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Baltimore on the Border: First Blood

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Baltimore on the Border: First Blood

Abstract

In the study of the Civil War, the violence between brothers, neighbors, and countrymen is most frequently explored through the eyes of great armies clashing on the field of battle. But in the American Civil War, as in any modern conflict and especially those dividing a people amongst themselves, a citizen did not have to wear blue or grey to feel passionately about the war. In Baltimore, Mayor George William Brown and paper merchant Samuel Epes Turner, took strikingly different stances on the war despite their geographical proximity to the fighting. Fort Sumter may have seen the first shots of the war, but the infamy of first blood belongs to the civilians of Baltimore and the Union soldiers they confronted. [*excerpt*]

Keywords

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Disciplines

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THE GETTYSBURG COMPILER

ON THE FRONT LINES OF HISTORY

Baltimore on the Border: First Blood

May 13, 2014

By: Kevin Lavery, '16

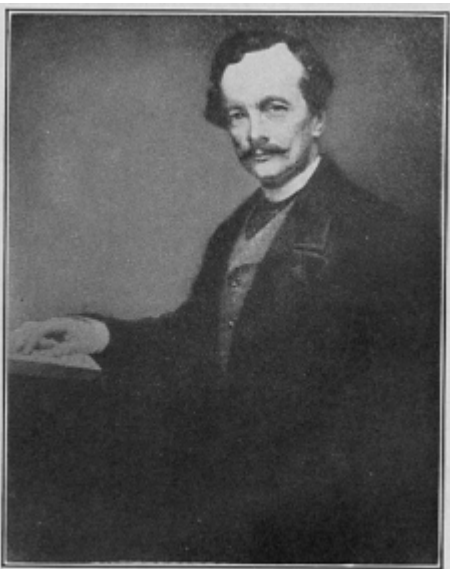
Avenge the patriotic gore

That flecked the streets of Baltimore...

-Maryland, My Maryland

In the study of the Civil War, the violence between brothers, neighbors, and countrymen is most frequently explored through the eyes of great armies clashing on the field of battle. But in the American Civil War, as in any modern conflict and especially those dividing a people amongst themselves, a citizen did not have to wear blue or grey to feel passionately about the war. In Baltimore, Mayor George William Brown and paper merchant Samuel Epes Turner, took strikingly different stances on the war despite their geographical proximity to the fighting. Fort Sumter may have seen the first shots of the war, but the infamy of first blood belongs to the civilians of Baltimore and the Union soldiers they confronted.

As a border state that was considered by Brown to be “neither dead nor asleep on the subject of slavery,” Maryland found itself sharply divided in loyalty. Brown, a Confederate sympathizer, reasoned that “the house of every man is his castle, and he may defend it to the death against all



GEORGE WILLIAM BROWN.

aggressors.” Epes, meanwhile, was “almost ashamed . . . that in this age of the world, enough men could be found to break up such a government as ours.” He was not representative of most Baltimoreans. In general, Maryland – especially in its most eastern reaches – was initially inclined toward ambivalence or the South.

As the North began mobilizing for war, the first units mustered from Massachusetts and Pennsylvania made their way south by way of Baltimore. As there were no railroad tracks through the center of the city, the troops were forced to march from one train station to the next through the streets populated with resentful Baltimoreans. When a crowd of several hundred began striking the men of the 6th Massachusetts with bricks and stones, the anxious and

inexperienced soldiers began firing back disorderly. Mayor Brown himself went out to try to calm the crowd and escort the soldiers safely through the city in an attempt to maintain order. Though Brown's efforts may have precluded further violence, they did not prevent four soldier and twelve civilian deaths and countless others wounds. Alluding to another flashpoint in the nation's past, Epes called the event the Baltimore Massacre, accusing city officials of ignoring the warning signs of the mob mentality brewing in the streets. With the blood of this confrontation, any chance of peaceful reconciliation had vanished.

Soon after the riot, Mayor Brown and Governor Hicks collaborated on a plan to destroy the railroad tracks north of the city in order to prevent the arrival of more troops and the violence that accompanied them. To these men, the Union intrusion was contrary to the safety and security of the state of Maryland. The unionist Epes, however, was glad to see the North refuse to back down. In response to this "armed neutrality," Brigadier General Benjamin Butler led his Union forces into Baltimore and occupied the city. This military intervention further embittered those citizens kept in the Union against their will and left lingering tensions within Epes' divided city.



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