as Manifest Destiny was realized. And nearly all weapons used in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were recorded and romanticized in novels like Cooper’s Leather-Stocking Tales. All the same, Americans are raised knowing and recognizing guns, handguns, shotguns,
and rifles, because of the history which has been poured onto the land. Today, hand guns tend to be the most common form used. These are still, most often, considered as a source of protection with many people obtaining concealed-carry permits. Talks of the original intent of the Founding Fathers in the writing of the Second Amendment occur regularly, and the Supreme Court has issued definite stances on the rights of gun owners.

While many want to regulate and reduce the number of guns in the country, it is pertinent to realize that not only have guns been romanticized within America, but they have also become an entrenched institution. Those who founded the country, without realizing the lasting effects their actions would have, established a standard for the use of guns and a desire for all men to be rugged individuals. At the time, they may have seen the significance of their actions, but in no way would they have been able to envision the development of a deep-seated Western frontier culture. The founding of the nation by the British, the winning of the American Revolution by the colonists, the development and desire for the expansion across the continent and Manifest Destiny, and the ideals of rugged individualism and self-preservation have engrained the desire for gun ownership and gun usage in the minds and hearts of the people in the United States of America.

ENDNOTES


2 Ibid.


5 Ibid., 348.

6 Ibid.
Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid., 348-350.

Ibid., 350.


Ibid.

Ibid., 363-370.

Ibid.

Ibid., 352-253.


Ibid., 93-95.

Ibid., 97.


29 Ibid, 458-463.


34 Ibid.


42 Ray A. Billington, *America’s Frontier Culture* (College Station, Texas: Texas A&M University Press, 1977), 78.
The Battle of Narva: The Victory of Young Charles XII Over Peter the Great
By Matthew Kelley

History defines its leaders by their accomplishments, the victories they achieve, and the influence their marks leave. Nevertheless, they are also defined by their defeats. Peter I of Russia has been defined in history as one of Russia’s significant and successful leaders. He was able to achieve great victories for Russia, but was also faced with defeat. One of these defeats happened at the city of Narva during the Great Northern War. Peter’s defeat at the Battle of Narva by Charles XII of Sweden was one of the greatest military defeats in Russian history against an opponent that many, including Peter, had vastly under estimated. Defeat by Charles XII inflicted a wound on Peter in a way that affected his character while also showing Charles’s own skill in warfare.

Charles XII was born in 1682 and, at the time of his father’s death in 1697, was only 15 years old.1 He had no formal military training or studies, but his personality had marks of an incredible leader. Strong-willed and fierce, Charles XII showed that he was no ordinary youth and was soon displayed towards his enemies who had underestimated him. In late January 1700, Charles was out hunting, like he often did in his free time, when messengers from Stockholm arrived with news that Poland and Denmark had declared war and invaded Swedish lands.2 Augustus II of Poland had moved troops towards the Swedish held city of Riga and Denmark’s King Frederick had moved against King Frederick of Holstein, an ally of Charles.3 The Great Northern War had started and Charles, only seventeen years old, set off against kings of Europe that were twice his age and countries that were much larger and more populous than his.4 He stated to the French ambassador, Comte de Guiscard, before setting off to oversee mobilization that he “would soon make [them] go back the way [they] came.”5

Peter was able to declare war on Charles XII of Sweden almost a year later in August after the other countries had done so.6 However, he was startled to find out that Charles XII had knocked Denmark out of the war the same day he had declared war. Charles had personally led an invasion on July 22nd from the Swedish port of Malmö by sailing across the Sound.7 He landed in Zealand with a Swedish army numbering 12,000 men without having hardly any casualties while routing the Danish. Most of King Frederick’s army had been sent to Holstein and were not expecting Charles XII cross what they thought were impassable waters. Charles’ troops fortified on the coast of Zealand and put pressure on Copenhagen until the Danish King was forced to surrender without a fight.8 Charles forced Denmark to
Peter declared war on August 19th, 1700 and immediately moved towards the Swedish province of Ingria. His purpose of the invasion was to capture the Gulf of Finland to secure a port on the Baltic. Peter had instituted new recruitment policies in Russia and brought with him fresh recruits along with experienced, veteran troops from the recently relieved Turkish front. Immediately, Peter and 40,000 Russian soldiers marched across the Swedish provinces and appeared before the town of Narva. It was located only twenty miles from the Russian border, and held an importantly strategic position with access to both the Baltic Sea and the Narova River. Narva itself sat on the western side of the river in a bend that formed a natural barrier around the city causing it to be only accessible by land from one side. The only practicable way for the Russians to cross the Narova River was at the Kamperholm Bridge just north of the town. The large Russian force stood before Narva and its small garrison, but the garrison was able to hold off the Russians effectively. Peter began fortifying his men in a line that stretched around the side of the town that was not bordering the river. Essentially, Peter made a triangle around the town with his forces making up the one side where it was accessible by land and the river making up the other two. The Russians were at Narva on September 23rd, but the inadequate roads on the Russian side of the river kept supplies from being readily available for the troops. Narva was only twenty miles from Russia, but the nearest Russian city to procure supplies was over 100 miles away. Worse, autumn rains kept the Russians from moving their 140 artillery pieces into position and their troops from fully occupying their fortified positions. Peter was finally able to bombard the town in late October. He shelled the town for two weeks and launched two infantry assaults on the town, but the small Swedish garrison was able to hold. At the end of the two weeks, Peter was forced to send for supplies as he had run low on ammunition. At the same time, he received word that Augustus II’s campaign on the Swedish city of Riga had failed and that Charles and his army had recently landed in Livonia, only 150 miles away from Narva, after resupplying in Sweden. The siege was going poorly for Peter.

