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## An honorable problem: A case study in the pursuit of honor in the antebellum and Civil War South

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**An honorable problem: A case study in the pursuit of honor in the  
antebellum and Civil War South**

by

**Kelsey Joann Sissel**

A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Major: History

Program of Study Committee:  
Kathleen Hilliard, Major Professor  
Lawrence T. McDonnell  
Susan E. Cross

The student author, whose presentation of the scholarship herein was approved by the program of study committee, is solely responsible for the content in this thesis. The Graduate College will ensure this thesis is globally accessible and will not permit alterations after a degree is conferred.

Iowa State University

Ames, Iowa

2020

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**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iii
ABSTRACT.....	v
INTRODUCTION: PART I.....	1
PART II.....	8
CONCLUSION: PART III.....	35
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	38

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I have been extremely lucky to have grown up with two amazing parents who have always encouraged me to follow my passions and turn them into something great. And while this work is a far-cry from the greatness I still hope to achieve in my lifetime, I do hope it does not reflect too poorly on their parenting nor on the unconditional love and support they have given me through the years. I love you both.

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Very gratefully and humbly,

Kelsey Joann Sissel

**ABSTRACT**

This work uses the life of one man, Brigadier General Maxcy Gregg, to assess the life cycle of honor using newspapers, personal correspondence, pamphlets, and eulogies. Through early blunders with the public performance of honor, Gregg showcases honor's relative flexibility as he grew into his role as an honorable southern gentleman as the South edged closer and closer to Civil War. As he came into his own, Gregg asserted his claim to honor through local political office, military service, and finally as a radical secessionist who helped lead South Carolina into armed rebellion against the union between the states. With his death at the Battle of Fredericksburg, Gregg cemented his legacy as an honorable man.

## INTRODUCTION: PART I

On December 15, 1862, Brigadier General Maxcy Gregg of the Army of Northern Virginia was shot off his horse. Douglas Southall Freeman wrote in his 1943 *Lee's Lieutenants* that Gregg had been attempting to reign in his men as the Federals attacked a gap in the line at Fredericksburg. A curious moment in the history of the war, "in his deafness [Gregg] became confused and mistook the attacking Federals for retiring Confederates who might be shot down by his men."<sup>1</sup> As the Union advanced Orr's Rifles (the regiment to Gregg's right) turned and fled creating a gap between the rushing Federals and the retreating Confederates. It was into this gap that Gregg rode to order a cease fire where "Gregg, directly between his retreating soldiers and the pursuing Federals, was shot from his horse."<sup>2</sup> Having stopped the incursion into the gap the First South Carolina was reinforced by General Jubal Early's brigades that had, up to this point, been held in reserve. As they pushed the Union back toward the Rappahannock, "Some of the advancing officers remembered [...] they had seen a man pull himself painfully up by the side of a little tree, and wave them onward. It was Maxcy Gregg."<sup>3</sup>

Accolades for the fallen general echoed across the Confederacy as comrades, friends, and family eulogized one of the South's earliest and most radical secessionist stalwarts. During his lifetime, Gregg epitomized antebellum southern values and lived a life of honor. His eulogist, Benjamin Palmer, summed up Gregg's life in this way:

Inheriting a more than Roman virtue from his honored sire, it grew in him to such a robustness and symmetry as to command the homage of universal reverence. To say that he was incapable of falsehood, in any of the forms in which it is acted among men, would present but the coarse profile of his immaculate truthfulness. The historian must say of him more than this; that he could not stoop even to those minor indirections which creep unwittingly into human intercourse, and which are almost sanctioned by the usage of society. His simple word was the gauge of honor, and was always accepted as his surest pledge. His

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<sup>1</sup> Douglas Southall Freeman, *Lee's Lieutenants*, vol. II (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1943), 355-356.

<sup>2</sup> Freeman, *Lee's Lieutenants*, 356.

<sup>3</sup> Freeman, *Lee's Lieutenants*, 357.

innate sense of right, which could not inflict a wilful [*sic*] wrong, looked with a cultivated resentment upon the wrong perpetrated by another; and as the arbiter [*sic*] of many a dispute, the honor of a friend was confided to a guardian whose jealousy would not suffer it to be tarnished with a stain.<sup>4</sup>

Palmer's tribute suggested a life of honesty, integrity, sincerity, and courage. Gregg's death on the battlefield was a tragic, but fitting end to a life well lived. It was an honorable death for what the elite, white south deemed an honorable man.

This thesis considers the life of Maxcy Gregg and the southern social system that declared him honorable in attempting to answer the question: What did the life of an honorable man in the antebellum south look like?

Prior to its disappearance sometime during the Civil War, a socially recognized code of honor carried immense weight in the American South.<sup>5</sup> It served as the South's unofficial social, cultural, and political policing system designed to maintain and enforce certain standards on and among certain classes of men. An incredibly complex and abstract homosocial system, honor adhered to a myriad of rules, rituals, and requirements and could at times be ruthless when one did not comply.

Tracing Maxcy Gregg's life and his commemoration in death reveals much about the ways honor was performed in the antebellum south. It was a surprisingly flexible system that allowed for the growing pains of learning one's place within it. It was both pliable and unwavering in its application. Maxcy Gregg's life demonstrates both honor's flexibility and its place of central importance within the life of a southern man before and at the outset of the American Civil War.

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<sup>4</sup> Benjamin M. Palmer, *Address Delivered at the Funeral of General Maxcy Gregg, in the Presbyterian Church, Columbia, S.C., December 20, 1862* (Columbia: Southern Guardian Steam-Powered Press, 1863), 4.

<sup>5</sup> Honor, like any social system, did not disappear entirely during/after the Civil War but rather ceased to present itself in a manner that those from the old south would recognize as honor. That transformation effectively ended honor as it had been known in the south. Further scholarship is desperately needed to investigate the course this new system took in the years after the war and how it may have functioned as a new successor to the old ways of honor.



Honor would be a driving force in Gregg's life – helping him in his law practice and in the politics of pre-secession South Carolina – and would follow him in death as he fell defending those institutions he held so dear.<sup>6</sup>

Freeman spent a few pages on Gregg's military career and his character in *Lee's Lieutenants*.<sup>7</sup> In Freeman's telling, Gregg was a brave southerner who won the love and loyalty of his men and the admiration and respect (albeit, begrudgingly in some cases) of many of his peers and superiors. According to Freeman, Gregg was the perfect southern fighting man and one of the Confederacy's most skilled Brigadier Generals. Robert K. Krick does much the same in his work "Maxcy Gregg: Political Extremist and Confederate General" which focuses (as the title would suggest) on Gregg's military career and the fire-eating politics that helped South Carolina on the road to the Civil War.<sup>8</sup> Building on the work of Freeman, Krick, and many others, this thesis seeks to place Gregg within the larger context within which he lived; specifically, the culture of honor which shaped his life and elite male southerners like him. This holistic view of Gregg as a man within the politically charged and (eventually) war torn south lends a depth that is missing from such works as Freeman and Krick and further serves the historical community by broadening the terms of the retrospective investigation into the world of the antebellum south.

In his 1982 magnum opus *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South*, Bertram Wyatt-Brown outlined the basics of southern honor and how it functioned in the old south. He argued that honor was a homosocial relationship of control that sought to maintain and enforce specific standards on the white, male population of the pre-Civil War South. Conspicuous

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<sup>6</sup> One of those institutions, of course, was slavery.

<sup>7</sup> Freeman, *Lee's Lieutenants*.

<sup>8</sup> Robert K. Krick, "Maxcy Gregg: Political Extremist and Confederate General," in *Civil War History*, ed. Brain Craig Miller (Kent: Kent State University Press, 1973): 293-313.

consumption, mastery over dependents in the form of wives, children, and enslaved laborers, public acceptance of one's honorable status, and the public performance of honor were all key to maintaining one's position within this system.<sup>9</sup> Status and reputation were everything to these elites who jealously guarded the roster of honorable men from incursions by the base, low-born, and unworthy.<sup>10</sup>

If one was within the circle of honor, one had immense control over the course and direction of the social, cultural, and political life in the South through direct and indirect channels. This power might have been exerted via elected political office, solicited (or unsolicited) advice, or the censure of a dishonorable man to reinforce good behavior and punish the bad (such as rewarding promises kept with more trust or calling out a man who conducted himself wrongly with a young lady). With great power came great responsibility and these honorable men bore great responsibilities. They were policymakers, negotiators, and agricultural strategists. They were also trend setters, gauges of manners and gentlemanly comportment, and the cultural elite to which every southerner looked for their cues as to the next season's fashions. In short, honorable men had a hand in every last piece of the south.<sup>11</sup>

Crucial to honor's code was its public nature. Drawing on the work of anthropologist Julian Pitt-Rivers, Wyatt-Brown argued that honor in the Old South needed to be both internally accepted and externally rewarded. "Honor felt becomes honor claimed and honor claimed

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<sup>9</sup> Julian Pitt-Rivers, "Honor and Social Status," in *Honour and Shame: The Values of Mediterranean Society*, ed. John G. Peristiany (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1965): 22.

<sup>10</sup> Common but descent men would not have been considered honorable, even if they did have a glowing reputation. Wealth, status, and peerage requirements were also crucial to gaining entry into the elite system of honor. Similar to the phrase "all squares are rectangles, but not all rectangles are squares" all honorable men had good reputations, but not all men with good reputations were honorable holds true. Honor went hand and hand with reputation and status but required more than just that to be an honorable man. This list of undesirables also included people of color and women.

<sup>11</sup> Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

becomes honor paid,” Pitt-Rivers explained. The performance of honor was a real-life theatrical display in which one’s actions were always public.

