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Murder in Manassas: Mental Illness and Psychological Trauma After the Civil War

Abstract

Following the American Civil War, the small railroad junction of Manassas, Virginia grew into one of the most prominent towns in the region with the help of town founder William S. Fewell and his family. In 1872, the youngest daughter of the prominent Fewell family was seduced and abducted by Prince Williams County's Commonwealth Attorney and most prominent orator, James F. Clark without warning. Having just come home from three years of military service in the Civil War, witnessing the death of his twin brother as well as suffering for a year in Elmira Prison as a prisoner of war, Lucien N. Fewell walked into Clark's jail and murdered his younger sister's abductor. Acquitted of murder on the terms of mental illness, Lucien Fewell continued to live a life of violence caused by his traumatic experiences during the Civil War. Like many soldiers who came home from the Civil War, Lucien Fewell gives historians an insight into those who came home with combat-induced mental illnesses, as he came back from his military services a changed and violent man.

Keywords

Manassas VA, Mental trauma, 1872, Civil War, Brentsville VA, James F. Clark, Lucien N. Fewell, Fannie Fewell, William S. Fewell, Reconstruction, Psychological trauma, Ladies Memorial Association of Manassas, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, Bull Run, Alexandria VA, Fewell

MURDER IN MANASSAS: MENTAL ILLNESS AND PSYCHOLOGICAL TRAUMA AFTER THE CIVIL WAR

Savannah Rose

The small area of Manassas, Virginia began as a mere railroad junction, joining the Orange and Alexandria Railroad and the Manassas Gap Railroad. During the American Civil War, Manassas witnessed two major battles, the First Battle of Bull Run in 1861 and the Second Battle of Bull Run a year later, leaving the junction in ruins. As the nation plunged into Reconstruction following the end of the conflict, very few buildings remained, and the townspeople found destruction when they returned to the homes they had vacated for safety. As the town of Manassas proliferated, it immediately faced hardships as tragedy struck the residents of the town, tragedy that stemmed from the harsh fighting of the Civil War. In the years after the war, mental trauma and delusion led to a kidnapping, a murder, and the trial of the century in the small town of Manassas, leaving the people bewildered at the sudden psychological break of one of their most prominent citizens.

The town's development began when William S. Fewell arrived at the junction. An "enterprising and foresighted man," Fewell owned hundreds of acres within the area of Manassas Junction and laid out the foundations

of the would-be town.¹ Fewell inherited land from the will of Sanford Thurman in 1858, yet he stayed in Lynchburg, Virginia until 1865 to keep his family safe from the Civil War. Following the war, Fewell moved back to Manassas with his family, selling pieces of his land in order to begin forming a town.² By 1868, the town grew to such a size that officials in Prince William County, Virginia made a motion to move the county seat from Brentsville to Manassas, but they hesitated, waiting for the town to become officially incorporated and grow to a substantial size.³ As the nation continued to reconstruct itself under the policies of President Andrew Johnson, the town of Manassas grew within Prince William County. In 1869, the first professional practices opened with a law office under George Round and several physicians' offices. "The village of Manassas had grown from mere pasture land into a thriving town," and it only continued to grow from there.⁴ Churches were established, and *The Manassas Weekly Gazette* began production, giving the citizens a news outlet. In 1870, thirty more buildings were constructed in Manassas, a rate that continued for several years during Reconstruction.⁵

By 1871, the county seat prepared to make its move to Manassas as the town filled itself with a substantial

¹ Catherine T. Simmons, "Mr. Fewell's Town," in *Manassas, Virginia: 1873-1973* (Manassas, VA: Typesetting & Publishing Inc., 1986), 17.

² Simmons, "Mr. Fewell's Town," 17-19.

³ "A Visit to Manassas," *Alexandria Gazette*, August 15, 1868.

⁴ "Letter from Manassas," *Alexandria Gazette*, September 24, 1869.

⁵ "Manassas," *Alexandria Gazette*, September 1, 1870.

number of Northern men, who ensured that the now five hundred citizens of Manassas accepted the political measures of Reconstruction. Manassas became the largest town between Alexandria and Warrenton and was “still pushing ahead.”⁶ *The Alexandria Gazette* reported that on March 6, 1873, the citizens of Manassas approved a charter of incorporation, officially becoming a town.⁷ Manassas quickly became one of the most prosperous towns in Virginia during the Reconstruction Era due to the hard work of town founder William S. Fewell and his family.

William S. Fewell was born on February 4, 1814 and became a depot agent in Manassas Junction. After serving as the colonel of Company H of the 17th Virginia Volunteer Infantry in the American Civil War, Fewell returned to Manassas to begin settling the junction as a town.⁸ Along with his wife, Elizabeth Norvell Fewell, William Fewell began a town and a family. Together, the Fewells had six children, Sarah C., Mary Elizabeth, twins Lucien Norvell and William Haydon, Margaret, and their youngest daughter, Fannie. Elizabeth died in 1868, forcing William to become the sole provider for his children and raise Margaret and Fannie mostly on his own; his other

⁶ “Extract of a Letter from Washington,” *Alexandria Gazette*, May 1, 1871; “Correspondence from Fairfax News,” *Alexandria Gazette*, June 12, 1871.

