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Haupt-enstance: Whatever Became of Herman?

Abstract

Tom Lehrer, on his 1965 album *That Was The Year That Was*, sang a send-up of then-Vice President Hubert Humphrey with his, "Whatever Became of Hubert." The song's been going through my head this past week or so, but with the name "Herman" taking the place of LBJ's second-in-command. [*excerpt*]

Keywords

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Comments

Interpreting the Civil War: Connecting the Civil War to the American Public is written by alum and adjunct professor, John Rudy. Each post is his own opinions, musings, discussions, and questions about the Civil War era, public history, historical interpretation, and the future of history. In his own words, it is "a blog talking about how we talk about a war where over 600,000 died, 4 million were freed and a nation forever changed. Meditating on interpretation, both theory and practice, at no charge to you."

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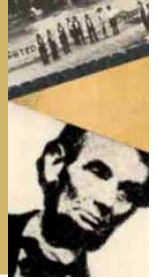
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Interpreting the Civil War

Connecting the Civil War to the American Public

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Haupt-enance: Whatever Became of Herman?

THURSDAY, MAY 24, 2012



Tom Lehrer, on his 1965 album *That Was The Year That Was*, sang a send-up of then-Vice President Hubert Humphrey with his, "[Whatever Became of Hubert](#)." The song's been going through my head this past week or so, but with the name "Herman" taking the place of LBJ's second-in-command.

One of my students, a good chap named Cory who just graduated, has been railing about how the college pays no attention to our most famous Herman: Herman Haupt. I have to admit, I hadn't paid much thought before this year to Herman Haupt, nor has much of the rest of Gettysburg's huge historical community of researchers, guides and authors. To be fair, Haupt *is* a relatively obscure Civil War personality. Haupt was one of those officers too good at his job for his own good. Like fellow masters of the mundane Montgomery Meigs and Winfield Scott Hancock, Haupt found himself relegated to the world of supply and support. Field command was beneath the engineering genius' genius.

Haupt's connection with the borough of Gettysburg before the war runs deep. Haupt found God in the town, baptized under the roof on St. James Lutheran Church in March of 1837 by Reverend Keller. He found love here, too, marrying the pastor's daughter a year later and settling into a quiet life in the Pennsylvania crossroads.

Haupt, the skilled engineer who graduated from West Point at 18 and went immediately to work surveying for railroads throughout the southern half of the Commonwealth, designed and built his own brick mansion on the ridge west of town. He christened the manse, "Oakridge." Years later, the building would be used to shelter wounded men from the elements as the work of war raged around its walls. Even later, on my first visits to Gettysburg, my mother would ogle the building and dream of someday buying the beautiful Queen Anne mansion. You've probably dreamt that dream too; it's that beautiful house on [the south-east corner of West Confederate Ave and the Fairfield Road](#).

Haupt worked as a brilliant professor of science at Pennsylvania College during the 1840s, helping to spearhead the initiative to form a scientific society on campus and to design and build their grand

home: Linnaean Hall. His writings in the society's journal run the gamut of subjects, from physics and chemistry to the study of weather patterns and putrefaction of natural materials. He was what you might call a Jack-of-all-Trades.

When war erupted, Haupt tendered his services as a railroad engineer, repairing and laying out new lines to support the operations of the armies in the field around Washington, D.C. As cannon roared in the three-day volcano of Gettysburg, Haupt painstakingly organized the repair of Pennsylvania and Maryland's ravaged rail infrastructure. Rail service to Gettysburg was restored by Haupt's careful work within days of the battle, a job Meade expected to take the better part of a month. Rail cars were flowing into Gettysburg in time to give General Daniel Sickles a smooth trip from the field of battle back to the halls of Congress to help crucify his former commanding general in front of the Committee on the Conduct of the War.



General Herman Haupt, surveying the work of the *General Herman Haupt*. Yup, Haupt was so cool they named a train after him.

Haupt more than likely had a hand in aggravating Lincoln's growing frustration with Meade over not following up on his massive victory at Gettysburg. It was Haupt who alerted the War Department of Meade's intentions to stay put and not pursue Lee. The telegraph, sent over Haupt's own newly repaired lines, was quickly passed on to Lincoln who was infuriated at yet another slow, plodding general in command of the Army of the Potomac.

Haupt walked the campus of Pennsylvania College and the streets of Gettysburg, not simply as a soldier but as a citizen and scholar. Gettysburg was where he cut his teeth, crafted his skills and found his life as a young man. Haupt's valiant work recreating the rail networks in the aftermath of the battle brought food to a tired and worn Federal army when they needed it most. Gettysburg was Haupt's home. What added meaning did this place have as he tried desperately to help in its defense?

And why have I never heard of Haupt, except as a footnote to a footnote? I'm still digging and piecing the story together, but Herman Haupt seems to be a key player in both pre-war Gettysburg society and the swift recovery of the army after a trip through flaming, dripping hell. He's certainly not a footnote. He was a key piece in the chess game that was Federal victory at Gettysburg.