Other historians have expanded upon Wyatt-Brown’s explanation of honor’s performance in the Old South. In both his works, *Honor and Slavery: Lies, Duels, Noses, Masks, Dressing as a Woman, Gifts, Strangers, Humanitarianism, Death, Slave Rebellions, the Proslavery Argument, Baseball, Hunting, and Gambling in the Old South* and *Masters and Statesmen: The Political Culture of American Slavery*, Kenneth Greenberg argues that the same virtues that Southerners espoused in their political elites were prized in their social elites as well and that those select men (whose circles often overlapped) had a language all their own to express their status.<sup>12</sup> Exemplified by John C. Calhoun, Greenberg argues that those who sought to be the top of Southern life – political or otherwise – could not seek out their position but rather had to accept responsibilities given to them by virtue of their honor. Ambition, it seemed, had to be much quieter in the south and the public performance as a reluctant servant to the state was exactly what honorable southern men were expected to do. Simply put, to get along one had to go along.<sup>13</sup>

More recently, researchers have taken a more expansive approach to the study of southern honor. The 2017 edited collection, *The Field of Honor: Essays on Southern Character and*

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<sup>12</sup> Kenneth Greenberg, *Honor and Slavery: Lies, Duels, Noses, Masks, Dressing as a Woman, Gifts, Strangers, Humanitarianism, Death, Slave Rebellions, the Proslavery Argument, Baseball, Hunting, and Gambling in the Old South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996). and Kenneth Greenberg, *Masters and Statesmen: The Political Culture of American Slavery* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988).

<sup>13</sup> Men like Calhoun, Greenberg argued, played the slow game of waiting for opportunities to fall into their laps. Rather than seek office actively, men would wait for a nomination and then protest they wanted nothing to do with government. But, of course, should they be elected they would be honor-bound to serve the good people of their county, region, or state. This is not to say that John C. Calhoun had no ambition. To say otherwise would be foolish and fundamentally wrong. But the appearance of apathy or unwillingness to accept one’s position of power was vitally important to the public performance of Southern political life and, of course, the production that was Southern Honor. Simply put, honor was conferred to those who waited patiently for their turn. Ambition, in this instance, did not pay. For more information see: Greenberg, *Masters and Statesmen*.

*American Identity*, includes essays by historians who argue that Wyatt-Brown's definition of honor's code as the domain of elite white men is too limited. Brenda Faverty considers women's honor in "'Tattling Is Far More Common Here': Gossip, Ostracism, and Reputation in the Old South," arguing that Southern white women were more in tune with honor than previous scholarship admitted. Women, she claims, manifested their own honor groups and utilized parallel tactics to those of their honored male counterparts.<sup>14</sup> In "'The Prisoner... Thinks a Great Deal of Her Virtue': Enslaved Female Honor, Shame, and Infanticide in Antebellum Virginia," Jeff Forret contends that slave women demonstrated their own form of honor when they chose to commit infanticide instead of bearing the shame of being unwed mothers.<sup>15</sup>

Though these are useful and important studies for understanding group dynamics in the antebellum south, their inclusion of dispossessed groups under the umbrella of "honor" in a culture built partially on their exclusion is problematic. Definitions matter here and scholars must take care to define their terms carefully. This is especially true in considerations of the antebellum south. While these disenfranchised groups may have recognized themselves as having an honorable system (and so it may very well have existed), the white, male elite of the antebellum south would have flatly denied their ability to partake in *their* system of exclusively white, male control. Faverty and Forret use a looser definition of honor – divorced from racial or gendered limitations – to make their arguments whereas this historian is pursuing honor as white, southern men would have understood it.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Brenda Faverty, "'Tattling Is Far More Common Here': Gossip, Ostracism, and Reputation in the Old South," in *The Field of Honor: Essays on Southern Character and American Identity*, ed. John Mayfield and Todd Hagstette (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2017) 231-241.

<sup>15</sup> Jeff Forret, "'The Prisoner... Thinks a Great Deal of Her Virtue': Enslaved Female Honor, Shame, and Infanticide in Antebellum Virginia," in *The Field of Honor: Essays on Southern Character and American Identity*, ed. John Mayfield and Todd Hagstette (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2017), 217-230.

<sup>16</sup> This choice was obviously informed by the subject matter of each study. This thesis focuses on a man well within the system of honor and therefore, the historical definition of honor as it was understood by those in the system works perfectly. Faverty and Forret's subjects, on the other hand, were outside the system but not wholly untouched

Historians, anthropologists, sociologists, and psychologists have studied honor cultures past and present – from the ancient Greeks to inner-city Philadelphia in the twentieth century.<sup>17</sup> For example, Iowa State University psychologist Susan Cross explores the psychological nature of honor cultures in Turkey. And while my research focuses on honor’s definition in the mid-nineteenth century American South, Dr. Cross and her team assess honor as it exists in the world today and use that work to make cross-cultural comparisons about attitudes toward honor.<sup>18</sup> This valuable research bridges the gap between how honor worked in a by-gone age and how peoples’ relationship to honor and with honor cultures shapes the way they view and behave in the world today.

In terms of popular semantics, “honor” has become synonymous with “honesty,” “nobility,” and “integrity.” A person can be “honorably discharged” from the United States military for dutiful service. Presidents and Congresspeople have been called honorable by their colleagues for their faithful service to their constituencies and their nation. And while “honor” has transitioned into these and many more modern uses, none of them come near the historically specific definition of honor I use in this study. Honor in the antebellum south was about control: self-control, social control, and the power to control others. It was also about authority and

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by its influence prompting their use of a slightly less restrictive definition of honor as their chose demographic would have used it themselves.

<sup>17</sup> See, for example, Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea: A Study of Mediterranean History* (New York: Wiley-Blackwell, 2000), 485-529 and Elijah Anderson, *Code of the Street: Decency, Violence, and the Moral Life of the Inner City* (New York: Norton, 2000).

<sup>18</sup> See, for example, Ayse K. Uskul, Susan E. Cross, Zeynep Sunbay, Berna Gerçek-Swing, and Bilge Ataca, “Honor Bound: The Cultural Construction of Honor in Turkey and the Northern US,” *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 43, (2012): 1131-1151., Susan E. Cross, Ayse K. Uskul, Berna Gerçek-Swing, Cansu Alözkan, and Bilge Ataca, “Confrontation vs. Withdrawal: Cultural Differences in Responses to Threats to Honor,” *Group Processes and Intergroup Relations*, 16, (2013): 345-362., Susan E. Cross, Ayse K. Uskul, Berna Gerçek-Swing, Zeynep Sunbay, Cansu Alözkan, Ceren Gunsoy, Bilge Ataca, and Zahide Karakitapoğlu-Aygün, “Cultural Prototypes and Dimensions of Honor,” *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 40, (2014): 232-249., and Ayse K. Uskul, Susan E. Cross, Ceren Gunsoy, Berna Gerçek-Swing, Cansu Alözkan, and Bilge Ataca, “A price to Pay: Turkish and Northern American Retaliation for Threats to Personal and Family Honor,” *Aggressive Behavior*, 41, (2015): 594-607.

demanded deference in all matters from those who fell below the honorable classes. The term “honor” was not thrown about lightly toward every statesman or soldier who acquitted themselves adequately at their task. Instead, honor was a tightly controlled social structure that self-regulated its membership within the ranks of the southern elite. These “honorable” men were elitist, deliberately exclusionary, tyrannical, and oppressive. To say Maxcy Gregg was an honorable man is not an endorsement of his character nor is it praise for his actions. It is a recognition of his membership in one of the South’s most sought-after titles: the honorable man.

## PART II

### Striving for Honor: The Young Maxcy Gregg

Maxcy Gregg was born in Columbia, South Carolina on August 1, 1814 to father James Gregg and mother Cornelia Manning Gregg. The first Maxcy to make their home in Columbia was Jonathan Maxcy, Gregg’s maternal grandfather. An ordained Baptist minister and graduate of Rhode Island College, Jonathan moved with his family from Attleborough, Massachusetts in 1804 to Columbia, South Carolina to assume the seat of first President of South Carolina College (now the University of South Carolina) which he held until his death in 1820. This family legacy, along with his father’s sterling reputation, was the foundation upon which Gregg built his honor.<sup>19</sup>

But adhering to the honor’s code and gaining status within South Carolina’s circle of honorable men was not as clear cut as Gregg’s eulogists would have his audience believe. Gregg, like many propertied young men, inexpertly negotiated the terrain of honor, exploding protocols, misinterpreting signals, and losing site of the community (and power) preserving mission of

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<sup>19</sup> Transcript from the New England Historical and Geological Register, undated, Folder 4, Jonathan Maxcy papers, South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, South Carolina., “Death of Colonel James Gregg.,” *Camden Weekly Journal*, October 28, 1852., and J. F. J. Caldwell, *The History of a Brigade of South Carolinians, Known First as “Gregg’s, and Subsequently as “McGowan’s Brigade.”*, (Philadelphia: King & Baird Printers, 1866), 62.

honor's intricate social ecology.<sup>20</sup> In Gregg's case, these youthful missteps took place on the so-called "field of honor," the dueling ground.

Unlike its popular image, dueling was only to be undertaken in the most serious circumstances. Far from needless and random, duels served a unique purpose in the pursuit, support, and maintenance of community relations and the status quo. Duels offered aggrieved parties an opportunity to achieve satisfaction for the wrong done to them and gave the offending party the chance to defend their actions/words. The proper administration of challenges by "seconds" or "friends" was then the key to avoiding unnecessary harm while simultaneously achieving satisfaction. To get satisfaction, the aggrieved party needed to feel that the offending party had made-up for their mistake or defended their words/actions at the possible cost of their lives.<sup>21</sup> Once achieved, satisfaction guaranteed that the matter was closed. If seconds were able to achieve satisfaction via non-violent means (an apology or clarification of a misunderstanding) they were expected to do so. Duels were meant to be the ultimate solution only when all others had failed. This type of ritualistic bloodletting was the last resort of men seeking to protect, maintain, or regain their honor. It was not something that was idly thrown about as it could mean very serious injury or death to everyone involved.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Though no record exists of Gregg owning any significant land outside of his home in Columbia, South Carolina a census from 1860 shows that Gregg owned four unfree laborers: two men ages sixty-eight and forty-one and two women ages seventy and twenty-two. These enslaved people were most likely household slaves. Census, "Schedule 2 – Slave Inhabitants," July 26, 1860, 33.