⁷ “A Correspondence from the Washington Republican,” *Alexandria Gazette*, March 6, 1873.

⁸ Simmons, *Manassas, Virginia*, 17; “Confederate Papers Relating to Citizens or Business Firms, 1861-65: W.S. Fewell,” The National Archives, accessed on Fold3.

children had married and moved out of the house⁹. In 1870, William lived with the prominent Merchant family in Manassas with Margaret and Fannie. William remarried in 1871, bringing stepmother Virginia B. Mankin Fewell into his household to assist in raising his children.¹⁰ Margaret left her father's house in 1871 following her nuptials, leaving sixteen-year-old Fannie with her father and stepmother. As the Fewell family grew and changed, they helped build the town, offering their services to many organizations that were meant to help the growing area as well as those intended to remember the battles that swept through the area, including the Ladies Memorial Association of Manassas.

The Ladies Memorial Association of Manassas organized on May 25, 1867, electing Mrs. Sarah E. Fewell, Lucien Fewell's wife, as their President and Mrs. Mary Elizabeth Fewell as corresponding secretary.¹¹ During their first meeting as an organization, the ladies of the society wrote a thank you letter to General Robert E. Lee for his service during the American Civil War.¹² The Association played a large role in forming the Confederate Cemetery in Manassas, as they moved to preserve the memory of those who died, ensuring that future generations would do the

⁹ 1870 US Census, accessed on Ancestry.com.

¹⁰ 1880 US Census, accessed on Ancestry.com.

¹¹ By 1870, Mary Elizabeth Fewell was often referred to as Mrs. B. D. Merchant, as she married Benjamin Merchant. Jeffrey M. Pouli, "The Manassas City Cemetery," in *A Brief History of the Manassas and Confederate Cemeteries* (Prince William County Genealogical Society, 1992); 1870 US Census.

¹² Pouli, "The Manassas City Cemetery."

same. Six months following their founding, William S. Fewell donated one acre of land for the beginnings of the cemetery. The Association received its first monetary donation from Miss Mary Lipscomb in 1867 and began working to raise additional funds for the creation of the cemetery. By 1869, over two hundred soldiers had been interred.¹³ The Association grew in membership, as several notable figures throughout the community became involved, including Benjamin Merchant, a hotel owner in Manassas; Judge Charles E. Sinclair, a local attorney from Brentsville; William C. Merchant; and Fannie Fewell, the youngest daughter of William S. Fewell.

Aside from fundraising, letter writing, and creating the cemetery, the Ladies Memorial Association preserved the battlefields and held ceremonies for the town during Reconstruction. On May 9, 1868, the Ladies hosted the dedication of their cemetery, inviting spectators from Alexandria, Washington D.C., and all of Prince William County to attend, and preparing picnics, dinners, poetry readings, and orations. The Ladies invited several well-known figures in Prince William County to give these orations, one of whom was James F. Clark of Luray.¹⁴ James F. Clark was one of the most prominent orators in Prince William County, and he had received several invitations from the Ladies Memorial Association of Manassas to speak in front of the crowds. Each trip allowed

¹³ "Letter from Manassas," *Alexandria Gazette*, October 4, 1869.

¹⁴ "Memorial Celebration at Manassas," *Alexandria Gazette*, May 11, 1868.

Clark to grow close to William S. Fewell, his wife, and his children.

On July 21, 1868, the Association held a celebration for the seven-year anniversary of the First Battle of Bull Run, one of the largest memorial celebrations in Manassas during Reconstruction. The celebration saw large numbers of viewers who came to see the ceremonies as well as the battlefields, and the Association invited several orators to speak, including James F. Clark. Clark gave a speech unlike the other orators before the jousting tournament labeled, “The Charge of the Knights.” In his speech, Clark spoke of bravery, chivalry, courage, and respect for the women of society. He spoke of the men of the Confederate Armies who fought for victory or death, facing immense trials and dangers to support the Southern Cross. He spoke of the Civil War and the brave men on both sides who fought for their flags, noting the importance of the festivities occurring that day.¹⁵ Clark left his audience aghast, speaking to the assemblage in a style that would not be surpassed the rest of the day and leaving an impression on his spectators.