After receiving word that Peter had declared war, Charles set sail for the Swedish city of Christianstadt at the southern tip of Sweden for supplies. Charles gathered his 14,000 men and supplies and set sail for Livonia on the Baltic Sea to show his enemies what he was capable of. He landed with his men between the cities of Pernau and Reval. There, he rendezvoused with a few thousand of his troops from Riga under the command of General Otto Vellingk. He built a camp at Wesenburg and began drilling his men who were not enthusiastic about winter campaigning in Russia. Nevertheless, Charles was determined to keep Peter from gaining
a foothold on the Baltic Sea. Charles set out with his men from Wesenburg on November 13th without adequate supplies and in terrible weather. He had little time to waste for more supplies or more favorable conditions. After leaving 5,000 troops to watch the movements of the Saxon army, the Swedes numbered around 10,000. However, the Russian army still outnumbered them 4 to 1, had combat experience fighting the Turks, and was dug in behind fortifications.

The first few days of the march towards Narva had the Swedish troops facing the weather rather than the Russians. They had left with a lack of adequate supplies and the troops were forced to ration their meals to the point they were almost on the verge of starving. The Russians had burned much of the countryside so that the Swedes could not forage supplies from the locals or find any sort of shelter from the elements. The rain and snow had soaked the roads and countryside forcing the Swedes to only bring with them what they could carry so their artillery was few and light. The troops were soaked and had to suffer through nights that reached below freezing with no adequate cover. Fortunately for the Swedes, the Russians did not oppose them on the march towards Narva until half way.

On the third day’s march, the Swedes reached the pass of Pyhajoggi that held a bridge over a stream that the Swedish needed to cross to get to Narva. Peter had sent a detachment of cavalry under Field Marshall Boris Shermetyev consisting of Cossacks and gentry from Novgorod to guard the west from any relief efforts by the Swedish. Shermetyev’s men were positioned at the pass in an effort to force a chokehold on any attempts by Charles of bringing troops to Narva. However, he did not destroy the bridge, which would have greatly delayed the Swedish advance. They were caught off guard by the approaching Swedish forces and did not manage to destroy the bridge. The Swedish advance guard met with the Russian cavalry, but they waited until Charles personally galloped to the front with eight light cannons and dragoons before they engaged. The opening fire of the Swedish guns and the charge of Swedish dragoons startled Shermetyev’s cavalry and forced them into a full rout. They took to such fear that they flew back to the Russian lines at Narva. When they arrived, Shermetyev reported to Peter that the Swedes numbered over 30,000, an exceptionally overestimated number. Nevertheless, Peter believed the number and it added to his growing fear of the Swedish forces.

On the morning of November 19th, the Swedish army first began arriving at Narva after spending six nights “in the open, half-frozen, and short of rations.” To the west of Narva was a high ridge line called Hermannsberg Ridge. Charles immediately began surveying the Russian lines from the high ground of the ridge. The Russians were dug in along a four mile long line that stretched around Narva to each bend of the river. The lines were made up of a six foot deep ditch and a nine foot rampart that the
Russian infantry were fortified behind. The Russians had 140 pieces of artillery with them, a good portion of the entire Russian army’s artillery. Peter’s men numbered around 40,000 troops including two elite guard units and troops that had been brought in from the Turkish front. He had with him some of his most able commanders as well: General Avtomon Golovin commanded the infantry in the center of the Russian lines with General Adam Weyde in charge of the left flank and General Ivan Buturlin on the right. In addition to the Russian commanders, Peter had Charles Eugene, duc du Croy along with him. Du Croy was a commander from the imperial Netherlands that had fought against the Turks with the army of the Holy Roman Empire. He had been fighting for Augustus, but was sent to try and get Peter to assist Augustus with his attack at Riga. Peter had every advantage against the Swedish forces, but Peter’s character put the Russians at a disadvantage.

