

Howard University

## Digital Howard @ Howard University

---

Newspaper Clippings

Oliver Otis Howard Collection

---

2-6-1910

### Lincoln and General Howard - Newspaper Article - photostat

O.O. Howard Collection

Follow this and additional works at: [https://dh.howard.edu/ooh\\_news](https://dh.howard.edu/ooh_news)

---

#### Recommended Citation

Collection, O.O. Howard, "Lincoln and General Howard - Newspaper Article - photostat" (1910). *Newspaper Clippings*. 2.

[https://dh.howard.edu/ooh\\_news/2](https://dh.howard.edu/ooh_news/2)

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by the Oliver Otis Howard Collection at Digital Howard @ Howard University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Newspaper Clippings by an authorized administrator of Digital Howard @ Howard University. For more information, please contact [digitalservices@howard.edu](mailto:digitalservices@howard.edu).

# LINCOLN AND GENERAL HOWARD

Like all true lovers of humanity, President Lincoln hated grafters, big and small. He didn't hate them simply for the sake of hating them, but he did hate to see them take what belonged to somebody else who might have need of it. And so when the time came for measures to protect and care for the refugees, freedmen and abandoned lands that had come into the Nation's hands as a sacred charge imposed by victory in the war he looked about for some one he could intrust with this charge with the assurance that all of the money to be provided for the relief of the wandering and war-impooverished millions of blacks and whites should be used for them and them only and a strict accounting given of every tract in the vast acreage that had come into the custody of the Government.

If Lincoln had not been a shrewd judge of men, as all great executives are, his simple hatred of the grafters might not have guided him to the proper selection of an individual for a task of such vast responsibility. As it was, there was little chance of a mistake. He had tested men in the white-hot crucible of civil strife and from them he selected one whose mettle had the true ring. One of his last official acts as President was to send a letter to General O. O. Howard, asking him to take charge of the proposed bureau of refugees, freedmen and abandoned lands.

A few years later, men of that class which Lincoln hated declared that he had chosen the wrong man. With a great display of patriotic regard for right administration of government affairs, they demanded an investigation of the conduct of General Howard in his new office. They had sprung a sensation, and the newspapers, even though they were not so yellow then as they are now, were full of it.

It was on a Monday that the charges against the venerable veteran with the one arm were spread broadcast through the press before the public eye. It was only three days afterward that General Howard and his wife came home from prayer meeting in the evening and found in the parlor of their modest home a costly new piano. On top of it was a handsome cover, with this inscription, wrought in needle work:

"Blessed are ye when men shall revile you and persecute you and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake."

Somebody besides Lincoln had confidence in General Howard, and had taken a beautiful way to show it. Thirty years later the piano was completely refitted by the firm which made it, and is now in the home of the General's widow, at Burlington, Vt. It is one of her most precious possessions, but she says she would give it up a thousand times before she would part with the cover.

### Lincoln's Choice Vindicated.

The investigation of General Howard's bureau was conducted. It resulted in complete exoneration for the head and official commendation for his able, self-sacrificing and energetic work. The grafters who had been unable to get their hands on the public lands and moneys because the one-armed soldier stood in the way were baffled. And once again was Lincoln's wisdom vindicated. The hand of the dead pilot was still felt on the rudder of the Ship of State.

General Howard died last October, 1909. He was one of the last survivors of the men who played a leading part in the greatest drama of American history. Newark claims a familiar acquaintance with him in his later life, as he ap-



Born 1830  
Died 1909  
*Olin Olin Howard*

peared in public many times in this locality and visited frequently at the home of his son, Major James W. Howard, of 234 Mt. Prospect avenue.

It was local interest in General Howard that suggested this article. A Newarker sent to the Sunday Call a copy of a poem entitled "The Empty Sleeve," which was inspired by the general, with a request that it be published, together with an explanation of the circumstances under which it was written.

At the battle of Fair Oaks, also known as Seven Pines, General Howard was wounded in the wrist. Three horses were shot under him. As the last one went down he received another bullet, which struck his right arm just above the elbow, shattering the bones of the upper arm. Up to this time the general had kept in the thick of the fight, encouraging his men. The second wound left him in a bad way, but he managed slowly and painfully to work his way to the rear, out of the hall of bullets.

In a short time his strength failed him.

A young officer carrying a message to the rear came along and found him sitting helpless, with his back against a tree. This officer was no other than General Joseph W. Plume, now president of the Manufacturers' National Bank, of this city. He spoke a few words of encouragement to the wounded man, whom he did not know, and hurried on to where an emergency field hospital had been established. At his urgent request men were sent out with a stretcher and the wounded officer was brought where he could be cared for.

In the surprisingly short space of eight weeks from the time he came so near losing his life the armless commander was again at the head of his troops. But in the meantime, when he was supposed to be home recovering from his injuries, he traveled from place to place, exhorting men to go to the front. In this way he raised two regiments. The empty sleeve was eloquent.