The great Manassas orator James F. Clark was born in 1844 to Reverend John Clark—a prominent reverend in Prince William County—and Jane Clark. James Clark was the second youngest of six children. When the American Civil War broke out, he enlisted in the 4th Virginia Cavalry and returned to his profession as a school teacher when the

¹⁵ “Manassas Celebration,” *Alexandria Gazette*, July 13, 1868.

guns fell silent.¹⁶ He married Mary Elizabeth Lee on October 24, 1868 and had two daughters, Laura L. in 1869 and Bertha in 1872.¹⁷ Clark changed his profession to law and soon became a very prominent attorney in Prince William County, working alongside the Commonwealth's Attorney for several years while he lived in Luray, Virginia. Clark excelled in the law practice and became the sole attorney for the Commonwealth on several cases as he rose in public prominence.¹⁸

With his rise in notoriety for his work as an attorney and orator, James F. Clark was announced as a candidate for the Commonwealth's Attorney on July 12, 1870 and received the position that same year.¹⁹ Clark moved his office and home to Manassas soon afterwards, working for the Commonwealth as he continued to rise in the ranks of attorneys.²⁰ In early 1872, Clark worked as the editor of *The Manassas Gazette*, increasing his presence in the community of Manassas as well as in Prince William County.²¹ He made headlines with his move out of Manassas to King George County in August of 1872 as he prepared for his move to the west, along with his

¹⁶ "Compiled Service Records of Confederate Soldiers Who Served in Organizations from the State of Virginia: James F. Clark," The National Archives, accessed on Fold3.

¹⁷ 1860 US Census, accessed on Ancestry.com; 1870 US Census.

¹⁸ "Letter from Prince William County," *Alexandria Gazette*, September 10, 1868; *Alexandria Gazette*, June 14, 1868; *Alexandria Gazette*, October 25, 1869.

¹⁹ *Alexandria Gazette*, July 12, 1870.

²⁰ "James F. Clark," *Manassas Gazette*, March 12, 1872.

²¹ *Manassas Gazette*, March 12, 1872.

resignation as editor of the *Gazette* and as the Commonwealth's Attorney. Clark was replaced by Charles E. Sinclair.²² As Manassas continued to recover from the Civil War, however, James F. Clark made further headlines in the town, as the former prominent figure, then twenty-eight, was arrested for the abduction of sixteen-year-old Fannie Fewell.

On August 22, 1872, James F. Clark found himself at the end of his plan to seduce and abduct the youngest daughter of the most prominent citizen of Manassas, a plan unknown to the public for some time. Clark fled Fredericksburg that evening with the help of Mr. Thomas Haydon, stating that he was going into the country to visit his wife, who he had sent to live with her parents in King George County as they prepared for their move west. William S. Fewell obtained a warrant for the arrest of James F. Clark on August 23, just days after hearing rumors of Clark's connection to his daughter's disappearance. That evening, Sergeant Edrington arrested James Clark with great ease. Clark believed he was innocent, insisting that the arrest was caused by Mr. Fewell's paranoia and irrational concern about his daughter's whereabouts.

Though the arrest was an easy one, Clark feared retaliation by the Fewells. He worried that Mr. Fewell would shoot him at first sight and thus refused to leave his father-in-law's house until Fewell had been sworn to keep

²² *Alexandria Gazette*, August 4, 1872.

the peace.²³ The news poured into Manassas, and great excitement arose over the two prominent families as citizens anxiously awaited further details surrounding the elopement, details that the newspapers gathered quickly. Until the trial could commence once again, Clark's examination occurred, and the accused was brought back to Prince William County on August 27 to be jailed. At his request, a guard accompanied Clark at all times, as Clark feared retaliation from the Fewell family. News of his arrival spread across the town quickly, with people across the county going to the jailhouse to catch a glimpse of the accused man as he sat alone in his cell.²⁴

The Alexandria Gazette covered the "tragedy" in extensive detail, sharing information quickly as they discovered it. Secrecy kept many details hidden from the public, who awaited answers with the highly-anticipated arrival of Fannie Fewell back to Manassas. On August 24, Mr. Benjamin Merchant, a close friend of the Fewells, arrived in Washington D.C. and succeeded in finding the missing girl. With the help of Detective McElfrish, Merchant tracked Fannie Fewell's location to the Boyles Hotel, where Clark had abandoned her several nights before. Upon seeing Merchant, Fannie broke down into tears, claiming Clark married her in the city then left her with no money. Fannie returned to Manassas on August 26, accompanied by her father and a family friend, Judge

²³ "Arrest of James F. Clark," *Alexandria Gazette*, August 24, 1872.

²⁴ "Jas. F. Clarke," *Alexandria Gazette*, August 27, 1872.

Charles E. Sinclair.²⁵ The town of Manassas longed to discover the fine details regarding the elopement as rumors filled the town of the plotted revenge against Clark by the Fewell family.

