

Richmond, Virginia April, 1865

In the archives of the Colebrook Historical Society is a newspaper from Richmond, Virginia dated April 27, 1865, just 24 days after the Confederate Capitol had surrendered to the forces of the Union Army. Its name is "*The Richmond Whig*", volume 1, number 21. It consists of one sheet of newsprint, folded in half and then in half again, thus giving it a total of 8 pages of news and advertising. It is a very valuable reference, as so many major events had taken place in such a short time that the populace, both North and South, were reeling much the same as the general population did after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 and the Islamic terrorist's on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001. On the 27th of April 1865 John Wilkes Booth had not yet been apprehended, many military units of the Confederate Army were still in the field, Lincoln had died just 12 days prior and as a consequence the paper has many conflicting accounts of what was going on in Virginia as well as the nation.

On Sunday morning April 2, as Jefferson Davis sat in his pew at church, an officer walked up the aisle and handed him a telegram from Lee. Davis opened it and read: "Richmond must be evacuated this evening." Concealing his feelings, he rose and left the church. Calling his Cabinet together, he hastened to pack the archives of the government and to board a train for the southward. The fatal news spread through the city and the scene during that afternoon, the coming night and the next day was such as cannot be adequately described. All social order was destroyed. Many left the city, but the great majority could not do so. The nine ships building in the river were set on fire, and so were the bridges and the great tobacco and cotton warehouses. The arsenal was also fired, and the thousands of bursting shells sounded like an artillery battle. Barrels of liquor were emptied into the streets, and hundreds of the rabble became intoxicated; and these, joined by the convicts from the penitentiary ran howling like demons through the streets. The fire spread to the city, and 700 buildings were soon in flames, and the crash of falling walls was added to the general pandemonium. The people rushed from their homes to the streets and to Capitol Square with the few effects they could carry. Such was the condition of Richmond on the 2nd and 3rd of April, 1865.

On the 3rd, the Union troops entered the city, and within a few days order was in some degree restored. President Lincoln had visited Richmond on April 4th, while the fires were still burning.

General Lee, with the 28,000 remaining troops in his once formidable army, attempted a series of desperate maneuvers, but was blocked at every turn. On the 9th of April, he raised the white flag. On April 26, the Confederate army consisting of 37,000 men under General Johnston surrendered to Gen. Sherman. A week later all the remaining Confederate forces east of the Mississippi were surrendered by Gen. Richard Taylor, and on May 26, E. Kirby Smith surrendered the last Confederate army west of the Mississippi, and the great tragedy of the Civil War was ended.

With those dates in mind, the relevance of this Richmond newspaper of April 27th takes on its proper meaning.

"From the ARMY OF THE POTOMAC:

Headquarters, Army of the Potomac, April 23. Reports are current here that many of our soldiers have been found murdered in the vicinity of houses through the country, but notwithstanding careful inquiry, no confirmation of these rumors can be obtained. Squadrons of cavalry, however, have been sent to scout the country and to bring in no prisoners who are found with arms in their hands, whether claiming to be paroled or not.”

“It is more than probable that if any of our men are murdered it is done by citizens in defense of their homes and families, for it is a well known fact that some bad men, stragglers from our army, are scattered for miles from the army lines, devoting their attention to plundering and outraging residents. Some of the worst cases ever recorded have been reported within a few days, and it is to be hoped that extreme measures will be at once adopted to bring the miscreants who have perpetuated them to justice.

A delegation of citizens from Danville came through to headquarters yesterday with a petition from the president and directors of the Richmond and Danville Railroad, asking permission to repair their road, saying that all the rolling stock was at Danville, and in good condition. The communication was telegraphed to Gen. Grant, who replied that the request would be granted provided they would take the oath of allegiance, the Government to retain the right to take possession of the road at any time they see proper.”

“It is believed that the cars will be running again on this route in two or three days, as the track is almost in as good order as before Lee’s retreat. It was learned from these gentlemen that Davis had been in Danville some two or three weeks since, but that he had left, and his present whereabouts is unknown to them. Large numbers of citizens appear daily at the office of the Provost Marshall at headquarters to take the oath and asking that their homes and property may be protected by placing guards over them, that they may be able to save enough from the rapacity of stragglers to keep their families from starvation until they can raise their crops during the coming season. Their requests, however, are refused on the ground that it would require about a corps of the army to supply all who ask, and this, of course, cannot be thought of. At the earnest solicitation of the citizens of Farmville for protection, the 40th New York Volunteers have been detained as guards for that town, and will remain there until things become settled.”

“The army still remains in the vicinity of Burksville Junction. No further change in its disposition will be made until official news is received from Sherman. No troops from this army have gone toward him, as it was believed that he was fully able to look after Johnston with the forces he had.”

(Item) “A mob lately besmirched the house of ex-president Fillmore with ink, because it displayed no signs of mourning for the death of Mr. Lincoln. The *Buffalo Currier* (Republican), thus explains Mr. Fillmore’s reasons for not decorating his house in mourning: ‘We have ample reason to know that this omission was not for want of sincere respect for the deceased, or of a heartfelt sorrow at his death. But private dwellings were not generally draped and no notice was given that they would be, and Mrs. Fillmore, out of health, Mr. Fillmore, as we are informed, did not leave his house after going to the post office in the morning, and therefore was not aware that

any private dwellings were draped, and naturally thought that an ostentatious show of grief might be misunderstood.”