Charles noticed the impressive defenses of the Russians and the great numbers of the Russian army, but noticed also how thinly spread out they were. The Russians would be less able to concentrate their forces and Charles would take advantage of that situation. Charles also had an impressive array of generals with him. Charles greatly relied on the skill of his most trusted general, General Carl Rehnskjold in the assault. Charles also had General Vellingk from Riga, General Magnus Stenbock, and General Arvid Horn. He had artillery with him, but it was a small amount as it was all that they could get through the harsh weather conditions. Charles XII was in a position that most military commanders would have deemed drastic, but he was sure of victory despite being outnumbered and outgunned.

Charles planned to split his infantry into two concentrated divisions split further into two columns that would attack the middle of the Russian lines. One division would attack towards the center-left of the Russian lines and the other on the center-right. Rehnskjold would lead the infantry on attacking on the Russian left and Vellingk would lead the infantry on the Russian right. Charles planned to keep the Swedish cavalry on the flanks to tie up any attempt the Russians might have to flank the engaging infantry. Charles, Horn, and Stenbock would lead a small force to the north to attack. Charles chose to do this for his reconnaissance led him to believe Peter’s headquarters were there and Charles hoped to personally fight Peter during the battle.

Before the Swedish army arrived, Peter’s fear got the better of him. Peter met with du Croy and asked him to take command. One of du Croy’s officers reported that Peter was “confused and half-mad, wailing and draining glass after glass of brandy.” Peter made several excuses for leaving command, but all of them were excuses to get away from the approaching king of Sweden. He claimed that he was leaving to get reinforcements from Novgorod in one report, then claimed that he was
leaving for Moscow to meet with Turkish representatives (who happened to be still in Turkey) and claimed that he was meeting with Augustus, "who was far away in Courland." All of Russia rested on Peter the Great, but his officers saw that his "howling and weeping by turns was shameful to see" of such a tsar. Peter signed off for du Croy to take command of the army with written instructions. Peter was already on his way to Moscow by the time Charles XII reached Narva and command was now in the hands of a man that did not have the ability to speak Russian.

Du Croy awoke on the morning of November 19th to see the Swedish army on the ridge, but believed it to only be the advance guard because of its size. Du Croy considered sending out a detachment to engage them, but his officers refused to leave their lines. He believed that it would take time for the Swedes to bring up all of their forces for the weather was poor and the Swedes would most likely dig into their position. However, Charles did much the opposite of what Du Croy expected. He quickly formed his men into their positions and deployed his artillery. The weather cleared off by around noon, but it was growing colder and a storm was approaching Narva. Charles positioned his artillery and opened bombardment on the center of the Russian lines as his men moved into positions. By two in the afternoon, the Swedes were in position to attack. Du Croy did not realize the Swedes’ intention until he noticed that the Swedes were carrying fascines, bundles or planks of wood, to cross the ditches with. Charles ordered for two signal rockets to launch to signal the Swedish advance. Meanwhile, the weather drastically turned. As the Swedes began their advance, a blizzard hit, but the snow and ice were blowing almost horizontally at the backs of the Swedish and into the face of the Russian lines. Some of the Swedish officers thought that the attack should be postponed, but Charles shouted "Now! The snow is at our backs, but full in the enemy’s faces." The winter weather that would save Russia against her enemies in the future was now against her.

The Russians were completely blinded by the storm and they could not clearly see the approaching forces of the Swedes and either fired too early or not at all. On the other hand, the Swedes marched up close, within thirty paces of the Russian fortifications before firing volleys that devastated the Russian lines. After unleashing their volleys, the two divisions of infantry threw their fascines into the ditches and charged into the Russians. At the front of the Swedish infantry was the Darlecarlian regiment, who cut through the Russian line with swords and newly issued socket bayonets, a devastating invention of eighteenth century warfare. The Russians were able to fight for a quarter of an hour, but soon the Swedish infantry created a breach first with the southern division on the Russian left-center under the command of Vellingk. After breaking through, their columns wheeled and began rolling up the Russian regiments. The Streltsy took flight, but Golovin’s regiments
were able to put up resistance for a short period of time. The Russian cavalry positioned behind Golovin’s line on the Russian left would have been able to help, but at the first sign of engagement they fled. They tried to flee across the Narova River, but the weather caught them in the river and drowned almost a thousand cavalymen.