Whenever asked about his connection to the affair, Clark asserted his innocence with great force, claiming he never encountered Fannie Fewell before in an intimate setting. Chosen to represent Clark in his trial were John L. Marye Jr. and Charles Herndon, while the Fewell family hired the Commonwealth's Attorney, and James Clark's replacement in the position, Charles Sinclair as their counsel. Fewell and Merchant spoke to Sinclair about Clark's actions with Fannie, claiming that Clark made no suspicious moves towards Fannie and that there had been no intimacy between them aside from a short, accompanied carriage ride they took together.²⁶ Details regarding Fannie's conduct on the night of the elopement startled the town, as they learned that the young, beautiful girl left Mr. Merchant's house on July 21 and traveled by train to Alexandria, Virginia. During the train ride, Fannie concealed herself in a water chest to escape the eyes of her father, who worked as the depot agent at the train station. Once in Alexandria, Fannie rode away in a carriage along with James Clark, where they took a train to Missouri.²⁷

²⁵ "The Clark Affair," *Alexandria Gazette*, August 26, 1872; "Prince William County Items from the Manassas Gazette," *Alexandria Gazette*, August 26, 1872.

²⁶ "The Case of James F. Clark," *Alexandria Gazette*, August 27, 1872.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

Fannie Fewell became ill with anxiety after her return home, refusing to speak to anyone outside her family and closing off her testimony and further details until her recovery.²⁸ Due to Fannie's illness, the Fewell family delayed Clark's trial until she could tell her side of the story. Though Fannie Fewell refused to see the public and partake in an examination, she released a statement through Charles E. Sinclair. In it, she blamed Clark for her abduction, stating that Mrs. Hynson, a family friend in Manassas, had helped her in the elopement and was told that Clark had separated from his wife forever. Fannie refused to finish the statement as she broke down in excitement.²⁹ William S. Fewell prepared evidence for the upcoming trial, gathering testimonies from Benjamin Merchant and other witnesses who had watched Fannie board the train at Manassas the night she ran away. While the Fewell family prepared their case against James F. Clark, the accused remained in the Brentsville County Jail, waiting to prove his innocence. Held in a felon's cell, James Clark allowed newspaper personnel to enter the cell and talk to him about the affair, but he did nothing but assert his innocence. One reporter recounted his visit to Clark, noting how the man feared for his safety in the prison.

Clark's room contained little but a bed, a table, a fireplace, a tin wash bin, and two chairs. Clark claimed that Mr. Fewell and Fannie's older brother, Lucien Fewell, had

²⁸ "Telegraph News," *Alexandria Gazette*, August 27, 1872.

²⁹ "The Case of Jas. F. Clark," *Alexandria Gazette*, August 28, 1872.

not been friendly with him since his arrival at the prison. Clark stated that he knew the people of Manassas had turned against him since he first advocated for the removal of the courthouse of the county to Manassas. He cited this notion, rather than his plan of eloping with Fannie, as his reason for leaving the county abruptly. Clark noted the security of the prison, saying that the guards had no fear that he would escape and thus had put few officials on duty against the prisoner's request for additional protection. With only one jailer and no guards, Clark understood how easy it would be for someone to assassinate him but claimed that if anyone were to shoot first it would be him, as he did not fear personal harm while in prison.³⁰

Though Clark's comments insinuated that he had no fear, he did worry about the repercussions from the Fewell family. Clark feared Lucien Fewell, who had a violent past, worrying that his safety in the prison was not as secure as he wanted to believe, as a drunken Lucien had been contained and brought back to his family home in Manassas after hearing assassination rumors. The man who had once spoken out for courage in the face of the enemy and respect for women in 1868 was now cowering in jail, accused of abducting the daughter of the town founder.

Lucien Norvell Fewell, born in May of 1854, grew up in Prince William County with his siblings, including his twin brother William Haydon Fewell.³¹ Lucien served

³⁰ "The Case of Jas. F. Clark," *Alexandria Gazette*, August 29, 1872.

³¹ Lucien Fewell and William Haydon Fewell are consistently listed as having the same month and year of birth and being of the same age. 1860 US Census.

in Company H of the 17th Virginia Infantry along with his father and twin brother, enlisting on April 6, 1862 as a private and serving in George Pickett's division at the age of seventeen.³² As the boys began their military careers in the Civil War, William Haydon died on June 30, 1862 in the Battle of Frazier's Farm in Virginia.³³ Heartbroken, Lucien continued to fight at the Second Battle of Bull Run, where he believed he had killed Lieutenant Colonel Fred Pierson of the 1st New York Volunteer Infantry and picked up the fallen officer's sword. For years after the battle, Fewell worked desperately to find the relatives of Pierson, eventually trading them the sword for a double-barrel shotgun.³⁴ For the rest of the war, Lucien fought bravely with his fellow men until his capture outside of Bermuda Hundreds in 1864.³⁵ Captured on July 30, 1864, Lucien Fewell was transferred to Elmira Prison in New York on August 8, 1864. His father desperately searched for his son, putting ads in local papers seeking details on the whereabouts of Lucien. Lucien was eventually released from Elmira Prison on June 19, 1865, returning home to Manassas a changed man.³⁶ After witnessing the horror and

³² "L. N. Fewell," Civil War Soldier Records and Profiles, 1861-1865, accessed on Ancestry.com.