<sup>21</sup> Challenges were often voided by simple apologies or explanations if a misunderstanding occurred. An "I apologize. I spoke out of turn." or "That was not what I meant, I do apologize for any misunderstanding." was enough to vacate challenges and grant satisfaction to the wronged party. Of course, some duels went further still and were then solved through a ritualized and heavily regulated violent component that varied wildly from challenge to challenge. See Joann Freeman, *Affairs of Honor: National Politics in the New Republic*, (Hartford: Yale University Press, 2001).

<sup>22</sup> "Seconds" or "friends" were trusted allies of the "principles" or involved parties. In the event of a challenge, seconds maintained the rules agreed upon by their principles and acted as witnesses and referees to any actions taken in the pursuit of satisfaction. This could include attesting to the innocence of the offending party to those outside a settled dispute, setting out a means of an apology, or agreeing to the type of weapon, the time, and the place for a duel. Even when it came time to duel, some seconds arranged openly (with their principles) or in secret (with their

To the modern eye, duels appear petty, dangerous, and chaotic. But like the rest of the ritual surrounding honor it conformed to a strict code and set of guidelines. Former South Carolina Governor, John Lyde Wilson, officially codified these guidelines in a twenty-two-page booklet published in 1838 titled *The Code of Honor: Or Rules for the Government of Principals and Seconds in Duelling*. Wilson's stated philosophy was a fervent wish that all duels would eventually cease. He acknowledged that a world in which honor could not be upheld would be a world without control and so officially wrote the handbook to instruct his peers on how to properly conduct a duel to avoid unnecessary bloodshed.<sup>23</sup> This code included guidelines for principals and seconds, their conduct, the expectations of the challenger and the challengee, when the duel was over, and when one could publicly out their opponent (or even their principal) as a coward. In a sweepingly comprehensive work, Wilson put to paper rules that had guided disputes of honor in South Carolina for years.<sup>24</sup> This became a manual for dueling that would determine the efficacy, honor, and reputation of challenges in the future. But for all intents and purposes Wilson but put to paper what had already been known in honorable circles. He simply standardized the rules of dueling so that all involved might be held to a measure for their conduct during such a heated time. Though written three years after the fact, Wilson may have had an incident involving a young Maxcy Gregg in mind when he wrote sections of his pamphlet.<sup>25</sup>

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counterpart) to make sure no blood was spilt. There were instructions to fire at the ground, off to the side, or not at all. Some even went so far as to load their principles' pistols with blanks. See: Freeman, *Affairs of Honor*.

<sup>23</sup> John Lyde Wilson, *The Code of Honor: Or Rules for the Government of Principals and Seconds in Duelling*, (Charleston: Thomas J. Eccles, 1838).

<sup>24</sup> As evidenced by Chapter Three, Rule Two which stated that the weapon most commonly used should be the weapon of choice for most, if not all duels, which "in this state, is the pistol." See Wilson, *The Code of Honor*, 11-12.

<sup>25</sup> Though this incident was recorded for history by Alexander Cheves Haskell, he wrote the narrative as he remembered it – as a story told *by* Gregg *to* Haskell. According to Haskell, Gregg told him this story after he found a spent ball in his handkerchief after the battle of Sharpsburg. This use of first person by Haskell on Gregg's behalf makes this story both interesting and slightly confusing to work with as the story was Gregg's but was told by Haskell.



Gregg's Assistant Adjunct General (administrative aide) Alexander Cheves Haskell

wrote in a reminiscence to his daughter that Gregg once mentioned a peculiar incident from his youth.

Some years ago there was a difficulty which ended in a duel between Boyce of Winnsboro & Whaley of Charleston – both lawyers & leading men. I was Boyce's second and a Mr. Pinckney was Whaley's second- The legal authorities got wind of it & the Sheriffs were on the lookout – to arrest us. The duel was on the "Sand-Bar" in the middle of the Savannah River – below Augusta – out of our State- but all lines of approach were cut off & guarded- So we agreed that we would stroll – Boyce & myself – down Meeting Street – Whaley & Pinckney down Broad – and when we got to the crossing of the streets at St. Michael's Church our chiefs should halt at opposite corners & word be given, & the whole thing be over before any body [*sic*] could interfere-<sup>26</sup>

The duel between William Baynard Whaley and William Waters Boyce roughly followed the pattern laid out in Wilson's booklet: there was a disagreement over the issue of collegiate honors, seconds were chosen, negotiations were attempted, and when those broke down the issue ended in a duel.<sup>27</sup> Terms were agreed to by seconds Pinckney and Gregg who met to plan the encounter. By Whaley and Boyce shooting at each other, the aggrieved party received satisfaction and the aggressor stood by his actions. Both men, according to southern convention, had maintained their honor. The story, however, goes on.

I had of course conference with Mr. Pinckney to arrange all these details, & I noticed that he seemed hurt by something I had said, though I did not mean to wound him- & I don't know yet what it was. So when all was arranged – I referred to this & said that I had not meant any such thing – but that I felt bound to give him satisfaction- He then thanked me and cordially accepted my offer- It took no time to arrange – we would be at the appointed corners across from our

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<sup>26</sup> Haskell wrote these reminiscences in the form of several letters to his daughter, Mary, who asked him to record his personal history. We have her to thank for a treasure trove of firsthand accounts, such as this one, that help to make our historical protagonists (or antagonists) feel more alive, grounding them to a basic humanity that all human history shares. Correspondence from Alexander Cheves Haskell, November 9, 1908, Folder 18, Items 19-20, Alexander Cheves Haskell Papers, South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, South Carolina.

<sup>27</sup> The disagreement which started the ruckus is revealed in a newspaper article much, much later. The *Memphis Daily Appeal* reported in their January 5<sup>th</sup>, 1863 issue readers were told that the nature of the dispute was that of an issue with the conveyance of South Carolina College's award of "first honors." Beyond that, nothing was said though it does illuminate for posterity the causes of such a fuss. "General Maxcy Gregg.," *Memphis Daily Appeal*, January 5, 1863.

chiefs- Then occupying the four corners singly – so as not to attract attention- & when our chiefs had finished – the we would exchange shots. “We met – gave the word – Whaley hit Boyce & put him hors de combat- Boyce’s ball went through the beaver hat of a gentleman who was sitting on his horse with one leg across the saddle [illegible] – talking to a priest – Seeing all at a glance – I took off my hat & bowed to Pinckney giving him the signal to fire first we drew pistols – He fired & hit me on the side the ball going through my vest [pocket]- I fell back – rising on my elbow I fired & hit him in the thigh- The public & the Doctors took hold of us – all wounded except Whale- They carried me to my room at the Hotel – pronounced my wound very serious – probed my side – by finally gave up that they could not find the ball or any [illegible] beyond the surface wound – ball must have gone behind a [illegible]- Finally they left me- & my man servant proceeded to undress me & put me to bed- As he pulled off one of my boots he exclaimed ‘Mars Maxcy – here de ball in de boo’- Here is the half dollar & the quarter & the pen knife & the silver pencil case that stopped the round ball.” & he pulled out each as he spoke- “I have carried them ever since.”<sup>28</sup>

Very quickly this duel, so conventional in its inception, devolved into something else entirely. Not only were Whaley and Boyce shooting at each other but so were Gregg and Pinckney. According to Haskell’s recollection, Gregg and Pinckney exchanged words during their negotiations that ended with Pinckney accepting Gregg’s offer of satisfaction. There were a few major problems with this arrangement: first, this duel was not private, second, both principals and seconds shot, third, Gregg fired from the ground to hit his rival, Pinckney, with a ball, and fourth, Gregg was not aware of why he and Pinckney were dueling in the first place. All of these instances were flagrant violations of the rules laid out in Wilson’s booklet and southern convention.

First and foremost, this duel quickly became very, very public. The choice to relocate to Meeting and Broad was a horrendous mistake for anyone attempting to follow the rules of dueling. Duels, drawing on Wilson and the convention from which he made his code, were meant to be private affairs. Only those who were invited were allowed to witness them and those

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<sup>28</sup> Correspondence from Alexander Cheves Haskell, November 9, 1908, Folder 18, Items 19-20, Alexander Cheves Haskell Papers, South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, South Carolina.

who were present were supposed to be few and every man there had a specific a purpose. Just a few blocks from the slave market and right off the main shopping street, Meeting and Broad was one of the busiest intersections in Charleston.<sup>29</sup> As Gregg told Haskell , “Boyce’s ball went through the beaver hat of a gentleman who was sitting on his horse [...] talking to a priest.”<sup>30</sup> Their dueling spot was neither secluded nor was the surrounding population controlled or confined. As discreet affairs, there should have been an expectation of relative privacy for all involved. Private this was not.

Further flouting convention, Gregg and Pinckney had their dispute tacked on to the duel of their principals. Why was it not arranged as it ought to have been? There exists no record of Pinckney and Gregg engaging their own seconds for their duel. This, once again, disrupted the delicate harmony of the ritual violence of honor in that the largest body of content from Wilson’s booklet was ignored (as he spent most of his ink on the role of the second who conducted every honorable dispute). The answer may lay in the nature of this second disagreement. Gregg mentioned to Haskell that “I noticed that [Pinckney] seemed hurt by something I had said, though I did not mean to wound him- & I don’t know yet what it was. So when all was arranged – I referred to this & said that I had not meant any such thing – but that I felt bound to give him satisfaction- He then thanked me and cordially accepted my offer.”<sup>31</sup> Gregg had insulted Pinckney in some undetermined way and offered Pinckney the opportunity to achieve

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<sup>29</sup> Ironically the location of Gregg and Pickney’s duel is now known as the four corners of law as the intersection of Meeting and Broad is home to St. Michael’s Episcopal Church, Charleston City Hall, Charleston County Courthouse, and the Federal Courthouse.

