

J. Warren Keifer's Civil War Tablet Dedication Address (1885)

On Commencement Day in 1885, Antioch College dedicated a marble tablet to memorialize its students who had died in the American Civil War. The Hon. J. Warren Keifer, then just months removed from a four term hitch in the US Congress (one as Speaker of the House), gave the following dedicatory address. Keifer came from nearby Springfield, had briefly been a student in the 1850s, and was himself a veteran of the Union Army. He enlisted in April 1861 at the outbreak of war, was elected an officer by his company, and by 1864 was brevetted to major general for

gallant and meritorious service

in several battles with the 110th Ohio Volunteer Infantry. So respected was he that, despite the infirmities of age and girth, President William McKinley made him a general of volunteers in the Spanish American War. Appointed a trustee of Antioch College in 1873, Keifer would serve the Board for nearly sixty years.

The notes for his address are typed on his law office letterhead in the purple ink common to 19th century typewriters, and are replete with a wide variety of abbreviations reproduced exactly as they appear in the original text. After calling the roll, Keifer relates the exploits and death of Marion Ross, perhaps the most valorous of all the Antiochians who died in the War Between the States. His comments indicate just how little reconciliation between North and South had actually taken place twenty years after the war had ended. Following a requisite accounting of republican virtue, Keifer concludes with an over-the-top description of Horace Mann, full of the martial air of a military man, and the hero worship so many Antiochians have and have had for their college's first president.

Law Offices

J. Warren Keifer

Springfield, Ohio

Mr. President: Friends of Antioch College: Comrades:

The tablet placed here is to commemorate the lives, and perpetuate the names of those, who, in the earliest days of Antioch College, while in the pursuit of knowledge, to fit them for life and eternity, mustered in these halls; then a little later on fields of tumultuous war's wild carnage, and who now muster beyond the grave in that great great army of immortals, called, died for their country.

The thirty one names, here engraved in marble, can be found on the rolls of nearly as many regiments and separate military organizations of the US Army.

Killed

Ten or more of this number died on the field, where they fell amid the fury of the battle, and on the scene of their heroism. They were of the mangled slain. Others of the number met the same fate.

Here is this dead list

1. [Captain] Chas. Oren [student, 1855-1858]

5th Reg't. Col. Inf'y [the 5th Colored Infantry was formed out of the 127th Ohio Volunteers in 1863]

Killed. Petersburg, Va. 1864.

2. Lt. Thos. B. Burkholder [1860-1862]

8 OV [Ohio Volunteer] Cavalry.

Killed at Martinsburg, Va. 1864.

3. John P. Cost [1856-1859]

49 OVI [Ohio Volunteer Infantry]

Killed

Liberty Gap [TN], June 20 1863.

4. Folger Howell [1857-1858]

44 OVI

Died Nov 1864 from wounds received at Beverly, Va., Oct. 1864.

5. John Lapham [1858-1861]

?32 OVI [44th Ohio Volunteer Infantry]

Killed

6. Albert T. Miller [1858-1861]

44 OVI

Killed at Liberty W. Va.

7. Capt. Wm. A. Hathaway. [class of 1859] 110th Ohio Vol. Inf

Killed

Monocacy Maryland July 9th. 1864.

8. Lt. James B. Cross [1853-1858]

94th Ohio Vol. Inf

Killed at Resaca, Ga. May 14th. 1864.

9. Wm. H. Smith [1854-1859]

74th. Ohio Vol. Inf

Killed

Stone[s] River, New Years Day, 1863.

10. H.W. Hall, [1858-1860] - Killed at Resaca [GA].

Died of Wounds.

[Three] others of this number are known to have died from wounds received in battle. Fuller information will increase the list of those who died of wounds. I give their names.

1. Lt. Israel Ludlow [1854-1857]

Gunther's Regular Battery

Died at Cin. Of wounds received at Chickamauga, Ga.

2. Sam'l G. Brown [1854-1856]

8th OVC

Died of wounds May 23, 1885

3. Wm. P. Long [1855-1856]

2nd OVI

Died Feb'y. 14 1863 in field hospital on Stones River battlefield, of wounds.

Died of Disease.

Seven of those named are reported to have died of disease contracted in the service of their country, but the report is incomplete.

Their names are as follows:

1. Edward J. Hosmer [1861-1862]

[52nd] Mass. Reg

Died of disease

Baton Rouge, La.

2. Nathaniel J. King [1857-1861]

154, 184 OVI

Died of disease

Nashville, April 20th

[1865].

