



THE HISTORICAL TIMES

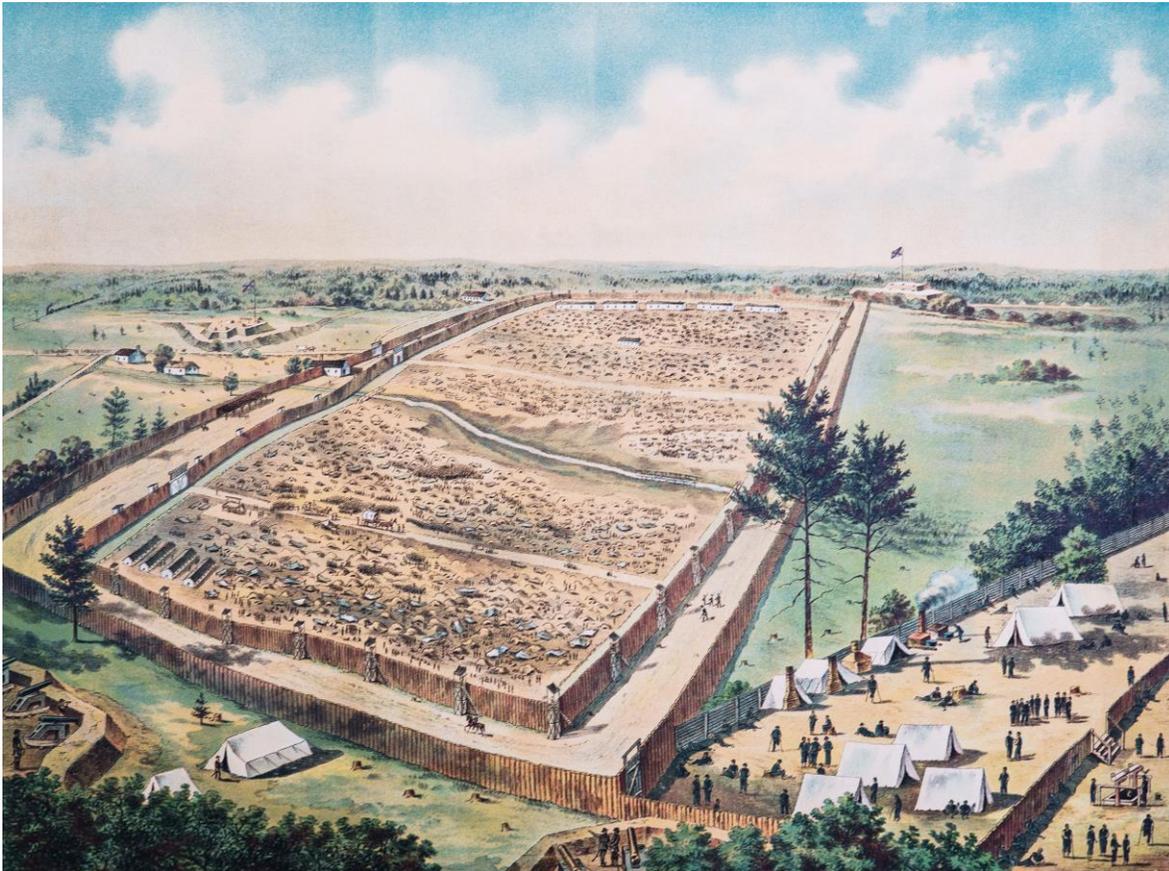
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Was rebel prison 1882 Memorial Day topic?



“Bird’s-Eye View of Andersonville Prison From the South-East,” – artist unknown. This print is part of the Granville Historical Society Archives collection.

Granville’s ‘Chaplain of Andersonville’ gave the address

By CHARLES A. PETERSON

The keynote address for the 1882 Granville Decoration Day program, given by Rev. Thomas J. Sheppard, may have been one of the most significant Memorial Day speeches ever given here. Rev. Sheppard, a Granville resident at the time, was placed in Georgia’s notorious Andersonville Civil War prison in mid-1864, following his capture by the rebel army near Kennesaw Mountain. He was given the title “Chaplain of Andersonville” by his fellow prisoners for his heroic devotion to meeting their spiritual needs in the midst of complete deprivation and despair.