The Swedish troops on the Russian center-right under the command of Rhenskjold also broke through, but met stiff Russian resistance as they fought from one bastion to the next. Eventually, the Russian officers began to fall and the Russian troops began to cry out in panic and flee. Some Russian soldiers tried to climb out of the ramparts to flee the Swedish infantry only to be driven back by the Swedish cavalry posted on the outside. The Russian soldiers began to rout over the Kamperholm Bridge, their only escape route. On advancement to the bridge, the Swedish infantry was stalled by boggy ground and Peter’s guard regiments. As the rest of the Russian army flew past them, the Preobazhenskii and Semenovskii Guards stood their ground defending the passage to the bridge. Without any organization, the Russian army became a dense mass of soldiers and artillerymen trying to escape the battlefield. The hordes of troops rushing across the bridge eventually caused it to sag and buckle under their weight. The bridge collapsed and plunged hundreds of Russians into the icy river which either drowned or froze them to death.

Charles XII had spent the battle directing the troops outside of the Russian fortifications and pushing their assault on the Russian right. As the battle moved past the earthen fortifications, Charles joined in the direct fighting. He had two horses shot from underneath him forcing him to fight on foot, lost one of his boots, and was hit by a musket ball that had been deflected by his metal cravat. Du Croy realized by late afternoon that the situation was uncontrollable and hurried out of the front lines to surrender to General Stenbock. By that time, most of the Russian officers had surrendered. However, the Guard regiments were still putting up resistance. They gathered around a number of fortified blockhouses to hold out against the Swedes on the right. The fighting continued there throughout the night until Charles brought up artillery to pound the fortifications. At eight o’clock in the morning the remaining Russian officers in the fortification sought to make terms with Charles XII and agreed to a ceasefire.

On the far Russian left remained General Weyde who had participated little throughout the fighting. Alone, his men outnumbered the Swedish army and could have easily beaten Charles XII. By night fall, the Swedish army was disorganized and exhausted, but Weyde’s men still remained to be dealt with. He had stood his ground throughout the battle as he had received no orders to do otherwise. His men had seen little fighting along their lines, but Weyde had been slightly wounded. At dawn, he received word that the rest of the Russian officers had surrendered and that
the Swedish cavalry now had him surrounded. With a force still much larger than the entire Swedish army, he and the remainder of the Russian army surrendered to Charles XII. Charles claimed victory as he stood next to the ruined Kamperholm Bridge and the Russians laid down their regimental colors before him.

The astonishing defeat had cost the Russians 10,000 men with the rest of their numbers in captivity. The prisoners were such great in number that they still outnumbered the Swedish over two to one. The Russian army lost 140 pieces to the Swedes including precious mortars and howitzers. In contrast, Charles only suffered 600 casualties. It was a truly remarkable feat for a small army attacking a larger, fortified opponent. However, Charles realized that the Russian numbers were so great that there would be no way that they could safely transport them to Swedish encampments. Instead, Charles decided to allow the enlisted men to return to Russia after they repaired the bridge and other damages to Narva and only the officers were to be taken as prisoners. In all, ten top ranking generals of the Russian army, ten colonels, and thirty-three senior officers were taken captive.

It was the greatest defeat Peter suffered during his reign. His army was crippled by a great loss in leadership, morale, and equipment. However, the defeat saved Russia from being conquered. Charles’s victory had shocked the coalition against him and made them believe that he was unstoppable with only a handful of men. He believed that the Russian army was devastated and would not be able to come back from the damages he had inflicted on it. Peter’s flight caused Charles to also degrade Peter’s ability as a commander. Instead of marching on with ease, he turned towards Poland and focused his military there for several years because he concluded that the Russian army was worthless. Peter learned from his mistakes and adopted the lessons from the defeat. He rebuilt the Russian military from the ground up. By Charles ignoring him, he was granted a chance to redeem himself nine years after the Battle of Narva. He would meet Charles XII again on the fields of Poltava and show Charles the error he had made in underestimating Russia.

ENDNOTES


7 Godley, *Charles XII of Sweden*, 35.

8 Ibid., 42-43.


13 Godley, *Charles XII of Sweden*, 50.

14 Ibid.


16 Latimer, “Storm of Snow and Steel at Narva,” 60.

17 Ibid.

18 Godley, *Charles XII of Sweden*, 44.
19 Ibid., 51-53.
20 Ibid., 53.
21 Ibid., 47-48.
22 Ibid.
23 Ibid.
24 Ibid.
25 Ibid.
26 Ibid., 53.
28 Bushkovitch, Peter the Great: The Struggle for Power, 225.
29 Ibid.
31 Godley, Charles XII of Sweden, 51.
32 Latimer, “Storm of Snow and Steel at Narva,” 60.
35 Ibid.
36 Godley, Charles XII of Sweden, 54-55.
37 Ibid.
39 Godley, Charles XII of Sweden, 54-55.
40 Ibid., 55-56.
41 Ibid.