³³ "Company H: Names of Men Who Joined Company H, After September 1, 1861," *History of the Seventeenth Virginia Infantry* C.S.A. (Baltimore: Kelly, Piet & Company, 1870), 299.

³⁴ Lucien N. Fewell to Henry L. Pierson, July 12, 1869.

³⁵ "Lynchburg, Va., Oct 18, 1864," *Richmond Enquirer*, October 20, 1864.

³⁶ "Compiled Service Records of Confederate Soldiers Who Served in Organizations from the State of Virginia: LN Fewell," The National Archives, accessed on Fold3.

carnage of the American Civil War, Lucien became disillusioned with combat and civilian life and frequently integrated the two. During his career as a soldier, Fewell had used violence to stay alive and kill his enemy, a mindset that he could not shed when he returned home.

Immediately following the Civil War, while his town rebuilt itself, Lucien ran into trouble with the law. On February 8, 1868, the case of the *Commonwealth of Virginia v. Lucien N. Fewell* began as George and Thomas Jones accused Lucien of assault and battery. George Jones claimed that Lucien struck him in the face with intent to kill him and “all the dammed Yankees about.” Thomas recounted similar actions taken upon him, stating that Lucien planned on murdering both men. Lucien was found guilty of all charges and sentenced to pay a fine.³⁷ One month later, Lucien faced another charge of assault from James Brawner and W.S. Hynson. Both men recalled Lucien’s attempts to murder them, and he was indicted once again.³⁸ May 12, 1869 brought another assault charge from L. L. Allen, who accused Lucien of assaulting him close to death outside of the town’s Presbyterian Church. Again, Lucien was found guilty by the county court.³⁹ In

³⁷ Ronald Turner, “February 8, 1868: *Commonwealth of Virginia v. Lucien N. Fewell*,” *Clerk’s Lose Papers: Selected Transcripts 1811-1899*, vol. IV (Manassas: RELIC Bull Run Regional Library), 238-239.

³⁸ Turner, “March 14, 1868: *Commonwealth of Virginia v. Lucien N. Fewell*,” *Clerk’s Lose Papers*, vol. IV, 241.

³⁹ Ronald Turner, “May 12, 1869: *Commonwealth of Virginia v. Lucien N. Fewell*,” *Clerk’s Lose Papers: Selected Transcripts 1804-1899: Indictments, Juries, and Trials*, vol. III (Manassas: RELIC Bull Run Regional Library), 91.

1870, there was yet another charge against Lucien Fewell, as Elijah B. Georgia accused Fewell of beating him in front of his family with the intent to kill.⁴⁰ Despite all the charges, Lucien's Confederate military career allowed him to walk free, but he carried a reputation of violence.

Preparations for the trial pushed on as William S. Fewell and Charles E. Sinclair continued to gather evidence to convict Clark. Private letters between Fannie and Clark appeared and were held as evidence against Clark. The letters proved Clark's intentions in the matter, stating that he found her to be a beautiful young lady and a flirt.⁴¹ Sinclair believed in Clark's guilt, stating that he deserved to be punished by the law but not by violence. William S. Fewell promised to not interfere with Clark during the trial but wished he had "blown Clark's brains out" when they arrested him.⁴² William Fewell, overcome by grief, told the public that his daughter had fallen victim to a heinous plot that destroyed her reputation and that of the family. Details soon surfaced of Fannie being taken to Missouri before the marriage, where Clark robbed and abandoned her, angering the Fewell family further. The Fewells had the town's sympathy behind them as they pushed forward with the trial.

Tensions mounted between the Fewell family and James F. Clark with the emergence of more details and evidence against Clark, until the case hit a sudden climax

⁴⁰ Turner, "December 4, 1870: *Commonwealth of Virginia v. Lucian N. Fewell*," *Clerk's Lose Papers*, vol. III, 95.

⁴¹ "James F. Clark," *Alexandria Gazette*, August 29, 1872.

⁴² *Ibid.*

with the murder of James F. Clark by Lucien N. Fewell.⁴³ Before walking into the Brentsville jailhouse on August 31, 1872, Lucien N. Fewell's reputation for assault ran rampant through Manassas, making the news of Clark's murder shocking but not unexpected.

On the night of August 31, Lucien Fewell strolled into the Brentsville Jailhouse with no trouble. He found the front door open with only one jail attendant on duty, who pointed out to Fewell the cell that contained the cowering Clark. Fewell found Clark lying on his bed when he raised his gun through the bars of the cell. Clark, catching sight of the gun, jumped up and fled to the corner of the cell, pleading with Fewell not to shoot. The cries fell on deaf ears, as Lucien Fewell shot seven rounds through the cell door, mortally hitting Clark in the left breast and heart.⁴⁴ Clark threw everything in his cell at Lucien Fewell in a desperate attempt to save himself, but to no avail. Fewell fired his first three shots before help arrived for Clark and was firing his last shot when Major Thornton attempted to arrest him. Fewell left the jail and returned to Manassas, where he gave himself up to the authorities. Once Lucien was in jail, Judge Sinclair ordered eight men be placed outside the jail to act as guards, to keep Lucien from escaping, and to restrict those who might come in.⁴⁵ Back in the cell, Clark laid dying as those around him attempted to save him. Soon after he was shot, Clark was moved to a