<sup>30</sup> Correspondence from Alexander Cheves Haskell, November 9, 1908, Folder 18, Items 19-20, Alexander Cheves Haskell Papers, South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, South Carolina. At this time were not at all as accurate as their modern-day counterparts. This was one of many reasons why dueling was not necessarily a death sentence. It does however, as this example shows, illustrate the dangers of using such unreliable weapons in any sort of combat when others are anywhere near what might loosely be called one’s “line of fire.” For more information about the relatively bloodless nature of duels see: Freeman, *Affairs of Honor*.

<sup>31</sup> Correspondence from Alexander Cheves Haskell, November 9, 1908, 1 ALS, Folder 18, Items 19-20, Alexander Cheves Haskell Papers, South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, South Carolina.

satisfaction. But these two points of order fly directly into the face of Wilson's code. First and foremost, it was the job of the injured party to demand satisfaction not the offending party's to offer it. And second, that Gregg was unaware of the particulars of the tension between the two men was an understated oversight. Without knowing the cause of their dispute, neither satisfaction could be granted nor could a second successfully enter into the first step of negotiations with his counterpart. But of course, neither Pinckney nor Gregg had seconds.

This was confirmed when it was reported that, "While prostrate on the ground, Gregg fired a ball at Pinckney, sending a ball through [Pinckney's] thigh."<sup>32</sup> This was a mystifying turn for a number of reasons. Any position from which to shoot at one's opponent (other than turn-and-fire or other previously agreed up stance) was unusual and would have been considered unmanly, dishonorable, or even cowardly. In Gregg's case, he claims Pinckney's shot knocked him to the ground. According to Wilson's pamphlet, Gregg's second should have inspected him for wounds and the duel should have been declared resolved on the spot seeing as Gregg *had* been hit by Pinckney's shot. But of course, Gregg fired from the ground which, firstly, he should not have according to Wilson's code. And secondly, Gregg had no second of his own to inspect his person, even had protocol been followed.

Instead, Gregg (possibly with the aid of Pinckney) manufactured a duel that was then tacked on to another affair of honor so that these green young men could play at honor. Dueling, after all, was one of the most public and certainly the most daring way to prove one's honor to one's peers. That this did not damage his reputation later in life is a testament to the relatively forgiving nature of such a rigid social system. Surrounded by the pervasive and ever-present culture of southern honor, the young Gregg and his peers were both within and without a social

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<sup>32</sup> "General Maxcy Gregg," *Memphis Daily Appeal*, January 5, 1863.

system they were desperate to fully join. But these boys – as Whaley was eighteen and Boyce sixteen at the time of the duel– had no idea how to balance their lust for retributive violence, their need for satisfaction (real or perceived), and the social sensibilities that regulated and ritualized these acts of violence within the system of southern honor.<sup>33</sup> But they were, of course, boys. And as it so happens, this act of youthful ignorance seemed to do little to no damage to their reputations as honorable men in the long run. They botched the whole thing horribly. But when all was said and done, it was not the duel that most interested these young boys, but rather the public performance of their own emerging honor.

Others seemed to agree. As an article in the *Memphis Daily Appeal* recounted, this “street fight” was nothing more than the unchecked ambition of four young, inexperienced men stumbling their way through honor. Brushing off the incident as a youthful indiscretion and nostalgic anecdote to publish with the news of the Gregg’s death, the newspaper all but forgave the boys’ naivety on the grounds that this folly did no real harm to the reputations of the men involved in the long run. Wyatt-Brown put it best when he wrote, “Deviance from accepted norms can only be tolerated if the offender somehow conveys a sense of powerlessness.”<sup>34</sup> While these boys were far from powerless, their deviances – as there were many – in regards to this particular duel were attributed to youth and hot tempers not yet experienced with moderation and temperance. This moment was transformed from a near murder of an innocent bystander into a fond memory recounted to a mourning public after the death of their fallen hero.

This was not the only time Gregg would come to blows over the award of First Honors. Again in 1835, Gregg would have his own disagreement over the distribution of First Honors.

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<sup>33</sup> Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*.

<sup>34</sup> Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), xii.

However, instead of confronting his rival for the spot – a student named Blanding – Gregg would bring his grievance to the specific attention of Chairman of the Faculty, Henry Junius Nott.

In a letter to his fellow board members, Nott stated that, due to his relatively recent ascension to high office and given the (apparent) nascency of some of the professors, the faculty had decided to hold a popular vote to assist in the allocation of the college's six honors:

The students were informed that six appointments would be made {viz} a first & second honor & four other honors. That each member of the class was to make out a list and place it in a hat according to the usual method of balloting; that the faculty would then distribute the honors and {bring} their own judgment; it being well understood that the students had not the power to elect, but that the faculty wished the opinions of the class in aiding their judgment – It was stated that it was a great difficulty for the new professors to judge of the uniform good conduct & proficiency of students they had but recently known & and [*sic*] that it was not only a delicate thing for me to take the whole matter on myself, but moreover that it was impossible for me to speak positively except on my own departments.<sup>35</sup>

Upon tallying the votes from the students, almost every ballot placed either Gregg or Blanding in first and second. These two young men, it seemed, were equally qualified for the award of First Honors in the eyes of their peers and, as it turned out, their professors' as well. According to Nott, "The faculty deliberated long [...] It was eventually agreed to consider them as standing on the same footing & so to announce it to the College, and to settle by lot who should have [...] the first and second honors."<sup>36</sup> Upon its announcement, Nott wrote that everyone who had received honors "excepting one were satisfied [...] up to this moment I have heard of no discontent in any quarter, but the single case now to be mentioned. Blanding has

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<sup>35</sup> Correspondence from Henry Nott to the faculty of South Carolina College, undated, Folder 1, Henry Junius Nott Papers, South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, South Carolina.

<sup>36</sup> Correspondence from Henry Nott to the faculty of South Carolina College, undated, Folder 1, Henry Junius Nott Papers, South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, South Carolina.

expressed his entire satisfaction.”<sup>37</sup> That one exception was, of course, Maxcy Gregg. According to Nott:

The day after the announcement of the honors Gregg called at my house & begged to decline the honor conferred on him, but gave no reason. I informed him that he would probably lose his degree according to the Laws of College; to which he made no reply.

The same evening at Prayer time when I ascended the pulpit and was about commencing the Service Gregg arose in the chappel [*sic*] and dressed a speech of considerable length to me specifically, as he said that the other members of the faculty had no legal right to their places until elected. I listened to his speech with with [*sic*] patient attention but I confess that at the time I could not trace out his course of reasoning nor as of yet understand why he decline accepting the first honor which had taken to him.

When he had concluded I observed to him that I might well animadvert on the singular indecorum of interrupting [...] the public ceremonies of the institution & object to the temper of his address [...]

I then detailed minutely the difficulties of the faculty, their course of conduct, the great difficulty in making discriminations on a class that had adhered to the College on its worst State & to-whom I felt the deepest gratitude. I stated also that the very same case had occurred a year before where the faculty had placed Hamblin & Simmons on the same footing. Here Gregg rising in the middle of my observations, I paused & begged him to correct me if I were wrong & to add freely whatever he knew. He observed that on the case alluded to , the precedence was not settled by lot. I answered that it was not settled by lot & that this was the very thing of which Hamblin & his frends [*sic*] complained, viz that the faculty had stated, that they made no distinction between the two candidates and yet they then assigned the place considered the most honorable, to one instead of permitting them to draw lots. In that case I may notice that was decided that the two should be considered as on a footing in the estimation of the faculty and the Salutatory was assigned to Simmons because it was thought he would pronounce Latin better & the Valedictory to Hamblin as he composed [*illeg.*]. To avail therefore the offense given in that case lots were now resorted to.<sup>38</sup>

Gregg unabashedly and unreservedly challenged his being placed in the rank of first honors by chance. The honors, he felt, could not be determined by lot but rather must be

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<sup>37</sup> Correspondence from Henry Nott to the faculty of South Carolina College, undated, Folder 1, Henry Junius Nott Papers, South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, South Carolina.

<sup>38</sup> Correspondence from Henry Nott to the faculty of South Carolina College, undated, Folder 1, Henry Junius Nott Papers, South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, South Carolina.

the result of careful deliberation that ends with the declaration of a winner. A decision, solid and final had to be made to declare one superior to the other or the entire prize of first honors was meaningless if left to chance. Simply put, Gregg wanted there to be no doubt that he deserved first honors. He did not want the allocation left to chance. There was a certain elegance to his argument and one might easily sympathize. In fact, Gregg had not alone in his feelings. Nott recorded that discontent amongst those receiving split honors was not at all uncommon:

Many of whom during my connection with the College have complained {to} me not bitterly of the injustice done them [...] Those have declined, are Mr. Daniel who refused the second honor. Professor Hilliard & Dr. [illeg.] Hunt. The latter stepped out in the chappel [*sic*] & declared to the faculty that he felt conscious he was inferior to no man in the class. The Whole graduating class in Brown University in Rhode Island, excepting three lost their degrees others <unintelligible> on account of their dissatisfaction at the appointments & I have understood that the faculty unable to give satisfaction on any manager have resolved in future to award no honors.<sup>39</sup>

Several complaints had been brought at colleges nation-wide about the issue of honors. These institutions, in turn, refused to give out any honors to avoid further scandal. Some were going so far as to cancel degrees over the ruckus caused by ranked honors.<sup>40</sup> Nott afforded Gregg a noble motive stating that he thought, “Gregg’s idea was that the faculty had no right to put two on a footing when the law had made a first &

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<sup>39</sup> Correspondence from Henry Nott to the faculty of South Carolina College, undated, Folder 1, Henry Junius Nott Papers, South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, South Carolina.