43 Godley, *Charles XII of Sweden*, 56.


45 Ibid.


48 Ibid.

49 Ibid., 63.

50 Bengtsson, *The Sword Does Not Jest: The Heroic Life of King Charles XII of Sweden*, 87.

51 Godley, *Charles XII of Sweden*, 57.

52 Ibid.

53 Ibid., 64.

54 Latimer, “Storm of Snow and Steel at Narva,” 64.

55 Bengtsson, *The Sword Does Not Jest: The Heroic Life of King Charles XII of Sweden*, 91.


57 Latimer, “Storm of Snow and Steel at Narva,” 64.


59 Ibid.
“Those who attack great interests, or thwart the ends of great parties, incur immortal hatreds,” proclaimed Cassius Clay of his fight to change Kentucky from a slave agricultural state into an industrialized one. Several statesmen and abolitionists from Kentucky wanted to end the institution of slavery in their state and worked endlessly in order to do so, but Cassius Marcellus Clay of Richmond, Kentucky was one of the most passionate opponents of slavery. Born as the youngest son of Green Clay, a prominent slaveholder, Clay was exposed to slavery from an early age, but later traveled to areas of the country without slavery, and he fought to end it in his home state because he believed slavery to be an obstacle to a better economy for the state. Clay proposed the idea of changing the state’s constitution to emancipate all slaves in Kentucky and replace the institution of slavery with a new industrialized state. Clay, although raised with slavery, believed it to be a horrible institution and fought for the emancipation of slaves using many avenues such as public speaking, his newspaper, and legal means, but was unsuccessful due to his unorthodox and unpopular methods.

Clay, as an emancipationist, tried to end slavery by gradual, legal, and peaceful means. His counterpart, the abolitionist, believed slavery should be ended by any means possible. Clay was a firm believer in doing things the legal and right way. He fought for changes in the Kentucky state constitution that would end the institution of slavery. Even though he truly believed in the non-violent approach to ending slavery, he did not back down from physical aggressions toward himself. During the heated political Wickliffe-Garret Davis debate in 1843 at Russell’s Cave Spring, Clay was shot in the chest by a paid assassin by the name of Samuel M. Brown. Brown openly shouted insults to Clay and struck him with a club. Clay, knowing Brown’s reputation, drew his Bowie knife. Brown drew his Colt revolver and fired a direct shot at Clay’s heart, but at the same time Clay came down with his knife on Brown’s head and opened a 3-inch cut in his skull through to the brain. The mob then attacked Clay but he repelled them with his knife. He was taken to his home where it was discovered that he was not shot at all because the bullet was stopped by a scabbard strapped to his chest. Clay did not like physical fighting such as this incident with Brown. He believed such violence inhibited his ideas against slavery from progressing.

Clay was almost an emancipator from birth. He began as a young child seeing slavery first hand. Cassius Clay was born on October 19, 1810 as the youngest son of Green and Sally Clay at White Hall in Richmond, Kentucky. He was raised as gentry and grew up surrounded by slaves.
Since he believed that slavery was wrong, both as an institution and for the economy of Kentucky, he was not one to ignore his beliefs, but instead had always been taught to speak out against any and all injustices. What brought about these strong beliefs of Clay? He was allowed and encouraged throughout his childhood to form his own judgments and opinions and not be influenced in situations by family, friends, or society.

Because Clay grew up surrounded by slavery, many circumstances affected his beliefs concerning the injustice of it. One such incident involved his young playmate, George. George was a young black boy that was owned as a slave by Green Clay. Cassius Clay and George were playing and got into a heated argument that progressed into a physical fight. George then informed Clay he could not fight with him because, as a slave, he would be punished. George said to Clay, “Mars’ Cash, you would not treat me so if you had not a marster and mistress to back you.” To which Clay replied, “Well, George, I can whip you myself.” Clay convinced him to fight with him and told him it would be just a fight between the two of them as boys, that George being a slave would not affect the outcome of the fight. The fight continued with Clay soundly whipping George, but Clay never disclosed any information concerning the fight to anyone and the two boys continued as friends. Learning that his friend did not see himself as an equal to Clay did not surprise him, but did allow him to look at the institution of slavery somewhat differently. Even though he had grown up with slavery as an accepted practice, this incident caused Clay to begin thinking that slavery was not the good idea that most people he knew proclaimed it to be.