A written version of his oration is likely lost to

time. Perhaps it was delivered extemporaneously. However, using two sources with Sheppard’s own written words recalling that experience in his life, we are able to construct what that speech may have sounded like when it was delivered in Maple Grove Cemetery on May 30, 1882.

The first nine paragraphs of this imagined speech are taken from “At the Academy,” an autobiographical sketch believed to have been first published in the Denison University Alumni Newsletter. It begins with his attendance as a youth at the West Bedford Academy near Coshocton, Ohio. It continues into his Army life starting in 1862 at Zanesville and on

through to his unit's march from Ohio and through Kentucky and Tennessee in 1863. (In cases where Rev. Sheppard's recollections were expressed in sentence fragments, words are added here to make complete sentences for easier reading.)

The last 22 paragraphs are taken from descriptions he penned of his prison experiences, published in *"Andersonville: a story of rebel military prisons, fifteen months a guest of the so-called southern Confederacy,"* by John McElroy. Rev. Sheppard's writings were dated "Granville, Ohio, Dec. 29, 1910," but were penned while he was in Bucyrus, Ohio, where he lived with his daughter two years before he died.

Both of these accounts were obtained from the Rochester Museum and Science Center in Rochester, New York, with assistance from Granville historian B. Kevin Bennett.

By the time Sheppard gave his keynote address in 1882, Granville's Decoration Day program was an annual event. *The Granville Times*, the village's weekly newspaper at the time, mentioned in its coverage of the event only his name as speaker, ignoring its content describing the horrors of life in the prison. Whether his address was read from a prepared document or given extemporaneously, it may have sounded like the following, using his own written words:

An imagined Granville Decoration Day keynote address by Rev. Thomas J. Sheppard – Andersonville survivor

(Fellow citizens:) My enlistment in the Army was not mere accident, nor burst of boyish patriotism, but the result of prolonged thought and deep conviction. My ancestors were strongly opposed to human slavery. This was a war which promised to destroy that great evil; should not I bear part? I had been taught that our government was the best the world ever saw. The flag was the symbol of the highest hopes of mankind. It was now 1862, the darkest hour in the struggle for life of this Government. Should I refuse to help? I decided, as I thought then, I could, if need be, give my life for the maintenance of the Government and the spread of human freedom.

So on August 11, 1862 David Burtch [a cousin] and I walked to Zanesville from Duncan's Falls where I lived and put our names in the roll of Co. E. 97 O.V.I. in the basement of the old Court House. The Capt. and 2nd Lt. having appointed all Sergeants but one, Lt. Hull named me as 5th.

The Regiment left Zanesville Sunday, September 9, 1862. It was fed by citizens of Cincinnati in the Market House. We got into trenches at Covington Heights. About two weeks to Jeffersonville, Ind., while lying asleep along the street at night, we were awakened by a terrifying noise and fled for our lives. We crossed to Louisville, Kentucky October 7.

At Perryville we were first under fire. We marched all the night before, with no water. We



The Confederacy's prison at Andersonville was an unimaginable trial for captured Union soldiers. Rev. Thomas J. Sheppard spent 10 months there, according to Granville historian B. Kevin Bennett.

were asleep on our feet. We rested for 10 days, then marched across Kentucky to camp nine miles from Nashville. I estimated this march at 500 miles. All this way there were no tents. We could scarcely get water to wash our faces. Often the dust was so thick we could hardly see the file leader. We slept in open fields or in woods. In Kentucky the dry grass caught fire and we had to grab our knapsacks and cartridges and stamp it out. In Tennessee one of the last mornings of that march, we crawled out from under snow. Sick call was well attended.

We remained near Nashville until the day after Christmas foraging — for the first time facing bullet

fire. We retreated amid cornstalks. In January 1863 we marched into Murfreesboro and remained till about July 3rd.

On the 14th of May I was ordained in Evergreen Chapel by five Baptist chaplains and two laymen, a request of the home church in Duncan's Falls, Ohio.

Our Regiment escaped the Battle of Chicamauga having been made Provost Guards of town. Saturday and Sunday, September 19 and 20, was an exciting time in Chattanooga. All day long Army wagons passed through town and parked on the west side of the Tennessee River.

For several nights we slept on our arms and so aroused did the men become that the undue rattle of a tin cup would bring a company to their feet as if moved by machinery.

