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Loyalty: Democracy and Gettysburg's Union League

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Loyalty: Democracy and Gettysburg's Union League

Abstract

"The ball is rolling," the *Sentinel* crowed, "and it is no time now to faint or falter in the good and noble work of crushing rebels and traitors abroad and at home, and bringing back to its original glory our time-honored Union."

The Union would be saved, the *Sentinel* was sure, by the pure and sustained love and loyalty of her people. Gettysburg was showing her mettle in that department in the waning days of April 1863, as citizens gathered to follow the lead of others to the east in forming a Loyal Union League in the Adams county seat. [*excerpt*]

Keywords

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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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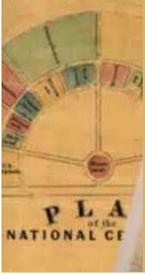
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Interpreting the Civil War

Connecting the Civil War to the American Public

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Loyalty: Democracy and Gettysburg's Union League

TUESDAY, APRIL 23, 2013

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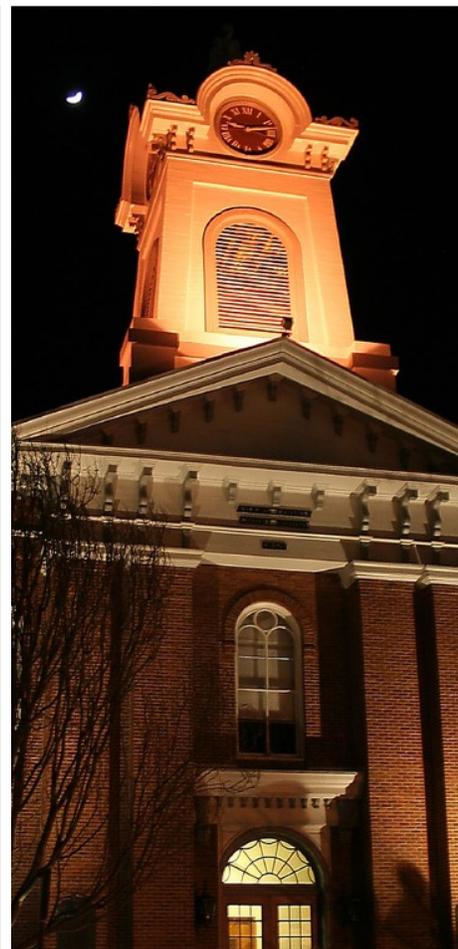
The Union would be saved, the *Sentinel* was sure, by the pure and sustained love and loyalty of her people. Gettysburg was showing her mettle in that department in the waning days of April 1863, as citizens gathered to follow the lead of others to the east in forming a Loyal Union League in the Adams county seat.

Like their counterparts in the cultural hub of Philadelphia, Gettysburg's citizens came to the call, bringing, "together a large number of warm, enthusiastic loyalists, who are going in, 'heart and soul,' for the Union." All told, 87 men pledged their names as loyal members in support of their nation.

Beyond the group of 87 who met in the Adams County Courthouse to form a Loyal Union League, other citizens of Gettysburg weren't as impressed. Quoting Christ's parable from Luke of the braggart Pharisee and the pious tax collector, *Gettysburg Compiler* editor [Henry J. Stahle](#) ripped into the Union League's public declaration of patriotism. "We desire to bring this lesson of the Great Teacher," Stahle preached, "to the notice of the very respectable gentlemen in broad-cloth and patent leather boots, of the sect of the Pharisees, who met in the Court House on Monday evening."

Those men, the *Compiler* spat sarcastically, "modestly arrogated to themselves all the honesty, intelligence, patriotism and christianity in the community."

In another article, speaking with words reprinted from the pages of Harrisburg's *Patriot and Union*, the *Compiler* urged Gettysburg and the nation in another direction. "If the people are anxious to go into a Union League under the idea that they can aid the nation in this critical period," the paper announced to



The Courthouse where Gettysburg's nascent Union League met one night in April, 1863. / [CC zizybalooah](#)

Gettysburg, "let them go into the Democracy, and they will breathe the truest spirit of love for the nation and its laws." The Democracy, the Democratic Party, was the only antidote to war. "A man who is a genuine Democrat needs no Union League to inspire him with devotion to his country."

Still, Gettysburg's Union League proudly announced their stance, "to unconditional loyalty to the Government of the United States, to its unwavering support of its efforts to suppress the rebellion, and to spare no endeavor to maintain unimpaired the National unity, both in principle and territorial boundary." Perhaps it was a the Pharisee, loud, brash and only for public show.

Then again, maybe it was just political rivals, each in their own way damning the other for failing to, "bind together all loyal men, of all trades and professions, in a common union to maintain the power, glory, and integrity of the Nation."

As the *Adams Sentinel* begged for, "all of every race and creed, religious and political... to have a unity of sentiment and action in support of the war for the preservation of the Constitution and the Union," Gettysburg sat a borough divided, at war with herself. America sat a nation deeply divided, at war with herself. And it didn't require a single rebel boot on the American soil to drive that wedge deeper and deeper.

But rebel boots *were* coming to Pennsylvania. And soon.