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Baltimore on the Border: The Occupation

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Baltimore on the Border: The Occupation

Abstract

Though Baltimore and Maryland were preserved for the Union, it was a victory won at gunpoint. Historian Harry Ezratty describes one occasion when Governor Dix, Butler's successor in the Middle Department, demonstrated "a genuine display of gentlemanly tactfulness" and Victorian cunning when he invited overly influential local ladies to discuss matters of the occupation. According to his memoirs, he then pointed to a gun stationed at Fort McHenry and diplomatically asked his guests where it was directed. They observed that it was pointed to Battle Monument Square: a site of local importance commemorating the War of 1812. He promised them that if they stopped sowing the seeds of insurrection, there would be no more trouble. Otherwise, "that gun is the first that I shall fire." [*excerpt*]

Keywords

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Disciplines

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THE GETTYSBURG COMPILER

ON THE FRONT LINES OF HISTORY

Baltimore on the Border: The Occupation

May 15, 2014

By: Kevin Lavery, '16

Why is "Maryland" like a blind bird – because she can't 'See-Seed' (Secede)

-Joke told by Samuel Epes Turner, Jr. to his father

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Samuel "Epes" and Clara Turner were strong supporters of the Union, but they understood how the sentiments of the war continued to tear apart their community. Both of the Turners had been born in Massachusetts, which helps account for their strong loyalty to the North. Epes was descended from the ninth president of Harvard – where his son would attend school during the war – while Clara was descended from *Mayflower* pilgrim John



Alden. Most of their neighbors, however, were born and raised in the slave state of Maryland, and many would remain resentful toward their northern occupiers for the duration of the war.

It was no longer safe to openly lash out against the Union, but Confederate sympathizers were still vocal in their beliefs. "We have had considerable excitement here," Epes wrote his cousins, "in consequence of our 'Rebels' rejoicing over the defeat of our first Maryland Regiment – and it resulted in a few of the scamps being knocked down." Evidently, even small, personal rebellions

were not tolerated by loyalist Baltimoreans emboldened by the presence of the United States Army.

The animosity came from both sides. Clara told one anecdote about a woman named Mrs. Streets who offered a friend one of her eleven American flags, one for each rebellious state, when she realized the friend did not have one hanging. When the friend declined, Streets promptly departed, leading Clara to conclude that Streets “cuts her secession friends without any ceremony.” And Epes himself declared that he would happily “go to Washington to see Jeff Davis hung” should the opportunity arrive. Before the Battle of Antietam, both Turners made it clear that they would sooner destroy Baltimore themselves than see it fall into the hands of the rebels.

But although the city remained highly divided, Baltimore was no longer a hotbed of rebellion. The barricades erected ahead of the Battle of Gettysburg were not for staging a rebellion, but for keeping out the Confederate invaders. Thankfully for the loyal Turner family and for the destiny of the Republic, Baltimore was kept for the Union. It simmered still with sectional tension, but its allegiance was made stable.



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Images:

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