Never can I forget the mingled emotions of surprise, mortification and horror I experienced when, on June 8, 1864, in the confusion of a night attack, I found myself hopelessly in the hands of the enemy. I thought I had considered every other chance of a soldier's fate when in the passion of patriotism I enlisted "for three years or the war."

Bewildered by the unexpectedness of the calamity, it was only after repeated and impatient orders that I relinquished my gun and cartridge box. Yet, dazed as I was in this regard, with respect to many surrounding circumstances, I never had more vivid impressions, witnessing the following:

"That's my gun," cried one Rebel; "That's my cartridge box," said another; "I take that haversack," cried the third, while the fourth dropped at my feet his old gray cap, whose external color suspiciously hinted at its internal furniture, seized my good hat and coolly remarked, "This will do for me."

Such was my first intimate acquaintance with Southern chivalry. A few hours later I was much more kindly treated by a "Confederate Brigadier," and a fine soldierly looking fellow from Texas hoped that my fears of long imprisonment and starvation might prove unfounded.

About 2 P. M., June 23, 1864, I, in company with about two hundred unfortunates, was turned like a wild beast into the "pen" at Andersonville, Ga. There were given to us no shelter, no cooking utensils, no soap, no kettles for washing our clothing, no system of police to prevent crime or secure cleanliness, nothing save what we carried on our backs. They provided a fifteen-foot stockade and bloodhounds to

prevent our escape, guards to shoot us if we crossed the Dead Line, rations, such as they were, usually once in twenty-four hours, and — *graves*.

As we entered that horrid place filled with ragged, dirty, diseased humanity, the sight was almost overpowering; but, having been at the time of my capture much impressed by the words of the heathen king to Daniel, "Thy God whom thou servest continually, He will deliver thee," I tried to lean upon the Lord and seek "a heart for any fate." Corporal W. S. Moss, Seventh New York Heavy Artillery, having proposed to join with mine what shelter he had brought in, we became companions in suffering and partners in the possession of a rude tent.

I spent much time in search of a religious company, but without success until the night of July

**"We had the most beautiful singing,
led by a trio of fine voices and joined
by all present. It seems to me now that
theirs were the sweetest voices I ever
heard."**

8, when attracted by the singing of hymns, I found a large and attentive congregation gathered in prayer and conference meeting. I was deeply impressed by the sight, as the faint light of the feeble fires fell on their emaciated forms clothed in rags, begrimed with dirt and disfigured by disease, their faces pinched with hunger, but radiant with the presence of God. What words of Christian cheer they uttered in the very jaws of death! What songs of triumphant faith floated out upon the air! What words of holy trust rose in prayer to God! Never have I attended religious meetings where song, and speech, and prayer more fervently and fittingly expressed the riches of Christian experience.

The "local habitation" of our public religious services was never fixed for any great length of time. We used to assemble on some vacant spot, and as the prison filled up, move to another. A little before dark those who took a leading part, especially in singing, would repair to the place and "ring the bell," as we used to say starting some familiar hymn. Upon this the prisoners would gather, often to the number of three or four hundred. We had the most beautiful singing, led by a trio of fine voices, and joined by all present. It seems to me now that theirs were the

sweetest voices I ever heard. They used not only to lead our devotions, but also sometimes sing patriotic songs to intensely appreciative audiences of their fellow prisoners until warned to desist by apprehension of danger from the guards.

Having no facilities for singing except our memories and our voices, we used only the most familiar pieces. Such hymns as "Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing," "All Hail the Power of Jesus's Name," "Jesus, Lover of My Soul," and "A Charge to Keep I Have," were most frequently used. Two others, which seemed especially appropriate to our situation, were sung again and again, always with the greatest feeling and truest comfort. They were:

*When I can read my title clear
To mansions in the skies,
I'll bid farewell to every fear,
And wipe my weeping eyes.*

Another, which expressed the hope of eternal joys beyond the grave, and, at the same time, in the chorus, furnished a vehicle for all the tenderness of feeling and intensity of longing, awakened by every thought of *home*, seemed never to wear out. It was the one sung by so many at the Reunion of Prisoners, at Toledo, commencing:

*My heavenly home is bright and fair,
No pain nor woe can enter there;
Its glittering towers the sun outshines—
That heavenly mansion shall be mine.
I'm going home to die no more;
I'm going home; to die no more;
I'm going home to die no more.*

If it be true that the human mind loves contrasts, how much more amid dirt, disease and death, far from friends and native land, surrounded by bitter foes, and daily expecting the most horrid of all deaths, must pious hearts have poured forth in that hymn their quenchless hope of a "better country"; that is a heavenly one, and their abiding conviction of the mighty contrast between Earth's most dreadful spot and Heaven's incomparable glory.