An additional lesson learned by Clay involved Mary, a mulatto and a slave who helped Clay and his sister plant small gardens. She too was more a friend than slave to Clay. The overseer she was assigned to was a cruel man and loved to verbally attack Mary, but she was accustomed to speaking her mind and even slaves would not take such abuse from “poor white trash.” Ultimately, she talked back to him, and he and his family plotted revenge on her. She started carrying a butcher knife with her at all times for protection. This ended with Mary killing the overseer with the knife. She was later found innocent of all charges by a jury of her oppressors, not her peers. Even though she was found not guilty, Green Clay still shipped her off to the Deep South as punishment. Green assigned the task of selling her to Clay’s oldest brother, who was a minister and hated the task; Clay remembered seeing the pain on both faces. He decided then that neither the slave owner nor the slave was happy with the institution of slavery. Clay began thinking about what his world would be like without the institution of slavery. Mary was a person he had known and grown to care about as a friend, but she was treated...
badly, and because she sought to defend herself, she was sold and had to leave her home.\(^8\)

Clay, having been raised with slavery, knew firsthand the slave holder and slaves’ position. Clay once said of his father, “his life was one rather of business than anything else; and here he passed all his contemporaries in the west.”\(^9\) Clay did not just look at his father as a slaveholder, but rather a man interested in becoming one of the richest men in Kentucky.\(^10\) Clay believed that slaveholders and defenders of the institution were misguided. He believed that once the slaveholders were enlightened, they would then believe slavery to be evil and it would end. Clay’s mother, Sally, took on the role of teacher for the formal education of their children. Clay said of his mother, “At all times, the mother, being both parent and teacher, mostly forms the character.”\(^11\) His mother was a Calvinistic Baptist and was deeply religious. She believed and tried to pass on to her son that God’s hand was on every aspect of her life and also his.

In 1831, Clay went to Yale University where he heard the famous abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison speak against the evils of slavery.\(^12\) Being from Kentucky, this was the first time Clay had heard people speak against slavery in a public forum. Even though he had his own ideas about how slavery should end, these abolitionists produced in him a desire to take action against slavery. So with the realization that just thinking slavery was wrong was not enough, Clay decided to actively oppose slavery. He did not do this through abolitionists’ ways, but rather as a legal battle. He felt emancipation was the only way to completely rid the state of Kentucky and the country of slavery.\(^13\)

Also, while in the North attending college, Clay was introduced to a new kind of labor force, free white men working in factories. He became convinced this type of economy could be put in place in Kentucky. Clay believed that if he could convince the people of Kentucky that there was an alternative way of making a living without slavery, they would be willing to allow it to come to an end. He thought the industrialized North was the idea that would change the Kentuckian’s way of thinking about slavery. At this time, he had no way of knowing that the Kentucky farmer would look upon this idea as destroying the farmer’s way of life, not just ending slavery.\(^14\)

After college, Clay returned to Kentucky with a mission, to end slavery. He was elected to the Kentucky legislature in 1835. Since Clay’s belief was to emancipate the slaves, he saw being in the legislature as a means to put his plans into motion. He immediately began his quest to change Kentucky from agricultural to industrial, which was met with great opposition. Most argued that he was attempting to destroy the farmer; he argued back that he was attempting to end slavery, which to the farmer was
changing Kentucky from an agrarian state to an industrialized one. Clay first believed that slavery would gradually end on its own just as it had begun when Kentucky was first settled. He believed that new industry would naturally cause slavery to fade away. He soon came to realize that this would not be the case. He submitted his plan which stated that industrialization was the way America should be heading and Clay wanted Kentucky there also. As a means of implementing his plan, Clay first attempted to convince the farmers to grow crops like food-grains and produce meat instead of relying on slave-produced crops such as tobacco and cotton. He claimed the state would become prosperous like the Northern states if it would become an industrialized society instead of a farming one; these new crops were the first step.

When he failed to convince the slaveholder of his plan, he approached the poor white farmer with his ideas. He told them their wages would never increase because of the competition of free slave labor. Even though Clay could produce evidence that non-slaveholders and white workers were not benefited from the institution of slavery, he failed to convince them to end it partly because he failed to understand the class system of the South. He did not understand the bond between the slaveholder and the non-slaveholder. He did not see that the non-slaveholder dreamed of becoming rich like the slaveholders and could not see any other means but slavery allowing them to reach their dream.

When he was re-elected to the state legislature in 1837, he developed full opposition to slavery. Clay announced publicly, “I believe slavery to be an evil, an evil morally, economically, physically, intellectually, socially, religiously, politically an unmixed evil.” Clay was willing to use any argument, whether he actually believed it or not, to prove Kentucky would be better off if slavery were to end. He did not fight the abolitionist fight, in that he felt the law could be used to end slavery rather than the methods used by the abolitionists. He truly believed that slavery should end legally and according to the constitution which made Clay an emancipator. Clay proposed amending the state constitution to provide that every black female born after a designated date (1860-1900) would become free at age twenty-one. Since children retained the status of the mother, he felt that slavery would eventually be ended. He saw this as the legal and peaceful end to slavery that would help Kentucky to become a powerful state economically.