3. Edward A. Kellogg [1857-1862]

5 OVC

Died at Cincinnati of disease contracted at Pittsburgh Landing [TN], 1862.

4. Alex'r Mcl. Armstrong [no record]

8 OVI

Died of disease, 1864.

5. Wm. H. Alexander [class of 1860]

110 OVI

Died of disease, 1865.

6. John Lawrence [1855-1856]

5 OVI

Died of disease, 1862.

7. Osborn Lynn [1855-1857], 8 OVI

Died, 1864.

More men die in war from disease, than from the sword, the bayonet and the bullet.

About nine per centum of all who went into the Union Army in the late war, died before peace came; five ninths from disease, and four ninths from mortal wounds.

Died in Prison.

W.B. Perkins [1858-1862]

87th Ohio Vol. Inf't., and Henry Clay Patten [1860-1864], are known to have died in Andersonville Prison in Georgia.

Unknown Fate.

Others of this list may have met the same or a like fate.

Beyond the fact of their death as soldiers or sailors, I am without information as to the military organization, or the times, places, or causes of the death of OP Fairfield [1857-1858], J Silsby [1860-1862], JW Teeter [1860-1861], Andrew Dodds [whose family business made the monument, 1858-1860], BF Jacobs [1855-1861], James Coppock [1855-1856] and Joshua Peck [1859-1861], whose names also appear on this memorial tablet.

The name of Rhoderic Dhu Yeoman, an early Antioch student and graduate [there is no record of Rhoderic Yeoman], under Horace Mann, appears on this tablet. He died, in 1861, in the Confederate Army. It is known that he was teaching in the South when the war broke out, and having recently gone there from the North, was at once suspected, and compelled to enlist in the Confederate Army. He did not bear arms but served in the capacity of a musician.

It remains to mention Marion A. Ross [1855-1862], Sergeant Major of the 2nd Ohio Volunteer Infantry. He, as was each of the others whose names appear on the tablet, was a hero and a martyr, but his tragic death made him something more.

On June 18th 1862, after hope of a better fate had possessed him and others of his comrades in the same prison, who had been taken prisoner with him while on an expedition to capture a train of cars and burn bridges in Georgia and Tennessee, he was summoned, with six others, to go immediately from a prison to a scaffold. He was hung. Six others were hung at the same time under the same circumstances, after conviction on the same false charge of being spies.

Marion A. Ross was one of a party of twenty four who set out from Shelbyville, Tenn. On April 7th 1862 for the purpose of capturing a locomotive and cars, at or near Marietta, Ga. And with a view to run them via Chattanooga, Bridgeport and Stevenson to Huntsville Ala. to meet Gen'l OM Mitchell's Division of the Union Army; destroying railroad bridges en route. The train was captured by 20 of the party as planned, on April 12th, 1862, at Big Shanty, Ga. and after running the engine about 75 miles and doing some comparatively unimportant damage to the railroad, they were, on the same day, obliged to abandon the engine and cars and attempt to escape singly or in small parties. The party of twenty was soon made prisoners, with two others of the expedition who did not participate in the capture.

Their sufferings in captivity were without a parallel in the annals of cruelty.

The object sought to be accomplished by the expedition was novel in war. The attempt to attain success was boldly made, and it only failed because of misfortunes and accidents which could not be guarded against. The members of the party struggled bravely, but in vain, against fate.

When captives, they each bore starvation and cruel treatment heroically, and none with more Christian resignation than Marion A. Ross. The leader of the party, JJ Andrews, was hung first, then seven others including Marion A. Ross. Eight of the party escaped in Oct. 1862, and six were exchanged in March 1863. Two of the original party did not reach the rendezvous, and in time reached the Union lines. Ross was convicted of being a spy, the penalty of which is death. On his trial no proof was offered to show what he and those with him did. The judgment of

history is, that he was hung for what he was not guilty of, and that, as a soldier, he had a right to go disguised as a citizen, within the enemy's lines, and then make open war. The Confederate authorities expressly authorized their own soldiers to dress in citizens

clothes, and sometimes in the US uniform, on expeditions within the Union lines, guerillas of the Confederate service practiced all manner of deception: they were never judged to be spies. The friends of Marion A. Ross deeply deplored his seeming ignominious death, but all the circumstances taken together, twenty two years after his death, his surviving friends and college mates may take pleasure in dedicating here a marble tablet on which is inscribed his name among other dead heroes of Antioch College, who, from these hallowed halls, went down to battle and to honorable death in the cause of law and liberty.