⁴³ "The Clark Affair," *Alexandria Gazette*, August 31, 1872.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ "The Clark-Fewell Tragedy," *Alexandria Gazette*, September 2, 1872.

new bed in a cell upstairs, where he died on September 2, 1872.⁴⁶

Lucien Fewell, now held in the same cell in which he shot Clark, became anxious, stating that Clark had to pay for his actions and deserved death and refusing to rest until news of Clark's death came through. Lucien Fewell's primary examination began on September 2, attracting a large crowd from Prince William County whose sympathy lay with Fewell; most believed that Clark deserved assassination. Clark's family hired Charles E. Sinclair, J. Y. Menefee, and ex-Governor of Virginia Henry A. Wise to convict Lucien of murder, while William S. Fewell hired General Eppa Hunton, General William H. Payne, and Henry W. Thomas to represent his son.⁴⁷ Lucien Fewell had no fear of conviction, believing that he was justified in murdering Clark for abducting his sister and diminishing his family name.

Scheduled to begin trial in October, Lucien remained in prison, heavily guarded. After a few illnesses, Lucien Fewell began trial on October 7, 1872 in front of the biggest audience the county courthouse had ever seen. The trial, presided over by Judge Nicol and a carefully selected jury, began with a speech by General Hunton, who moved to wait until November to begin gathering proper

⁴⁶ "The Clark-Fewell Tragedy: Death of James F. Clark," *Alexandria Gazette*, September 3, 1872.

⁴⁷ "The Clark Affair," *Alexandria Gazette*, September 7, 1872; *The Bell Ringer* (Education and Research Committee of the Friends of Brentsville Courthouse Historic Centre Inc., February 2006), 4.

evidence.⁴⁸ Unaware of Clark's death and her brother's imprisonment, Fannie Fewell slowly began to speak up about her experiences to her counsel, blaming Clark solely for seducing and abducting her. This testimony needed to be gathered before the trial could properly begin, and it was approved to be pushed back a month. Forced to wait another month in jail, Lucien decided to attempt escape on October 20 but ultimately failed.⁴⁹

At last, the trial commenced on November 6, 1862 with the opening statements from both sides. The jury for the trial came from the Prince William County, and most had developed a predisposed notion about the case but swore to base their judgments solely on the evidence.⁵⁰ These opinions, however, played a role in the result of the trial as the jurors knew the prominent Fewell family and understood the pain brought upon them by the actions of James F. Clark. The defense based their arguments on the notion that Lucien Fewell lost control of himself due to the angst and grief that overcame him, leading him to uncontrollably shoot Clark.⁵¹

The trial continued, hearing evidence from Lucien Fewell, Major Thornton, Benjamin Merchant, and Miss Fannie Fewell. During the trial, the last details regarding the elopement of Fannie and James Clark arose. Clark took

⁴⁸ "The Fewell Case: Speech of General Hunton—Murder Trial," *Alexandria Gazette*, October 8, 1872.

⁴⁹ "Letter from Brentsville," *Alexandria Gazette*, October 21, 1872.

⁵⁰ "The Fewell Trial," *Alexandria Gazette*, November 2, 1872.

⁵¹ "Prince William County Items," *Alexandria Gazette*, November 2, 1872.

Fannie to New Mexico, Missouri, where he left her with no money, and returned to Washington, D.C. Fannie, with the help and financial aid of the hotel owner, tracked Clark down in Washington, where he robbed her again, leaving her in the Boyles Hotel where Benjamin Merchant found her days later.⁵² Letters exchanged between Fannie and James Clark proved to the jury that the elopement was planned and that Clark had romantic feelings for Fannie while married to his wife Mary, with whom he had two daughters.⁵³ Fannie Fewell's testimony became the most important piece of evidence against Clark, as she blatantly blamed him for the elopement. She included the aliases Clark used to travel with, as he changed both his and Fannie's names several times for hotel records. This secrecy proved to the jury that Clark planned his actions and did so in a manner to not be discovered by the public or the Fewell family. Fannie blamed Mrs. Hynson, the family friend who aided her elopement, for the content of the love letters written to Clark, pushing all the blame off her in an attempt to salvage her reputation.⁵⁴

After Fannie's testimony, Judge Nicol made it clear that if the jury found Lucien Fewell as having suffered from temporary insanity, he would be acquitted of all charges. Following the testimony, instructions were given to the jury to follow in the decision of the case. These instructions dictated that if the jury believed that the "act complained was the offspring or product of mental disease

⁵² "The Fewell Trial," *Alexandria Gazette*, November 2, 1872.

⁵³ "The Fewell Trial," *Alexandria Gazette*, November 9, 1872.