<sup>40</sup> Nott considered doing this himself with Gregg. Correspondence from Henry Nott to the faculty of South Carolina College, undated, Folder 1, Henry Junius Nott Papers, South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, South Carolina. Ironically Jonathan Maxcy – Gregg’s grandfather – communicated to the Board of Trustees in 1813 that there was a unanimous recommendation by the faculty to expel a student due to his “ungovernable passions and & highly disrespectful conduct & language before the Faculty.” Correspondence from Jonathan Maxcy to the Trustees of South Carolina College, November 26, 1813, Folder 2, Items 9-13, Jonathan Maxcy papers, South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, South Carolina.



second honor.”<sup>41</sup> But a noble argument was no replacement for tact and, once again, Gregg’s chosen method of delivering his grievance was very public and verbally violent.

Again, Gregg thought he was performing honor. Gregg felt that determining who won first and second honors by lot had done both him and Blanding a disservice. By refusing to choose in the privacy of his own home, Nott forced Gregg to publicly call him to account for the misdistribution of these academic awards. Had he accepted Gregg’s resignation of the honor bestowed upon him, the issue may have ended there as both men would have saved face and acted nobly. But just like in Charleston, Gregg overplayed his hand when confronting Nott in the middle of his sermon. In the end, “The faculty left the honors as they were: they merely said they could make no distinction between the aspirants & therefore left to lot the chance for first & second.”<sup>42</sup> Gregg’s performance had changed nothing, but it did signal a willingness on Gregg’s part to challenge those he felt wronged him. Furthermore, Gregg’s first step of appealing to Nott at his home also showed an understanding of how one might approach such an issue without the theatrics of a very public duel. He simply did not approach things in a way that Nott wanted. “If Mr. Gregg was discontented he could have spoken to the faculty & addressed a petition on memorial to them or appealed to the trustees. There was no necessity for the course he adopted & [illeg.] for the manner in which it was done.”<sup>43</sup>

This story has no resolution. But that, for the purpose of this study makes no difference. Gregg demanded honors wherever he could find them, sometimes at the end of a pistol and

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<sup>41</sup> Correspondence from Henry Nott to the faculty of South Carolina College, undated, Folder 1, Henry Junius Nott Papers, South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, South Carolina.

<sup>42</sup> Correspondence from Henry Nott to the faculty of South Carolina College, undated, Folder 1, Henry Junius Nott Papers, South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, South Carolina.

<sup>43</sup> Correspondence from Henry Nott to the faculty of South Carolina College, undated, Folder 1, Henry Junius Nott Papers, South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, South Carolina.

sometimes in the midst of a sermon. In either case, Gregg very publicly asserted his honor for all to see. By shooting in the streets of Charleston he and his comrades had announced their intentions to claim their honorable due. The same claim could be staked in Gregg's inability to accept collegiate honors allocated by lot without challenging Nott for a deliberate ranking. And though each issue was poorly handled as far as honor went, the youth and inexperience of those involved did, it appears, garner a modicum of understanding from the community with which they were trying to ingratiate themselves as no long-term damage appears to have been done to their reputations.

### **Building Foundations: Honor, Law, and Politics**

Over the course of the 1840s and 1850s, Gregg became an accomplished lawyer, local statesman, and was much beloved in his home city of Columbia. Like many other young, southern men eager to prove themselves, Gregg's first encounters with the world of honorable, southern manhood were rife with missteps and flagrant in their ignorance. But over time and with a clearer head on his shoulders, Gregg proved himself worthy of the acceptance into the circle of honor that governed southern politics and culture in the antebellum era.

Gregg became a well-respected lawyer and property owner. In 1856 Gregg was part of a team that defended the Mayor of Columbia, E. J. Arthur, and a police officer who, according to the *Carolina Spartan* and the *Edgefield Adviser*, had violated the rights of a newspaper editor, Dr. Gibbes, by throwing him out of a meeting at City Hall.<sup>44</sup> This, the *Advertiser* claimed, was a triumph for the personal rights of men and a guarantee of the First Amendment rights of South Carolinians. Furthermore, the *Advertiser* claims that neither Arthur nor the police officer paid

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<sup>44</sup> "Correspondence of the 'Spartan,'" *Carolina Spartan*, October 9, 1856., and "Triumph of Right, of Principle, and of the Freedom of the Press.," *Edgefield Advertiser*, March 25, 1857.

nearly enough to compensate Dr. Gibbes. And while Gregg's clients lost the case, the importance of defending a prominent Columbia citizen like the mayor cannot be understated.

Public recognition took a variety of forms. On his appointment to Major during the Mexican American War, "a dinner was given by members of the Bar, in Columbia, to Maxcy Gregg, Esqr."<sup>45</sup> In 1842, in a toast given by the Camden Debating Club, Gregg was declared "an honor to his native district."<sup>46</sup> Fellow lawyer Leslie McCandless extolled Gregg's character, proclaiming, "I have formed the highest opinion of his character. With intellectual powers of the highest order, and such as admirably qualify him for his profession, he unites a heart adorned with all the virtues which are attractive in human nature."<sup>47</sup> He amplified these laudatory remarks with a signal to men of honorable status. "He fears nothing under Heaven, but a base reputation," he declared. This was a very public, published absolute acknowledgment of Gregg's place within the circle of elite southern men he had long aspired to join.<sup>48</sup> This toast, made publicly in a gathering of civic minded men and broadcast throughout the region with publication in the *Camden Weekly Journal*, allowed men of standing and power to recognize and congratulate Gregg—and each other—on their achievements and their shared place as powerbrokers in southern society.

By 1858, his reputation was such that he was called upon at a dinner honoring one of the most powerful slaveholders in the state, Senator and former Governor, James Henry Hammond.<sup>49</sup> Gregg was one of only a handful of respected men to offer remarks to the "twelve or fifteen hundred persons" in attendance, an opportunity to confer honor and, in doing so,

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<sup>45</sup> "Dinner to Major Gregg.," *Edgefield Advertiser*, April 28, 1847.

<sup>46</sup> "Volunteer Toasts," *Camden Weekly Journal*, March 16, 1842.

<sup>47</sup> "Volunteer Toasts," *Camden Weekly Journal*, March 16, 1842.

<sup>48</sup> "Volunteer Toasts," *Camden Weekly Journal*, March 16, 1842.

<sup>49</sup> "The Dinner to Senator Hammond.," *Edgefield Advertiser*, July 28, 1858; James Henry Hammond had also been a Representative for the State of South Carolina and a one-time Governor of the state.

confirm and claim it for himself.<sup>50</sup> Gregg had even learned to negotiate affairs of honor effectively. In December of 1851, Gregg settled a dispute between General H. K. Aiken and Captain J. N. Shedd. He and Shedd's second, James Chestnut Jr., determined there was no reason for a feud between the two apart from an easily cleared up misunderstanding and recommended the two resume a cordial relationship as they had before.<sup>51</sup> Clearly, cooler heads prevailed and maturity suited Gregg's honor splendidly. By settling this matter without violence, Gregg proved that he had come into honor fully and had a better understanding of what it meant to practice honor correctly. No longer was he the boy that shot wildly in the streets of Charleston, Gregg was a man who performed honor with dignity and responsibility – the way it was meant to be.

Given his growing stature within the Columbia community, it is not surprising that his fellow Carolinians called Gregg to public office. In *Masters and Statesmen*, Kenneth Greenberg argues that southerners held their statesmen in high esteem, celebrating them for their character and sense of independent judgment. Such men should not seek office, white southerners believed, they ought to be called to it in order to fulfill a duty to their peers and their subordinates. Southern elites celebrated public modesty, abhorring the ambition and attention-seeking that characterizes our current political landscape. Gregg's peers nominated him for the United States Senate in 1852. Playing the role honor required of him, Gregg authorized editor Thomas J. Warren to publish the following statement in *The Camden Weekly Journal*:

while gratefully [*sic*] acknowledging the too flattering compliment bestowed upon him [...] nominating him for the United States Senate, and speaking of him in such terms as he knows perfectly well could only be prompted by the extravagant partiality of friendship, he is constrained, at the risk of incurring the charge of vanity in unnecessarily declining a nomination, to declare that he is utterly

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<sup>50</sup> "The Dinner to Senator Hammond.," *Independent Press*, August 13, 1858.

<sup>51</sup> Correspondence from Maxcy Gregg and James Chestnut Jr. to W. M. Bratton and I. W. Nelson, December 1851, Folder 3, Hugh Kerr Aiken Manuscripts, South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, South Carolina.

unwilling that his name should be spoken of at all for the office in question, which he would not accept if so improbable an event should occur as his election to it.<sup>52</sup>

Gregg's modesty was on full display here, a far cry from the heedless ambition he exhibited in seeking university honors a decade prior.<sup>53</sup> Ironically, the publication of this letter declining the nomination beautifully (and publicly) illustrated his commitment to the cause and ideals of southern statesmanship. Gregg once again put his honor on display and performed for his southern audience.

This adherence to political modesty did not, however, stop Gregg from being involved in the politics of South Carolina and the Confederate States. Throughout his life – both before and after this nomination – Gregg would hold many a local and state political office and perform many of the duties of a local statesman. He was elected to be the Richland County representative in 1850 and served on the Richland Southern Rights Association board. In August of 1852 Gregg refused a nomination to the U.S. Senate via the *Camden Weekly Journal*.<sup>54</sup> His advocacy for southern rights was so well known and so well thought of that in 1856 Preston Brooks sent some pages to the *Independent Press* calling for a regiment under Gregg to be sent into the Kansas territory to resolve the violence there. “If our institutions obtain in Kansas, the slavery question is settled and the rights of the South are safe,” Brooks wrote.<sup>55</sup> And in 1860, Maxcy Gregg was nominated to represent Richland County at the State Convention that would decide the issue of

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<sup>52</sup> “Col Maxcy Gregg,” *Camden Weekly Journal*, August 20, 1852.

