

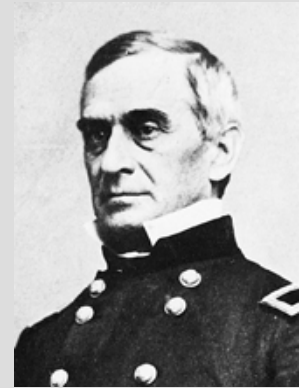
# *Overshadowed Greatness: Louisville's Notable Civil War Legacy*

By Steve Wiser, AIA

Gettysburg, Ft. Sumter, Atlanta, and Ford's Theater were all major sites of Civil War history. Louisville, though, is rarely mentioned for any important role it played in this national conflict. Now, with the 150th anniversary of the Civil War underway, it is time for Louisville to be recognized for the people and events associated with it, which were part of the North's successful victory.



On April 12<sup>th</sup>, 1861, when Confederate guns opened fire on Ft. Sumter in Charleston harbor, the Union commander there was a veteran military officer who once served with a young Abraham Lincoln in Illinois' Black Hawk War of 1832. He was born and raised on his family's farm, a short distance from today's inter-



section of Hurstborne Parkway and Interstate 64. Major Robert Anderson, a Louisvillian, ordered the American flag to be removed and the fort surrendered on April 13<sup>th</sup>, which began this epic War Between the States.

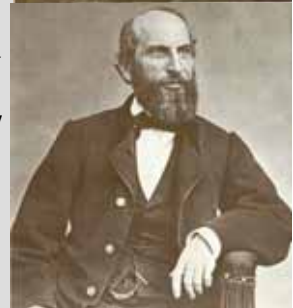
Joshua Fry Speed, whose father John built the Farmington plantation on Bardstown Road, was a long-time friend of Abraham Lincoln. Speed used his prominent connections and wealth to keep Kentucky from joining the South. He facilitated the transporting of weapons to defend both the city and state. His brother, James, delivered a patriotic pro-Union speech from the Courthouse steps on February 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1861, before a very large crowd. He would later serve in Lincoln's cabinet as Attorney General.



*Above Right:  
Joshua Fry Speed*



*Left: February 22,  
1861 gathering at  
Courthouse where  
James Speed  
(Right,) gave a  
patriotic speech  
on Washington's  
birthday.*



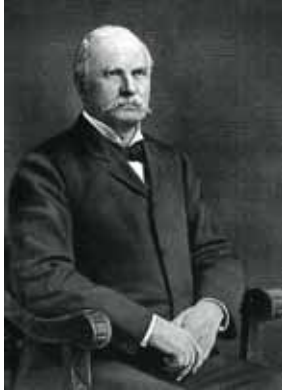
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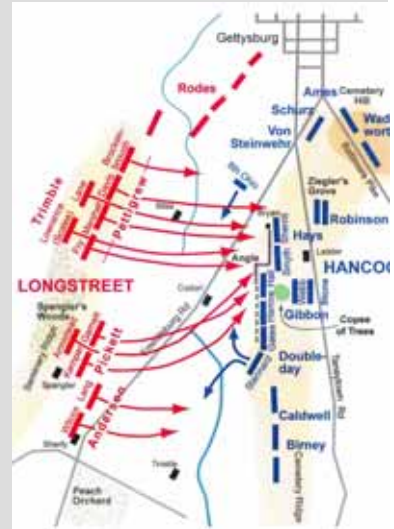
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Head of the Union forces in Louisville early in the war was the legendary William Tecumseh Sherman (*Left*). The city at one point had 60,000 federal troops, over 3,500 Confederate prisoners, and eleven forts around the perimeter. As headquarters to the L & N Railroad, the city provided a vital supply line to the Union forces as they advanced southward.



July 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1863, was perhaps the most famous battle of the war in the small Pennsylvania town of Gettysburg. There, stationed on Cemetery Hill, was a 21 year-old Union cannon battery commander from Scotland. As Confederate General George Pickett ordered his soldiers forward (*Right*), and with the Union guns were almost out of ammunition, Captain Andrew Cowan (*Left*) told his men to bravely hold fire of their cannons till the Confederates were in



close range. Cowan then gave the order to shoot, and the cannons decimated the enemy line. This would later become popularly known as the 'high water mark' of the Confederacy since it was the South's most northern advance.



After the war, Cowan, who would be memorialized with a Gettysburg monument for his heroics (*Left*), would move to Louisville, open a leather-goods business, and become a passionate advocate to build a parks system for the city.

Woods Theater, at the northeast corner of Jefferson and Fourth Streets, featured a nationally acclaimed young actor by the name of John Wilkes Booth. He starred in several plays there in late January 1864.



Booth was a known Confederate sympathizer and some even have speculated that he might have been a covert spy. Visiting a strategic Union military city was certainly an



interesting travel destination for Booth. He most likely stayed at either the Galt House or Louisville Hotel, where he was

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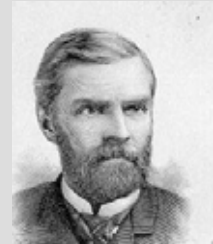
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surrounded by Union officers, who also would have been in the audience of his performances. After his acting here, he traveled to Nashville for an engagement there. Perhaps he relayed what he saw and heard in Louisville to Confederate operatives in Tennessee.



There is, though, one aspect of Louisville's Civil War links that is questionable. Several local authoritative sources state that, at the original Galt House, Union Generals Ulysses S. Grant and William Sherman met on March 9, 1864, to finalize the plan that would end this struggle. Grant would pursue Confederate General Robert E. Lee in Virginia, and Sherman would 'March to the Sea' via Atlanta. But, it is well-documented that Grant was in Washington D.C. on March 9<sup>th</sup> to meet with Lincoln, and that Grant never visited Louisville in 1864. There are other references that indicate the final strategy session was held elsewhere.

Sherman did have a Louisvillian on his staff during this final attack thru the South. Thomas Speed (*Right*), cousin to Joshua and James, was an administrative aide to Sherman. Thomas would later propose a parks system for Louisville which Andrew Cowan would champion its construction.



After Lee's surrender, President Lincoln told his good friend Robert Anderson, now a General, to travel back to his former command at Ft. Sumter and raise the flag he had removed four years earlier. He did so on April 14<sup>th</sup>, 1865, the same day Lincoln was assassinated by Booth.

While the city was never seriously threatened with a significant battle, Louisville was more central to the successful outcome of the war than it is credited. It's a history that has long been overshadowed by other events and locations, and now we can properly commemorate this great legacy.

For a timeline of 'Significant Civil War Dates in Louisville History', click on the website [www.LouisvilleHistoricalLeague.ORG](http://www.LouisvilleHistoricalLeague.ORG)

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For more information on this subject, then buy the book "Louisville & the Civil War" by Bryan S. Bush. His website is [www.BryanSBush.com](http://www.BryanSBush.com) or visit Carmichaels Bookstore.

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