⁵⁴ "The Fewell Trial," *Alexandria Gazette*, November 10, 1872.

in the prisoner,” then the delusion in the planning and execution of the murder would not render Fewell responsible for the act.⁵⁵ Thus, on November 13, 1872, Lucien N. Fewell was acquitted of the murder of James F. Clark on the basis of insanity and disease of the mind. The jury declared Fewell temporarily insane, claiming that he suffered from “diseases of the mind, [that left him] so affected thereby as to render him irresponsible for such [an] act.”⁵⁶ Lucien’s brave and heroic actions during the Civil War may have also influenced the jury, as they could have found it difficult to convict a man who fought nobly for Confederate Virginia. Demands of Southern honor played a large role in his acquittal, as the customs of the time demanded a response to the damage upon Fannie’s reputation, a response given by Lucien’s vicious actions against Clark. Lucien Fewell was released from prison to a large and applauding crowd, welcomed with congratulations as he made his way home to Manassas.⁵⁷

Lucien continued to suffer from “temporary insanity,” as his criminal actions did not dissipate following his 1872 acquittal. The following year, Lucien Fewell was charged with assaulting and stabbing Charles L. Hynson, the husband of James Clark’s aid in kidnapping Fannie. Fewell was charged with attempted murder but found not

⁵⁵ “The Fewell Trial,” *Alexandria Gazette*, November 13, 1872.

⁵⁶ “The End of the Fewell Trial: Acquittal of the Prisoner,” *Alexandria Gazette*, November 14, 1872.

⁵⁷ “The Argument in the Fewell Case,” *Alexandria Gazette*, November 15, 1872.

guilty based on insanity.⁵⁸ Fewell then assaulted his own wife, Sarah E. Fewell, and was charged with assault by Charles Brawner in 1876. This offense landed Lucien in prison, but he was released once again due to temporary insanity.⁵⁹ Sarah left Lucien Fewell not long after the assault, and he married Mary Jane Maples in 1880. Lucien decided to move to New Mexico to raise his two children with Mary,⁶⁰ but his new home did not keep him from legal trouble.

The Baltimore Sun reported that Lucien Fewell had been arrested in Santa Fe for the murder of several men and was in jail awaiting trial in 1888.⁶¹ Acquitted, Lucien began work as a carpenter in New Mexico before accepting a job as a stagecoach driver.⁶² He was fired and given the nickname “Piston John” for shooting at men while driving.⁶³ Lucien’s final act of assault came in 1900 when he pleaded guilty to assault with the intent of murder and was sentenced to two years in prison.⁶⁴ From there, Lucien Norvell Fewell disappeared from the record books, dying sometime before 1910.

⁵⁸ Turner, “December 10, 1873: Commonwealth of Virginia v. Lucian N. Fewell,” *Clerk’s Lose Papers*, vol. III (Manassas: RELIC Bull Run Regional Library), 116.

⁵⁹ Turner, “Commonwealth v. Lucien N. Fewell,” *Clerk’s Lose Papers*, vol. III (Manassas: RELIC Bull Run Regional Library), 110.

⁶⁰ 1890 US Census, accessed on Ancestry.com.

⁶¹ “Items from Piedmont, Virginia,” *Baltimore Sun*, January 9, 1888.

⁶² 1890 US Census.

⁶³ *New Mexican* (Santa Fe, New Mexico), April 21, 1893; *New Mexican*, March 2, 1894.

⁶⁴ *Albuquerque Daily Citizen*, October 1, 1900.

Lucien Fewell lived a life filled with criminal charges and murder, all caused by his experiences during the American Civil War. With the loss of his twin brother, his desperate and remorseful search for the family of the man he killed in battle, and his capture by Union forces, Lucien most likely suffered from combat-induced mental illness and may have been unaware of what he was doing during the acts. Civil War battlefield combat was often concentrated and personal, as most troops fought on the ground facing their enemy at close distances. Lucien suffered for almost three years in combat, witnessing the death of his twin brother along with numerous other comrades, and he experienced poor health and living conditions while at Elmira Prison. This intense exposure to trauma caused Lucien to suffer from mental illness for the rest of his life, leading him to become a violent and viscous person at times. Lucien's life following the Civil War was filled with anguish, violence, and tragedy, and he took his problems out on the citizens of Prince William County.