This however, is not the occasion on which to give, in full, the life, services, and death of these fallen soldiers. It is enough to know that they voluntarily went forth in their country's sorest hour of trial, and with their lives, paid the penalty of devotion to duty and country. These martyrs fought and fell on widely distant fields, and their hearts blood was drunk in by mother earth, on mountain slope, hillside and valley. Many of the number lie buried in ground consecrated alone by their own blood.

They fought under [Ulysses S.] Grant, in opening the Mississippi to the Gulf:- they fought with him also on the Atlantic coast; they fought and marched with Sherman to Atlanta, thence to the Sea; they fought and died under [George H.] Thomas, [James B.] McPherson, [George G.] Meade and [Philip H.] Sheridan, in other great campaigns and battles.

Representatives of Antioch College were on the hundred great battlefields of the war. They were found, when war clouds were lowering, along the highway of duty. They suffered and died on the march, in camp, in battle, in prison and hospital. The list is not yet complete.

It is noticeable that this tablet is in honor of the dead representative soldier, and in no sense in commemoration of the noble-born or high ruler.

But little of the past history of the world chronicles the acts of the people, save only such acts as are incident to the lives of Emperors, Kings and courts, Admirals, Generals, and Field-marsals and those who have ruled and commanded. Little or no space has been devoted to the annals of the people, except only to note the number who fell fighting for ducal, kingly or imperial crowns for the heads of hereditary sovereigns. Our country is not, however, without a sovereign, but its sovereign is, happily, found in the individual, disenthralled, universal free-man of the Republic.

Collectively, these individual free sovereigns are Supreme. In this country of organized liberty, governmental power emanates from, and is exercised by, and over one sovereignty'the people. We weave crowns for all mankind in our constitutional government. Such crowns grace and fit alike the heads of all citizens of the Republic. By our National organic act, all are made equal before the law, and the government is shorn of all power to oppress the most lowly.

As the supremest attainable thing secured by the late war, we may name the fact that there was for the first and only time in all the ages, a great nation firmly established, resting on the

brotherhood of mankind, guaranteeing equal rights to all, and over which, under written law, the people reign over themselves.

The honors bestowed upon the fallen heroes of Antioch by here writing their names in imperishable marble, to be read and commented on by the generations to come, must not be regarded as a reward of valor in battle alone, but more a tribute to patriotism and virtue, and in no sense a tribute to war.

The students of Antioch College ought to have been patriots. They early drank in a love of liberty. From the lips and teachings of Horace Mann, its first President, and the greatest philanthropist of the century, probably of the Christian Era, lessons of universal brotherhood among men, were learned, and unalterable hostility to oppression and slavery, was deeply instilled.

Filled, as Horace Mann was, in resemblance of the Savior of the World, with love for all mankind, yet, when he encountered wrong in his track he scourged it from his sight with that righteous indignation Christ exhibited when he drove the money changers from the temple.

Horace Mann was, also, in a large sense a hero and a martyr to the cause of humanity.

In early life, he too, on rostrum, in pulpit, and through the press proclaimed liberty throughout the land to all the inhabitants thereof.

He fought through the years and finally fell, battling, not in vain, on the field of public opinion. He preached, peace and good will to men; but with the broad battle-ax of a great moral giant, always uplifted, or always descending with fatal result upon the head of the oppressor and the wrong doer. His war cry against slavery was heard around and to the confines of the civilized world.

When the great statesman Daniel Webster of the State of Massachusetts and others, openly excused and apologized for human slavery, Horace Mann went forth, armed with the trinity of truth, justice and mercy, and successfully overthrew them upon their chosen ground.

By the force of his logic, in the high courts of the country, he swept away the barbarism of the law and wrung from them a decision, holding that a philanthropist, who sought only to set at liberty those whom God and nature had made free, or to strike the shackles from the limbs of human slaves, could not, within the shadow of the Goddess of Liberty perched on the dome of his country's Capitol, be convicted as a felon.

His voice was also heard, defiant and strong, when good men faltered, in the halls of Congress, demanding freedom in the name of the God of Justice, and pleading for that mercy Christ taught, from Mount Hattin, for the enslaved black-man.

In this chapel, from this rostrum, he preached a crusade against wrong, and enlightened and convinced the minds and softened and purified the hearts of these now heroes, whose immortal spirits have ascended from hospital, battle-field, prison-pen and scaffold to unite with his at the foot of the throne of God.

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