<sup>53</sup> Gregg was nominated to several state conventions in the 1850s and early 1860s. He was even nominated for federal office. Two gubernatorial and several senatorial nominations came and went for Maxcy Gregg. Clearly his fellow citizens thought of him when they discussed the honorable class to whom such high offices would go and felt there would be no considerable embarrassment by attaching his name to their nomination. And though neither was fully realized – he would be neither the Governor of South Carolina nor a U.S. Senator – that he was nominated was significant. See: “Executive Department.,” *Camden Weekly Journal*, May 10, 1853., “Mr. Editor.,” *Sumter Banner*, January 30, 1850., “Miscellaneous Items.,” *Edgefield Advertiser*, October 6, 1858., “Col Maxcy Gregg.,” *Camden Weekly Journal*, August 20, 1852., “Mere-Mention.,” *Yorkville Enquirer*, October 30, 1856., and “Correspondence of the Enquirer.,” *Yorkville Enquirer*, December 3, 1862.

<sup>54</sup> “Col. Maxcy Gregg,” *Camden Weekly Journal*, August 20, 1852.

<sup>55</sup> “Letter from the Hon. P. S. Brooks.,” *Independent Press*, February 22, 1856.

secession.<sup>56</sup> So came to fruition Gregg's opportunity to help lead South Carolina into the radical politics of secession with his long-standing membership in that club of rabid Confederates: the fire-eaters.

Over the course of his political career, Gregg gained a reputation for an honest and direct style of interaction and oratory. In 1851, for example, the *Camden Weekly Journal* wrote that, "Col. Gregg commenced in his usual way, no attempt whatever at oratory, but plain and practical. His style is peculiar to himself, and is in keeping with the dignified and honorable character of this gentleman. He never fails to impress upon the minds of his audience that he is in *earnest*, and *means* every word he says."<sup>57</sup> Here Gregg eschewed the flowery language of the statesman and, instead, used his own particular style of straight-forward and honest speech making. Gregg was well known for his absolute, bordering on cruel faithfulness to the truth. Such was his penchant for blunt honesty that it was even mentioned (in soft terms) in his eulogy.<sup>58</sup>

Greenberg paints a picture of Southern gentility and statesmanship in *Masters and Statesmen*. Oratory – flowery and impassioned speeches meant to overawe and inspire – was the order of the day and the hallmark of men such as John C. Calhoun. And while the oratory arts were essential for any Southern statesman, as Greenberg lays out, Gregg's own unique brand of brutally honest address was wholly consistent with his character and was, therefore, accepted. In a way, Gregg managed to carve out a space for himself to be himself within the larger framework of honor. The impulsive teen from 1835 maintained a scrap of individuality because his chosen fault was brutal honesty – something to be admired by the men of honor whose affirmation he

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<sup>56</sup> "Delegates to the State Convention.," *Anderson Intelligencer*, December 13, 1860.

<sup>57</sup> "Secession Meeting at Flat Rock.," *Camden Weekly Journal*, September 30, 1851.

<sup>58</sup> Palmer, *Address Delivered at the Funeral of General Maxcy Gregg*, 4.

craved. And it was on this foundation that Gregg built his life: a successful law practice, local statesmanship, a military career, and a legacy that would far outlive the man himself; a radical who died for the Confederate cause as an honorable man.

### **Standing On Honor: The Radical Maxcy Gregg**

By the 1850s, Gregg had gained recognition from South Carolina's circle of honorable elites and used this affirmation both to advance the cause of secession and boost his own reputation. His oratorical style and brutal honesty, so commended by superiors and peers as he rose in social and economic rank, found focus in the fire-eaters' drive towards disunion. In his efforts for secession, Gregg used his position, his station, and his standing, marshaling honor itself to make his case for the dissolution of the union between the states.

Gregg wrote in 1852 that "The position of South Carolina at this time is a most difficult and embarrassing one. Suffering under injuries which render a continuance with the present Union incompatible with honor or safety...."<sup>59</sup> He went on to report that South Carolina had been abandoned by other states who would neither stand nor fight against the despotism of the north. In a recommendation to the state of South Carolina, Gregg stated they needed more support from other similarly "oppressed" states if South Carolina was to act in any meaningful way. By 1858, his stance had hardened further. In a letter published by the *Edgefield Advertiser*, Gregg and other radical southern elites like then-Governor of South Carolina Robert Francis Withers Allston, Mayor of Columbia, S.C. James D. Tradewell and J. H. Adams refused invitations to a dinner honoring Milledge Luke Bonham.<sup>60</sup> The dinner for Bonham seems to have

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<sup>59</sup> This was published just over nine years before the advent of the Civil War but does highlight quite forcefully that Southern men were gearing up for a showdown long before the advent of open and armed hostilities. Gregg wrote about the issues facing South Carolina should it continue its present course with the Union in this 1852 report published in *The Sumter Banner*. "Report of Maxcy Gregg.," *Sumter Banner*, May 11, 1852.

<sup>60</sup> It is worth noting that the *Edgefield Advertiser* displays under the title of its newspaper this mission statement: "A Democratic Journal, Devoted to the South and Southern Rights, Politics, Latest News, Morality, Temperance, Agriculture, &c." This is all above the quote "We will cling to the Pillars of the Temple of our Liberties, and if it

been to congratulate him on honorably representing his constituents. Gregg's letter praised Bonham for breaking with party on a vote surrounding "the perplexed question of Kansas," and further congratulated Bonham on his non-support for the Democratic Party. This independent action was Bonham's alone as other South Carolinian representatives chose to follow the party line. While Gregg and his fellows seem to have had no issue with Bonham himself – many took the opportunity to commend Edgefield on their supreme choice of representative – they seemed to take issue with others in attendance at the dinner; namely James Henry Hammond. Hammond was, in Gregg's and the others' opinion, steering South Carolina into party politics instead of adhering to the principles of individual, state rule. It was their displeasure with the growing ties between South Carolina congressmen and the Democratic cabal seeking to compromise a slavery dependent South into oblivion that drove Gregg and the others from the festivities. This can be best seen by Gregg's concern with the legacy and lessons of John C. Calhoun stating:

Party consolidation is the grand engine for converting the Confederacy into a consolidated Nation. Against consolidation, and "National" Parties, the States Rights Party has been contending for long years. In that long struggle, our great and pure leader wore out his life... The monument to his memory has not yet been built. When the marble rises to attest our veneration, shall its legend be false? Shall all his words be effaced from our hearts, and shall we suffer an inferior strain of men to undo the work of his life? Honor, consistency, self-respect, and whatever of pride in South Carolina is left to us, forbid it<sup>61</sup>

This sharp statement drew a bold line between the political heirs of John C. Calhoun, placing radical States Rights Party members like himself in the right and National Democrats in the wrong. The time for compromise, he implied, was long past for anyone aimed to remain true to

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must fall, we will Perish amidst the ruins." "Executive Department, Glenn Springs..." *Edgefield Advertiser*, September 8, 1858. It is also interesting that this refusal to attend dinner at which Hammond was merely a guest comes mere months after several of these men, Gregg included, both attended and spoke at a dinner *to honor* James Henry Hammond. See: "The Dinner to Senator Hammond.," *Edgefield Advertiser*, July 28, 1858.

<sup>61</sup> "Gentlemen: I have had the honor of receiving..." *Edgefield Advertiser*, September 8, 1858.



the code of honor. These letters were then published in a booklet titled *An Appeal to the State Rights Party of South Carolina: In Several Letters on the Present Condition of Public Affairs*. Here, Gregg's voice featured prominently and last. Not only did he lambast his fellow South Carolinians but he accused them of faltering on the one thing that might keep each of above suspicion: their honor. He charged that those who stick to the party line seek "Not to do something worthy of remembrance, but to stand well with party, and to attain the preferments bestowed by" the national party. Gregg accused his fellow, honorable men of selling out South Carolina for the party.<sup>62</sup> He charged them with betraying South Carolina. Gregg's indictment of South Carolina's political trajectory and its representatives' seeming disregard for the conventions of honorable statesmanship was damning, but one he could confidently levy given his social rank and reputation. And it was a hill he would die on.

In December of 1860, Gregg was one of 170 men that signed the Ordinance of Secession that officially declared South Carolina a free and independent state and officially dissolved the union that had been formed in 1777 with the Articles of Confederation. On April 14, 1861 Brigadier General P. G. T. Beauregard oversaw the opening shot of the South's armed rebellion with the bombardment of federal troops stationed at Fort Sumter. The American Civil War had begun. And of course, Gregg was a part of it.