When his time in the state legislature ended, Clay then began the fight to end slavery on his own. When newspapers such as The Lexington Observer, refused to print his articles against slavery, he started his own paper, The True American in 1845. He sold his first issue on June 3, 1845 to 300 in-state and 1700 out-of-state subscribers. His paper’s sole purpose was
to promote gradual and constitutional emancipation of slavery. His main
appeal in the articles was to argue the point of economic self-interest of the
non-slave holder. He wrote about ideas that both blacks and whites were
enslaved by a few white wealthy slaveholders who forced blacks to work for
free and denied poor white men paid labor that would replace the slaves.
Many abolitionists did not endorse Clay’s newspaper as a publication against
slavery, mainly because there were still some slaves at White Hall. By this
time, Clay was the caretaker of White Hall, and he did eventually free all of
his personal slaves, but retained some that were owned by the estate. He lost
close to $100,000 when he freed his slaves and through the purchase of
others in order to free them and to keep families together.

William Lloyd Garrison did not support Clay’s newspaper because
he felt his feelings concerning slavery were not strong enough. Abolitionists,
such as Garrison, argued against slavery because of the inhumane treatment
of blacks as slaves. He felt that Clay’s position of emancipation and
economics did not address the actual conditions of slavery. Because Clay
saw slavery as a legal issue, he failed to gain the support of many who would
have helped him in his fight to end slavery.

When the first edition of The True American reached the public,
there was a large outcry of protest from proslavery advocates. Clay received
threats from the slaveholding community because they looked at Clay’s
writings as a direct challenge to their way of life and believed he was seeking
to destroy the institution of slavery. They could not relate to or understand
why a slave holder would feel this way. Following the receipt of threatening
letters, he fortified his newspaper office in Lexington and his home at White
Hall. The Lexington Observer actually created some of the opposition to
Clay’s writings by asking its readers, “Slaveholders of Fayette, is it not now
time for you to act on this matter yourselves?”

In his August 12, 1845 issue Clay printed an article written by an
anonymous slaveholder. The article itself would not have created much
opposition, but it was Clay’s editorial that accompanied the article that did.
The article simply stated that there should be equality for free blacks and that
slave conditions should be greatly improved. In Clay’s editorial to the
article, he again pleaded for the emancipation of all slaves as he had many
times before, but with much stronger words. Many readers took his words as
a call for violence to be taken against the slaveholders and their families.
This was not Clay’s intention at all, but rather, an attempt to try to make the
slaveholders see slavery for what it was, an immorality that should be ended.
Instead of The True American gaining support for Clay’s emancipation idea,
his heated and controversial writings turned people farther away from his
ideas of ending slavery. He, at times, went much too far with his
publications and the public was not prepared to hear and read his strong opinions that differed so greatly from what most in Kentuckian society knew.26

Cassius Clay was a man with visions of a better Kentucky. He fought against slavery and other wrongs in his beloved state. Why did he fail so miserably when it came to ending the institution of slavery? One reason for his failure was he did not understand the southern class system. Under this system, slaveholder and non-slaveholder were related, friends, or they worked together. This bond between the slaveholder and non-slaveholder was what abolitionists had to fight against and so did Clay as an emancipator. He was confused when he realized poor whites looked upon themselves as higher in class than “owned” blacks, but were actually not. In some cases, the poor whites lived a much poorer life than the slave.27 When he produced the argument for a better economy, no one agreed because they simply did not see what Clay envisioned since they could not see beyond their current status. They were afraid his promises were empty and possibly those of a misguided man who had been convinced that slavery was wrong. His argument was also weak because all knew him to be a man of the Gentry class and possibly felt he was already successful with the help of slavery and could not be trusted.28

Clay did not take up the fight because he felt for the blacks as slaves; he just felt slavery was holding Kentucky back economically. He stated, “This is not because we love the black man best, for we do not love him as well, but because it is just.” He went on to say of blacks, “They lack self-reliance – we can make nothing out of them.”29 These statements alone prove Clay to be an emancipator instead of an abolitionist.30 He failed to see the complete and utter wrong in slavery and this made his argument against slavery weak. Even though Clay had been exposed to the cruelties of slavery from an early age, he still did not see it as morally wrong. This could be in part because his father had owned slaves. He would at times argue facts concerning his earlier experiences with his friends who were slaves, but still push the point that slavery was just a means of preventing Kentucky from growing.31 Had Clay been sincere in his argument of the immorality of slavery, he might have been more successful in his battles.