How the Poem Was Written.  
One of the places where he spoke was

RD

One of Martyr Presidents Last Official Acts Was to Ask General Howard to Take Charge of Freedmen's Bureau—Facts in the Life of a Soldier Whom Many Newarkers Knew :: :: ::

the city of Bangor. In the audience was a native Australian, David Barker. Upon him, as well as the others, the appeal of the man from the front made a profound impression. When he went home he wrote, in honor of General Howard, the poem known as "The Empty Sleeve." This is what he penned:

'By the moon's pale light to a gazing throng,  
Let me tell one tale, let me sing one song;  
'Tis a tale devoid of an aim or plan,  
'Tis a simple song of a one-arm man.  
Till this very hour I could ne'er believe  
What a tell-tale thing is an empty sleeve—  
What a weird, queer thing is an empty sleeve.

"It tells in a silent tone to all  
Of a country's need and a country's call,  
Of a kiss and a tear for a child and wife,  
And a hurried march for a nation's life,  
Till this very hour who could e'er believe  
What a tell-tale thing is an empty sleeve—  
What a weird, queer thing is an empty sleeve.

"It tells of a battlefield of gore—  
Of the sabre's clash—of the cannon's roar—  
Of the deadly charge—of the bugle's note—  
Of a gurgling sound in a foeman's throat—  
Of the whizzing grape—of the fiery shell—  
Of a scene which mimics the scenes of hell,  
Till this very hour would you e'er believe  
What a tell-tale thing is an empty sleeve—  
What a weird, queer thing is an empty sleeve.

"Though it points to a myriad wounds and scars,  
Yet it tells that a flag with the stripes and stars,  
In God's own chosen time will take  
Each place of the rag with the rattlesnake;  
And it points to a time when that flag shall wave  
O'er a land where there breathes no cowering slave.  
To the top of the skies let us all then heave  
One proud huzza for the empty sleeve—  
For the one-arm man with the empty sleeve."

The poem was written in 1863. It may not have the finer points of classic verse, but it speaks in human tones and voices the spirit which sent those two regiments to the front.

**General Howard's Other Wounds.**

The empty sleeve was not the only evidence General Howard bore on his person of patriotic self-devotion and loyalty to principle. It was not generally known, even among his host of friends and acquaintances, that his war experience cost him two toes as well. One was cut through by a sabre stroke and the other was torn off by a shell, which took off the head of a boy who passed close to him, carrying ammunition.

The manner in which he received his first wound was characteristic. It was before the war, when he was a cadet at West Point, from which he was graduated in 1854. At that time the superintendent of the institution was Robert E. Lee, afterward commander-in-chief of the forces of the Confederacy.

The negro question was a frequent cause of heated argument between Northerners and Southerners at the Military Academy. One day at dinner a conversation started about the colored man and a youth from one of the Southern States remarked:

"We treat niggers as cattle, and kill 'em when we like."

Howard, who sat just across the table, looked at the young man who had spoken, and said, in a severe tone of reprimand, loud enough for all those around to hear: "Colored people have a right to live, sir."

At the word the Southerner leaped from his chair. In a fit of fury he seized a heavy glass tumbler and brought it down with all his might on Howard's head. The injury might easily have been fatal, but the victim of the assault was hard-headed in more senses than one, and recovered after he had been laid up for four months. It was hard digging for him to catch up with his class, for the course at West Point is not play; but he did it and graduated with fourth honors.

What an injury that enemy of the colored race would have done to it if his blow had struck home to the seat of mortality! It would have deprived them of one of the greatest helpers and protectors they had in the years of their struggles following the Civil War. It would have left for somebody else, or nobody, the task of founding the Lincoln Memorial University, which was to do so much for the elevation of the colored South. It would have saved a sound and able body from further mutilation by the enemies of the negro, but it would have ended a career that put hope and inspiration into many a white breast as well as into many a black one. It was a terrible and a Godlike vengeance that the Union soldier, Howard, wreaked upon the oppressor of the black man for that one murderous blow.

**A Bad Day for the Howards.**

Fair Oaks, it might be recalled in passing, was a bad day for the Howards. General C. H. Howard, a brother of Oliver Otis and then a lieutenant, was badly wounded in the left leg and barely saved his life by working his way to the field hospital in the rear, using the scabbard of his sword as a support for his tottering steps.

General O. O. Howard was a graduate of Bowdoin College, as well as of West Point. He won popularity as an author and an orator and fame as a soldier. But he always treated the meanest human being as his brother or his sister.

"Be courteous," was his advice to younger officers. "Use a request when it will do as well as a command."

The man whom Lincoln honored with so great a responsibility never for a moment permitted the importance of his mission in life to prevent him from stooping to the simplest acts of kindness. As age came on he did not realize the weakened frame could not withstand the burdens of sturdier years, and he literally gave his life in response to the call of duty.

Thus another name that is familiar as a household word of patriotism has been stricken from the roll call since the last Lincoln's Birthday. Another immortal jewel crowns the fame of his great chief. As the years and the men pass, the galaxy becomes brighter, each adding lustre to the brightest of all. For his wisdom made it possible for them to be what they were. He read them as an open book and to each, in so far as in his power lay, assigned the task for which he was best fitted. And so the majesty of the character of Lincoln has been gradually unfolding, as the knowledge of his influence upon men has become felt and understood. There are those now who regard him as the greatest American. Time is certainly adding to the evidence upon which they base their claim.