### **Cementing Honor: The Death and Memory of Maxcy Gregg**

After executing the Ordinance of Secession, the State Convention authorized the raising of a regiment of volunteers to defend South Carolina. Maxcy Gregg was placed in command. This

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<sup>62</sup> This is exactly the kind of behavior that Kenneth Greenberg discusses was completely counter to what honorable statesmen were supposed to be doing. Instead of following a national agenda, southern statesmen like Gen. Bonham, were expected to act on what they believed were the best interests of their respective states/communities/constituencies with little to no thought of what *they* wanted. In short, Gregg accused South Carolina's state representatives of forgoing their honorable duty to their people and selling out to a national and, thereby, un-South Carolinian, dishonorable agenda. Greenberg, *Masters and Statesmen*.

regiment would become known as the First South Carolina Volunteers (First S. C. V.), for South Carolina's use in the four-year slog which would become the American Civil War.<sup>63</sup>

The First S. C. V. "was distributed on Sullivan's and Morris' Island, near Charleston, until a few weeks after the bombardment and reduction of Fort Sumpter [*sic*] by the Confederate forces."<sup>64</sup> After this action, the regiment moved into Virginia and "after a stay of some two months about Fairfax Court House and Centerville, it was returned to South Carolina and disbanded," as its six-month term of service had expired. Colonel Gregg, as he was then known, "at once organized a new regiment, partly from companies of the old regiment, partly from new volunteer companies."<sup>65</sup> He took his new regiment to Richmond and then onto Suffolk, Virginia where, in December of 1861, Gregg was made a Brigadier General in the Provisional Army of the Confederate States. He assumed command of the "Twelfth, Thirteenth and Fourteenth regiments of South Carolina Volunteers. In June of 1862 his men joined the ranks of the Army of Northern Virginia" now under the command of General Robert E. Lee. This brigade would become known as the Gregg's and they would be the last brigade Gregg would ever command.<sup>66</sup>

Known for his composure in battle and his devotion to the Confederate cause, Gregg was well loved by his men. Their service in key roles at the battles of Gaines' Mill and Second Bull Run won the Gregg's and their leader praise. When Gregg was wounded at Antietam, his legacy was almost assured. Just a few months later, Gregg would indelibly cement his legacy with his death on the battlefield.

Gregg's fatal wounding at Fredericksburg was seared into the memories of his fellow soldiers. Remembering the victory, a Confederate veteran remembered the appearance of the

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<sup>63</sup> Caldwell, *The History of a Brigade*, 62-63.

<sup>64</sup> Caldwell, *The History of a Brigade*, 63.

<sup>65</sup> Caldwell, *The History of a Brigade*, 63.

<sup>66</sup> Caldwell, *The History of a Brigade*, 63.

what he believed to be the Northern Lights explaining “we enthusiastic young fellows felt that the heavens were hanging out banners and streamers and setting off fireworks in honor of our victory.”<sup>67</sup> After the battle, Gregg was taken to a nearby house where he was placed in bed. Still fully conscious, Gregg dictated a letter to Governor Pickens which read, “I am severely wounded, but the troops under my command have acted as they always have done, and I hope we have gained a glorious victory. If I am to die now, I give my life cheerfully for the independence of South Carolina, and I trust you will live to see our cause triumph completely.”<sup>68</sup> Gregg was right about his mortality and wrong about the south’s eventual victory in the war. The General had been shot through the side with the bullet lodging near his spinal cord. Resigned to his fate Gregg sent for his rival of many months, General Jackson, to make amends for an incident some months before. Jackson came and sat with the dying Gregg.

Their conversation was one of, unsurprisingly, honor. Gregg had, some months before, written an endorsement that he feared may have been seen by Jackson as a slight to his honor and authority. And though the two had been quarreling for some time, Gregg regretted any offense to the General. Jackson put his troubled mind at ease saying, “The doctors tell me that you have not long to live. Let me ask you to dismiss the matter from your mind and turn your thoughts to God and to the world to which you go.”<sup>69</sup> Gregg simply replied, “I thank you.”<sup>70</sup> He died shortly thereafter.

On December 14<sup>th</sup>, 1862 General Robert E. Lee wrote he regretted “to report the death of the patriotic soldier and statesman, Brig. Gen. Thos R. R. Cobb, who fell upon our left; and among the latter, that brave soldier and accomplished gentleman, Brig. Gen. Maxcy Gregg, who was

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<sup>67</sup> Freeman, *Lee’s Lieutenants*, 374.

<sup>68</sup> Freeman, *Lee’s Lieutenants*, 354.

<sup>69</sup> Freeman, *Lee’s Lieutenants*, 375-6.

<sup>70</sup> Freeman, *Lee’s Lieutenants*, 376.

very seriously, and, it is feared, mortally wounded during the attack on our right.”<sup>71</sup> History, of course, would prove Lee’s last sentiment correct. By the time *Yorkville Enquirer* printed Lee’s report Maxcy Gregg had died of his wounds. Just days later, Lee wrote again, this time to Governor Pickens:

While South Carolina is mourning the loss of her gallant and distinguished son, General Maxcy Gregg, permit me to join in your sorrow for his death. From my first acquaintance, when you sent him with his gallant regiment to the defense of our frontier in Virginia, I have admired his distinguished patriotism and his unselfish devotion. He has always been at the post of duty and of danger, and his services in this army have been of inestimable value, and his loss is deeply lamented. In its greatest triumphs and its bloodiest battles he has borne a distinguished part. On the Chickahominy, on the plains of Manassas, at Harpers Ferry, Sharpsburg, and Shepherds-town he led his brigade with distinguished skill and dauntless valor. On the wooded heights of Fredericksburg he fell in front of his brigade in close conflict with the advancing foe. The death of such a man is a costly sacrifice, for it is to men of his high integrity and commanding intellect that the country must look to give character to her councils, that she may be respected and honored by all nations. Among those of his State who will proudly read the history of his deeds, may be found to imitate his noble example. I have the honor to be, with great respect, your obedient servant.

R. E. Lee  
General<sup>72</sup>

Lee had now written one published and one private letter lamenting the death of Brigadier General Maxcy Gregg. His allusions to his nobility, character, bravery, and heroic fall for the Confederacy would have been understood by all southern men as praise of the highest order. Even in death, Gregg claimed the sterling reputation as a role model for southern manhood and unblemished honor. This was the truly pervasive nature of Southern honor. It did not simply cease to be at the end of one’s life; it endured through memory.

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<sup>71</sup> “Gen. Lee’s Official Report.,” *Yorkville Enquirer*, December 24, 1862.

<sup>72</sup> Correspondence from Robert E. Lee to Governor Pickens, December 18, 1862, Folder 1, Robert Edward Lee Papers, South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, South Carolina.

Gregg's friends would make sure his legacy lived on too. J. F. J. Caldwell – an invaluable source for this work and a soldier who served under Brigadier General Maxcy Gregg – published extensively on his regiment shortly after the close of the war. Within its pages, *The History of a Brigade of South Carolinians, Known First as "Gregg's, and Subsequently as "McGowan's Brigade."* Caldwell espouses every good, right, and virtuous trait of Gregg's without mention of a single flaw.<sup>73</sup> The *Yorkville Enquirer*, who had published much about Gregg during his lifetime, joined in lauding his last days. They boldly state that regiments in Savanna and Charleston were "lying idly in their quarters" where they "pined that *they* were not sharers in the passage of arms at Fredericksburg" where "Maxcy Gregg poured out the last drops of his noble blood *for the independence of South Carolina!*"<sup>74</sup> Again, Gregg was helped to his seat of honor by the public demonstration of his heroic deeds and the deliberate forgetfulness of his failures. But perhaps the South believed a little mercy befitted their dead hero. Dr. Palmer, the man who gave Gregg's eulogy in Columbia, South Carolina certainly thought so.

Palmer began his sermon by comforting those present that it was both normal and right that one might greet the passing of their fellow man with tears. But extended the depth of the loss the State and those attending the funeral saying:

to-day [*sic*] the State, like the Spartan mother of old, receives through us one of her noblest sons upon his shield, and pours out her grief upon his venerated form. Alas, our bereaved mother! How often of late has she strained her dead sons to her bosom, in the last embrace, and then turned aside, like Rachael, to weep, 'refusing to be comforted, because they are not!' Where is the family amongst us that does not whisper its secret grief around the evening hearth? And where the village cemetery whose sacred inclosure [*sic*] does not shelter some patriot's

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<sup>73</sup> Not mentioning one's faults is, of course, the point of a work in which someone is praised. That does not, however, mean that the author could not have been realistic about Gregg's lack of certain qualities – most notably tact. See Caldwell, *The History of a Brigade*.

<sup>74</sup> The last line in italics, "... *for the independence of South Carolina,*" is supposed to be an allusion to Gregg's supposed last words, "I yield my life for the independence of South Carolina." While this sentiment was echoed almost verbatim in Gregg's letter to Governor Pickens shortly before he died and would not have been out of character for Gregg to say, the authority with which these last words were reported is dubious and, therefore, not totally reliable. "Mammoth Armada.," *Yorkville Enquirer*, March 4, 1863.

grave? Her martyred sons sleep everywhere upon her soil; upon the mountains grassy slope, beneath the peaceful watching of the silent stars, to where the ocean fringes the earth with its foam, and chants with its deep bass the low, funereal dirge! But here, to-day [*sic*], in the centre [*sic*] of them all, with his sword beneath his head, we bury the gallant chieftain who led the strife in which they bravely fell. What language can rise to the solemn majesty of this assembly, or speak with the pathos which belongs to unuttered sorrow! Were I to follow the impulse of my own heart, I would cover my head, and sit a silent mourner beside that bier, rather than be the voice to utter the wail which now rends every breast throughout this commonwealth.”<sup>75</sup>

The sadness that attended Gregg’s death – if Palmer was to be believed – was palpable and, indeed, painful to his fellow South Carolinians. But Palmer did not stop with a simple outpouring of grief. Using the opportunity for the performance before him, he proceeded to remind the funeral attendees of what kind of a man lay before them and who it was they had lost. He stated:

He whom we now bear to the tomb is worthy of the reverence of these imposing obsequies; nor do I fear that words of praise will breed in your minds, as with one of doubtful virtue, suspicion of his merit. If there be one word which, more than another, covers the breadth of his character, it is the word *manliness*. He was a true man, in the full assemblage of virtues which crowd into that short, expressive term. Courage, honesty, and strength, were tempered with the softer graces of gentleness and love; ‘Elements/ So missed in him, that nature might stand up/  
And say to all the world, this was a MAN.’<sup>76</sup>

Palmer quoted William Shakespeare’s Caesar here.<sup>77</sup> This follows his earlier allusions to antiquity and its virtues, charms, and examples of heroic deeds and tragic heroes.<sup>78</sup> These allusions were a bit of public theater meant to invoke popular images of the virtues of times past and followed the American tradition of an idealized Rome, in whose footsteps many Americans – and Confederates – thought they were following.