Another reason for his failure was his unorthodox ideas for the argument against slavery. One such argument was Clay blamed slavery for divorces in the South. This argument produced no results for the ending of slavery. He claimed the black slave women were in the main house doing chores the wives should be doing and these women were catching the eye of the husband.32 What Clay failed to realize was that this did not cause divorces in the South. This was just an accepted practice among slaveholders.
so no one considered this a problem, and as a result, saw no need to end slavery for this reason. Clay used no statistics or documentation that proved there were more divorces occurring among slaveholders. This argument of Clay’s, like many others, proved unsuccessful and was marked as another of his outlandish ideas and in the end, ignored.

Even though Clay advocated a non-violent end to slavery, this did not always happen. One such incident occurred at Foxtown in Madison County on June 22. Clay took his ideas of emancipation to the voters. He spoke for candidates who supported emancipation. His main focus was in Madison County where the proslavery party had nominated Squire Turner, William Chenault, and James Dijarnatt for seats in the constitutional convention. Clay supported emancipator Major Thompson Burnam. Turner and Clay did not like each other and had already been involved in several arguments over the years.

On June 22, 1849, at a village on the Lexington-Richmond turnpike about a mile from White Hall, these candidates were publicly speaking. Squire Turner was the first speaker and Clay continuously interrupted him with questions and comments. Every time Clay spoke, there was complaining within the crowd so he took out his Bowie knife and held it in his hand. When Turner finished speaking, Clay took the stage to introduce Curtis Burnam, who was speaking on behalf of his father, Major Burnam. While Clay was on stage, a young lawyer, Richard Runyon began attacking Clay verbally. Clay brought all the issues back to Turner and finally Cyrus Turner, the oldest son of Squire Turner called Clay a liar and struck him in the face. Clay pulled his knife on Cyrus but it was taken from him by another man. They continued to fight with fists and Clay was beating the younger man viciously. The end result was Clay was stabbed and shot. Clay then saw his knife, picked it up and chased Cyrus, stabbing him in his abdomen and cutting out his intestines until he was stopped. It was the prediction that Clay would die and Cyrus would survive, but the exact opposite happened. It took five weeks for Clay to become healthy again, but he never fully recovered from his wounds.

Such incidences caused most people to believe him to be a violent man and killer of young men. People began to associate Clay with the violent acts of the abolitionists whom he tried so hard to be different from and would no longer listen to his talk of a better economy without slavery. After this particular incident, the emancipation party would no longer associate with Clay because his actions on this day created much opposition to the cause of emancipation.

The most powerful reason for Clay’s failure was that he approached the subject of ending slavery during the wrong time period. In the 1840s
when Clay first publicly objected to the institution of slavery, most politicians were quietly sweeping this issue under the rug. It was the time before the Civil War and most thought compromise was the solution to the problem, no longer seeking to do away with slavery. Clay should have been more political and taken notice of federal laws concerning slavery that were being passed. It was the time of compromise and Clay’s ideas about emancipation had no compromise within them. Before Kentucky became so engrossed in the belief that slavery would make them better off financially, Clay might have had a chance at convincing them to try his industrialism ideas. Slavery was such an extreme topic at this time that no one wanted to discuss it and Clay’s political opponents used his opposition to slavery against him in elections.

The final reason for failure could have been he did not approach the subject of ending slavery in a reasonable and sensible manner. He continued to write articles for his newspaper that were radical and uncompromising. In his journal, some of which was published, he would ramble at times with an almost obsession of doing away with slavery. The information he would record in his journal would be very controversial and most people considered the writings too radical. Eventually, no one took his ideas seriously and looked upon them as the ideas of a crazed and obsessed man.

Cassius Clay was a visionary, but his visions came at the wrong time in history. He was exposed to slavery from birth and accepted it, in part, as a way of life until he traveled to the Northern states and discovered a completely different way of life and became exposed to abolitionists’ arguments against slavery which helped to lead him to his individual ideas and beliefs concerning slavery. He envisioned Kentucky to be an example of what a great state could be without the institution of slavery, but it would not come to be until his friend, Abraham Lincoln on January 1, 1863 signed the Emancipation Proclamation declaring all slaves in territories still at war with the Union to be free. Clay considered the event to be “the culminating act of my life’s aspirations.”

ENDNOTES


5 Ibid., 8-9.

6 Ibid., 8.

7 Ibid., 8-9.


14 Ibid., 49-51.


17 Ibid., 49.

18 Ibid., 48-49.

19 Ibid., 49.

20 Ibid., 50.


23 Ibid., 50.


28 Ibid., 7.


33 Ibid., 138.