We usually had prayer meeting and preaching services on alternate nights. At the conclusion of all our meetings we invited within a ring, formed of the regular workers, all who desired their conversion to God, or their restoration to the joys of salvation.

I have always supposed that, perhaps, one hundred conversions resulted from the meetings with which I was acquainted.

So occupied was I at times with my interest in religious work as to shut out almost every other thought. I do not doubt that our work was a life-preserver, even in the low sense of an occupation which prevented brooding over the horrors of the situation. The work had also a blessed effect on others. Acts XXVI, 25, properly translated reads: "Paul and Silas were praising God and the prisoners were listening to them." This Bible experience of prison life was repeated in Andersonville. Says S. E. Shurty, Company F, Sixty-fifth Ohio Volunteer Infantry: "I lived on the South Hill, when you preached on the north side we, on the south side, could hear you plainly."

Besides the work of maintaining religious services, much else could be mentioned of a religious and philanthropic character. Many of us met there each Sunday morning at sunrise to study the Word of God in a Bible class. So we may lay at least some claim to having had an Andersonville Sunday-school. We also visited the sick and dying.

One instance in my own experience illustrates how... men were sometimes most thoughtfully alive to the dictates of humanity. My tent mate at the time was Joseph Queenall, a mere boy, a French-Canadian. A member of the same company and same regiment with Corporal Moss, he had, upon his death, come in as a sort of heir of his personal effects. Joe was the soul of faithfulness and unselfishness. The illustration of these traits on his part, which I am about to relate, was no doubt but one of hundreds known to Him who sees all hearts.

During January, 1875, we were without even the imperfect shelter we had been accustomed to have. I took a cold, coughed much, and must have looked very badly. With warmer suns and better shelter I recovered my usual prison health.

An organization was formed to clear the way for the sick and carry cool water to them. By the clumsy barbarity of Rebel arrangement, all the sick unable to walk had to be dragged through heat and dust to the south gate. My blood never boiled hotter than when I saw daily the long line of cripples crawling along, or the still more helpless borne on the backs of comrades or on blankets, while every movement was agony, and many died upon the way. Yet this daily torment was the price of a Rebel prescription. Frequently, from some cause, no doctors would be at the gate. In that case I never knew any notice to

be given to prevent the pilgrimage of pain, but the sick would come and lie around in the hot sun for hours, only at length to go groaning back to their miserable huts. To such, a cup of cool water was a boon indeed.

I was often called upon to hold burial services. I resolved that each should have that mark of respect as long as I had the strength to give it. One of the saddest deaths I saw there was that of Edward Shoulder, Company H, Second Delaware. He was a man, I think, about middle age, a quiet, unobtrusive Christian. With him starvation brought on delirium. He would start up, grasp my hand and then fall back with incoherent words or an empty laugh. The happiest death I witnessed was that of Andrew Smith, Seventh Pennsylvania. His death was one of triumphant joy. He seemed fully prepared to go.

I know of no test of real piety more severe than that applied by life in Andersonville and other prisons. We know how many men were demoralized by army life. In the almost entire absence of moral restraint and constant exposure to vicious companions, their morals gave way, and their want of real goodness was manifested. All that army life was for evil, that and tenfold more was the life in the prison pen. There was in the prison even less moral restraint. The stern, all-present necessity of preserving his own life, constantly tended to foster utter indifference as to others' good and quench every noble impulse of humanity. The intense suffering, the horrifying sights, and the seeming hopelessness of relief, save in death, constantly tempted us to conclude that there was in all the universe no "power that makes for righteousness." For myself, I can say that I only followed the dictates of a heart that longed for Christian fellowship, and the teachings of a Gospel which impelled me, in at least a feeble way, to imitate Him who "came not to be ministered to, but to minister, and to give His life as a ransom for many." But as I look back upon it now, I am amazed that any considerable body of men should there have kept up Christian faith, hope and zeal. And that they not only did not give up in despair, "curse God and die," but lived and labored, and when death did come, even in most horrid form.

