

THE BATTLE OF WAYNESBORO: 150TH ANNIVERSARY
A Tragic and Defining Moment in Virginia Masonic History



The Brethren of Lee Lodge No. 209, AF & AM

On March 2, 2015, the Worshipful Master, Officers and Brethren of Lee Lodge No. 209, AF & AM, hosted the 150th anniversary of the Battle of Waynesboro at Constitution Park in Waynesboro, Virginia. Worshipful Ross Morland welcomed all present and gave the opening remarks of this event, then introduced Brother A. Kim Webster, who offered up the invocation and blessing. Following such, Worshipful Joseph B Yount, III gave us the story of the Battle and the Biography of Confederate Colonel, William H Harman. Military salute was offered up by Company L of the West Augusta Guard, 5th Virginia Infantry.

Most Worshipful William Harman was serving as the Grand Master of Masons in Virginia on March 2, 1865 when units from the Union's Major General Phillip Sheridan ambushed the southern forces during this battle and Harman was the only southerner killed in this battle as a result of the surprise. The actual Union commander on the field was Brigadier General George Custer, who will later fall at the Battle of Little Big Horn, and he was in command of the Third Cavalry Division. The compliment of Custer's forces was 2,500 horsemen, to include elements of the 2nd US Horse Artillery.

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Commanding a diminished and fragmented 1,200-man Confederate Army of the Valley, composing of infantry, cavalry and artillery, was Lieutenant General Jubal Early. Early, who despite arguments from his subordinates to cross the South River and then fortify, instead chose to build an earthen defensive position with his back to the river and his right flank to the tree line, believing that the woods would hinder any cavalry unit. Unfortunately for Early, Custer called upon a battalion of his men to enter into the woods dismounted and with Spencer carbines, while moving the rest of his cavalry through an exposed gap in the left flank as to pincer them into the tree line with the artillery holding the front lines.

The battle was a complete rout against the Confederates, with Early's forces in a panic and nowhere to escape. General Early and much of his staff and other of his commanders managed to escape by making a dash over a rail fence to the bridge that crosses the South River, but two of his officers failed to follow within the chaos that ensued. The first was Colonel William Henry Harman, who held the rank of Brigadier General in the Virginia militia and the other was one Dr. Hunter McGuire, who was still very young when he was assigned a position as Stonewall Jackson's surgeon and would be the doctor that tended to Jackson upon his death. Both men were Freemasons.

William Harman was born on February 17, 1825 in Waynesboro, Virginia and grew up to be both a soldier and lawyer. He was a veteran of the Mexican War and was initiated, passed and raised within an Army Lodge in support of the United States Army during that time. He was elected to be Virginia's Grand Master in 1864 and was serving his second term when he was killed. Separated from General Early during the rout, he began to rally what troops remained to his person when he became surrounded by the

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enemy and ordered to surrender. Not believing that surrender was an option, he instead chose to attack the superior force before him but was quickly brought down by a now angry foe. He would be later buried at Thornrose Cemetery in Staunton, Virginia.

Hunter Holmes McGuire was born on October 11, 1835 in Winchester, Virginia and was the son of a prominent eye surgeon. He learned from his father and in following the same path, he would graduate from Winchester Medical College, becoming a doctor at the young age of 20 years. He continued his medical training in Philadelphia, then in New Orleans previous to the hostilities. With the outbreak of war, McGuire joined the army as a private in Company F of the “Winchester Rifles” of the 2nd Virginia Infantry, but it was decided that he was more important as a doctor, so he was given a commission as a brigade surgeon and ordered to report to Stonewall Jackson’s service. He served Jackson till his death and then was given orders to serve with Early’s unit.

After the war, Dr. McGuire would move to Richmond, Virginia and serve as Chair of Surgery for the Medical College of Virginia. He would later be the founder of the University College of Medicine and these two institutions would come together to become part of the Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU). Although I was not able to find neither his mother Lodge nor records to the dates of his degree work, his story is well chronicled in the Scottish Rite Journal, *Heredom* and his actions during the battle is clearly recorded to support his Masonic pedigree in the article, “*Gentlemen of the White Apron*” (Halleran, 2007, p. 4).

On the grounds of the State Capitol, a statue of him was erected in his honor with the inscription:

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Hunter Holmes McGuire, M.D., L.L.D. President of the American Medical and of the American Surgical Associations; Founder of the University College of Medicine Medical Director, Jackson's Corps, Army of Northern Virginia. An Eminent Civil and Military Surgeon and Beloved Physician. An Able Teacher and Vigorous Writer; A Useful Citizen and Broad Humanitarian, Gifted in Mind and Generous in Heart, This Monument is Erected by his Many Friends.

What is significant of Dr. McGuire is during the Battle of Waynesboro, his horse failed to make the leap over the rail fence to get to the bridge and both fell down into the mud only to be quickly surrounded by Union troops. Already provoked by the actions of Colonel Harman and having to return fire upon him, the Union troops proceed to draw their weapons upon the remaining enemy and it is at this point that Dr. McGuire gives the Masonic sign of distress, understanding that he has not a chance to resist. Upon seeing the sign of distress, a Union officer who was also a Mason intervened by ordered a halt to the fighting, and this ended any further bloodletting with the battle being over.

As Freemasons, we recognize that Most Worshipful Harman chose to fight and die as a matter of duty during the Battle of Waynesboro and he did such to maintain his honor and integrity. But likewise, we should be equally charitable of the actions of Brother McGuire, who instead of fighting on and dying, chose to surrender and survive in order to later in life give back to society with the great humanitarian deeds that are to this day recorded to his name and person. Once again, the events of the American Civil War shows us how the Light of Freemasonry can shine out against the darkness of human inevitability of circumstances and bring hope to both the future and to future generations.

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Memorial for Most Worshipful William H Harman

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