Lucien's experience during the Reconstruction Era was not uncommon, as many Civil War veterans suffered from combat-induced psychological trauma. Following the war, soldiers returned home with the notion that mental illness equated to manly weakness or underlying physical ailments and thus shied away from society or acted out to prove their manliness. The Civil War generation did not fully understand the concept of insanity and mental illness and often did not know how to treat those who suffered

from post-combat trauma.⁶⁵ Known as “irritable heart,” mental illness ran rampant with the veterans of the American Civil War, and conditions were so wretched that men often suffered until they experienced some type of psychological breakdown.⁶⁶ Many noticed that veterans were sometimes strangely silent or experienced inexplicable bursts of rage and violence.⁶⁷

For many men, the American Civil War was their first exposure to death, battle, and tragedy, as well as the shock, sounds, and horrific sights associated with war.⁶⁸ While soldiers suffered horrible hygiene and physical conditions, studies have found that prisoners of war also dealt with the difficult conditions of boredom, physical cruelty, disease, deprivation, and significant weight loss, resulting in psychological problems that lingered and intensified for years after the end of the war.⁶⁹ Prisoners of war were frequently kept in close quarters next to each other, which was fine at the beginning of the war when they were only kept for a few days before being returned or exchanged back to familiar faces. In the later years of the Civil War, however, the men were no longer quickly or routinely returned to their own side of the war but remained

⁶⁵ Eric T. Dean Jr., “‘We Will All Be Lost and Destroyed:’ Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and the Civil War,” *Civil War History* 37, no. 2 (June 1991): 139.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 142.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 150.

⁶⁸ Eric T. Dean Jr., *Shook Over Hell: Post-Traumatic Stress, Vietnam, and the Civil War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 70.

⁶⁹ Dean, *Shook Over Hell*, 81.

in prison camps until they died or were set free at the end of the war. Prisoners were frequently abused in the camps, adding to their psychological trauma.⁷⁰ These experiences in the Civil War lead to the exposure to intense scenes of death and suffering that produced a variety of stress reactions in soldiers and prisoners of war. These stress reactions caused men to suffer from flashbacks, extreme anxiety, depression, nightmares, cognitive disorders, and, in some cases, extreme violence.⁷¹ The violence of the Civil War quickly spilled into civilian life, as soldiers who were trained to kill threw off the restraints of society and accepted a disillusioned life of increased violence. This led to an increase in crime around the nation during the era of Reconstruction.⁷²

Leaving his family in Manassas for the warfront certainly affected Lucien Fewell. The tragic death of his twin brother just months after joining the army was traumatizing, and it was made worse when Lucien had to leave him behind on the battlefield. Although Civil War soldiers frequently adjusted to war and the deaths of comrades, many expressed great emotion when the victim was a close friend or family member.⁷³ Lucien continued to fight, feeling remorseful and guilty due to his role in the death of a Union stranger. After several more months, Lucien was taken from his surrogate family of Company H to Elmira Prison, facing harsh conditions all while being

⁷⁰ Ibid., 82.

⁷¹ Ibid., 87.

⁷² Ibid., 98-99.

⁷³ Ibid., 73.

surrounded by death and disease. These events in Lucien Fewell's Civil War career left him a scarred man, and he returned home filled with violence, rage, and disappointment over the loss of his brother and his nation. James Clark gave Lucien the perfect outlet for such anger, as Clark not only attacked his sister's reputation but the reputation of his family and fallen brother. Deemed "insane," Fewell got off with murder when no one could understand the processes running through his mind. This was the reality for many veterans who returned home from witnessing first-hand the carnage and destruction of the American Civil War. With no outlet for their mental illness, many went into solitude or acted out in violence as Lucien Fewell did in Manassas, Virginia.

Following the Fewell Trial of 1872, the town of Manassas continued to grow and prosper. The town became incorporated in 1873, officially becoming a town in Prince William County, Virginia. In 1892, the county seat moved from Brentsville to Manassas, just years after the incarceration of James Clark and Lucien Fewell. Fannie Fewell married James Edgar Trimmer in 1874, changing her name to Frances Sanford Trimmer to conceal her tarnished reputation.⁷⁴ She had four children before dying from exhaustion in 1914. William S. Fewell and his new wife, Virginia, moved from Manassas to Alexandria in 1881, leaving behind the town he founded as well as the place that ruined his family's name.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ 1880 US Census.

⁷⁵ 1890 US Census.

Reconstruction hit the Fewell family with great force, as the family founded Manassas but dealt with the abduction of their daughter and the murder trial of their trauma-stricken son. Manassas during Reconstruction was not unlike the rest of the former Confederacy in that it dealt with the physical and psychological wounds of a post-war America. Manassas suffered physically and psychologically during Reconstruction, as the town continued to work on rebuilding infrastructure and learned to deal with its citizens suffering from war-caused mental illnesses. Manassas during Reconstruction was a place of growing and learning, and the town learned more about those living in it, as well as how to function as a town. The Fewell-Clark Affair tested the town's citizens in supporting two of the most prominent families within its borders during a time of rebuilding and change. The Fewell trail tested Manassas'—as well as Prince William County's—ability to handle its citizens' suffering from war-related mental illnesses, as they worked on incorporating Civil War veterans back into society. Manassas rebuilt its town, memorialized the dead who fought in the battle with a new cemetery and battlefield, and worked to help those still suffering from its effects psychologically and physically as they returned home. The experience of the Fewell family is much like that of the United States during Reconstruction: stricken by tragedy but continuously growing.

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