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<sup>75</sup> Palmer, *Address Delivered at the Funeral of General Maxcy Gregg*, 3-4.

<sup>76</sup> Palmer, *Address Delivered at the Funeral of General Maxcy Gregg*, 4.

<sup>77</sup> William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, ed. Albert Harris Tolman (New York: World Book Company, 1913), 5.5,73-75.

<sup>78</sup> Having already referenced the state as Spartan and alluding to the popular idea that Spartan soldiers were tasked by their women before going off to battle to “come back with your shield or on it” implying they should either come back victorious or die in the effort. He is now referencing the death of the incredible man that ended the Roman Republic and whose death, historians commonly agree, began the Roman Empire.

By extolling Gregg's masculinity, Palmer continued an argument that began with the first sentence of his oration: Gregg was absolutely worthy of honor, a hero who gave his life for his country, and was a shining example of Southern manhood that all should strive to emulate. But Palmer was not going to leave that up to the crowd to decide, he was going to prove it. This was no longer a eulogy; it was a very public argument in favor of Gregg's unassailable and undeniable honor. Continuing the theme of Roman virtue, Palmer reflected upon the character of the man claiming that:

Inheriting a more than Roman virtue from his honored sire, it grew in him to such a robustness and symmetry as to command the homage of universal reverence. To say that he was incapable of falsehood, in any of the forms in which it is acted among men, would present but the coarse profile of his immaculate truthfulness. The historian must say of him more than this; that he could not stoop even to those minor indirections which creep unwittingly into human intercourse, and which are almost sanctioned by the usage of society. His simple word was the gauge of honor, and was always accepted as his surest pledge. His innate sense of right, which could not inflict a wilful [*sic*] wrong, looked with a cultivated resentment upon the wrong perpetrated by another; and as the arbiter [*sic*] of many a dispute, the honor of a friend was confided to a guardian whose jealousy would not suffer it to be tarnished with a stain."<sup>79</sup>

Palmer's allusions to Gregg's defense of the honor of his friends would have been well understood and well-known by his audience.<sup>80</sup> And while the statement "His simple word was the gauge of honor," may seem bold, the mere fact of its pronouncement in such a public forum served to illustrate the high esteem and great respect Gregg commanded in his last years and, ultimately, in death.<sup>81</sup> His honor, it seemed, was absolute and unquestioned.

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<sup>79</sup> Palmer, *Address Delivered at the Funeral of General Maxcy Gregg*, 4.

<sup>80</sup> Gregg was involved in many challenges, both his own and those of his friends, during the course of his life. Notably his duel in the streets of Charleston discussed above. He also took part in settling a dispute between Captain J. N. Shedd and General H. K. Aiken in December of 1851. Correspondence from Maxcy Gregg and James Chestnut Jr. to W. M. Bratton and I. W. Nelson, December 1851, Folder 3, Hugh Kerr Aiken Manuscripts, South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, South Carolina.

<sup>81</sup> Palmer, *Address Delivered at the Funeral of General Maxcy Gregg*, 4.

This was how the bulk of those at his funeral – and who read this speech – would remember him.<sup>82</sup> Palmer was not simply giving a sermon extolling the virtues of living a good, moderate life but was instead performing a service to Gregg. This theatrical display was Gregg's last honorable performance. Palmer gave his audience an image to cling to of idealized times and idealized men who should serve as guides for Confederate manhood going forward. Gregg was chief among them.

I may not, before this public assembly, lift the veil of domestic life, and reveal the tenderness of a strong man's love: which, not weaving ties of its own, twined itself around the venerable mother, who, by a timely release, is just spared the anguish of weeping over his bier; and around endeared sisters, who to-day [*sic*] mourn with a sorrow which sisters are seldom called to feel. Be it enough to say, that he belonged to that select class of the brave and true, whose hands are strong in the great battle of life, but who love with a woman's heart at home. In this rare union of gentleness with force, he became a type of the Southern gentleman; and fathers proudly pointed their sons to his model, as they gazed upon a character so massive in its strength, with such an undertone of honesty and truth, and so tempered with urbanity."<sup>83</sup>

As with any funeral, eulogies tell of the good and attempt to forget the bad.

Nowhere did Palmer mention that this honorable man shot at a boy across the busiest street corner in Charleston, S. C. in clear violation of many well understood dueling conventions. Nor did he recount his verbally violent attack on the President of South Carolina College which almost resulted in his expulsion from that same institution. Instead, Palmer told the story of a man who loved his family, carried himself with dignity, acquitted himself well in battle and in politics, and whose defense of his friends was both upright and unwavering. In short, Palmer presented the people of South Carolina with a hero whose honor had outlived the man. And Gregg was certainly not alone in this. Many an honorable southern man died for the cause of the Confederacy and

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<sup>82</sup> The eulogy was printed as a pamphlet by a press in Columbia, South Carolina, ostensibly for public consumption.

<sup>83</sup> Palmer, *Address Delivered at the Funeral of General Maxcy Gregg*, 5.



would similarly be canonized in their own communities.<sup>84</sup> Gregg's ability to marshal his men, fight for his cause, and die for his country was not unique to history nor was it unique to the Civil War.

### CONCLUSION: PART III

#### Honor's Legacy

Why then does this study of Maxcy Gregg matter? Gregg's struggle for honor – as evidenced by his early, violent, and incredibly public missteps – provides a few answers and generates many more questions about how honor worked in the antebellum South. In following a single man throughout his life as opposed to using small snippets from the lives of many of well-known men allows historians to study the life cycle of honor. Clearly Southern honor allowed, within reason, for certain missteps due to age, lack of experience, or other extenuating circumstances. This qualified flexibility explains why Gregg's early, very public failed trials with honor did not appear to taint his later endeavors. Neither Palmer nor the *Yorkville Enquirer* nor the Generals Thomas Jackson and Robert E. Lee had a negative word to say about Gregg at the end of his life.<sup>85</sup> Either the sins of Gregg's honorable gaffes had been long forgotten by a generous public or they simply did not matter later in his life. In any case, honor's apparent allowance for a learning curve was both surprising and understandable. The extent of that leniency is definitely a subject for further study and further complicates the study of honor for generations of scholars to come.

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<sup>84</sup> General Thomas Jonathan "Stonewall" Jackson was famously killed by his own men and has since become a well-known icon of the Confederate cause.

<sup>85</sup> This can, of course, be chalked up to not wanting to trample on the grave of a dead man. However, as a Palmer points out, a man's word was his bond. This included how he spoke of others. Neither Lee nor Palmer held back nor did they address Gregg's character in an honorably, yet disinterestedly "diplomatic" fashion. Instead, they lent their voices to praise Gregg's actions and espouse his honor in life and the moment of his death.

Creating further complexity is the backdrop of the American Civil War and all that horrible conflict entailed. Throughout history, war has always created opportunities that peacetime lacked. Men and women could rise through feats of extraordinary valor, inventiveness, and skill. His service in that great conflict over slavery was part and parcel of Gregg's honor. What would he have been without it? He certainly would not have been a martyr and his park in the center of Columbia, South Carolina may as well have been named for another famous Columbia local. This also begs the question, what happens to honor without the Civil War? As it stands, honor as it was known in the antebellum south disappeared and never reemerged in quite the same way. Why? If honor was so flexible, why did it break under the crucible of war? What did the war strip from the south that made honor impossible to maintain after its close?<sup>86</sup>

And as always, the pesky questions of "What if? history." Would the code of honor have continued had the Civil War never happened? Maxcy Gregg certainly thought that it would not. He feared party rule over South Carolina and accused his fellows of selling out their honor for favors and riches. Would this have been the reality? These and many, many more questions about the nature of honor will provide, this historian is certain, decades of research, scholarly conflict, and – even on occasion – a duel of words. But one thing is clear, more research is necessary.

Honor was absolute and pervasive in the antebellum South. Politics, economics, society, and – as it turned out – the fate of a nation lay within its keeping. Gregg was deemed an honorable man during his lifetime and his mortal wounding at the hands of the

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<sup>86</sup> Clearly the eradication of slavery, the devastation of the south, and the inability to practice total political freedom hampered any recovery honor may have made in the post-war south. But to what extent each of these factors and many others had on the disappearance of antebellum honor remains a subject in need of further scholarship.

Federals at Fredericksburg furnished him with a death that cemented his status within the circle of men who continued to uphold his values.

As of June 2020, a small park with a swimming pool in Columbia, South Carolina still bears Gregg's name. Aside from a small plaque which provides the barest details of Gregg's life and death at Fredericksburg, there is no other interpretation of his life. There is no mention of his fire-eating politics, his leadership in steering South Carolina toward secession, or his vehement defense of the institution of slavery: all things he won praise and honor for in life. But that is the tricky part about honor. Without a community that recognizes honor, allows for its performance, and continuously confers on the honorable their status via works, money, etc. honor cannot exist. These values: radical politics, civil war, and hate are no longer the values of many in Columbia. Without the affirmation of these values, Gregg's legacy has turned from one of honor to one of shame. Without a system to support it, Gregg's honor is long since gone. Yet the legacy of Gregg's honor remains.

As many Americans are finding out history is a study of reinterpretation. As historians, we try our best to be impartial arbiters of fact-based interpretation. Yet many of us, myself included, are tainted by the times in which we live. In a post-Civil Rights era, in a post-George Floyd era, the honor once garnered by men like Gregg must be reevaluated. Without his honor, Gregg was just a man who served the ideals of a state and a nation built on and sustained by slavery. Without his park, Gregg's last tangible sign of his once proud, honored status in Columbia would vanish. As of June 30, 2020 there have been no announcements made by the city of Columbia to consider changing the name of the park.

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