Now, while all loyal hearts must ever abhor the diabolism of the slavery rebellion, by which so many brave men found untimely graves amid the sands of the South, who can fail to rejoice at the earnest

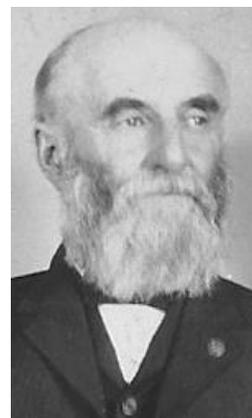
Christian labors of prisoners at Andersonville and other Southern pens? And may we not believe that when Jesus comes in all the glory of His final advent to gather His jewels, it may be said of many precious souls thus born to heavenly joys amid the deepest woes of earth, "These are they who have come up through great tribulation and washed their robes white in the blood of the Lamb!"

-- Charles A. Peterson, Editor, "The Historical Times"

Letters tell story of another local Andersonville POW

By CHARLES A. PETERSON

Elihu P. and Mercy Hayes of rural Granville received a letter dated July 4, 1864 from their son, Thomas, who was positioned at North Mountain at Martinsburg, Va., with Company B of the 135th Regiment of the Union Army during the Civil War.



Thomas E. Hayes

"I am well and a prisoner all the boys are well and with me from our neighborhood

I do not know whether I will be paroled or not".

It was the parents' first indication that their son and his comrades had been captured by the Confederate Army on July 3. This correspondence is part of a collection of Thomas Hayes' Civil War letters maintained by his great-great-grandson, Mike Whitehead, who lives in his forebear's house on Granview Road.

Thomas Elihu Hayes and his cohorts ultimately landed in the Rebel's prison camp at Andersonville, Ga., and would likely have been there at the same time Rev. Thomas Sheppard, a future Granville resident, was present.

According to a written recollection by Thomas' daughter, Delia Hayes Whitehead, Thomas and his fellow prisoners were paroled and delivered to the Union Fleet on Nov. 26, 1864, "mere skeletons from starvation and inhumane treatment."

Elihu P. Hayes was part of an effort seeking

(Turn to page 7)

Spiritual instincts guided Sheppard aiding fellow Andersonville prisoners

This piece is reprinted from the Autumn 2013 issue of "The Licking County Historical Society Quarterly", Vol. 25, No. 3. Some minor edits were required to update this article.

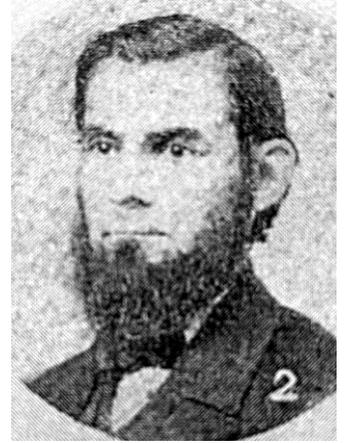
By B. KEVIN BENNETT

As Licking County was commemorating the 150th anniversary of the Civil War in 2013, we rightly noted the significant military and political contributions made by the citizens of this area. Largely forgotten but no less worthy is the story of Rev. Thomas J. Sheppard, who gained fame not through martial exploits but through his humanitarian efforts.

Captured by the Confederates in June 1864, he was sent to the infamous Andersonville POW camp that became a by-word for inhumane treatment. Motivated by the widespread suffering he witnessed on a daily basis, this simple soldier was motivated to fill the spiritual gap for a prison without trained clergy. He conducted impromptu prayer meetings, religious services, and most importantly ministered to the sick and dying so tirelessly that he became known as the "Andersonville Chaplain" by his fellow prisoners. After the war, legislation was introduced in Congress to recognize his services and confer the rank of chaplain upon him.

Sheppard was born in Zanesville, Ohio on June 22, 1834. In June 1859 he married Margaret Collins, who came from a prosperous farming family from the Wheeling, W. Va., area. In 1860 Sheppard and his new wife moved to Duncan Falls, Ohio, acquired a tract of land and took up farming. It also appears that he became deeply involved with the local Baptist Church and he later traced his desire to pursue a religious calling to that time. Records indicate that he engaged in some limited lay preaching in various communities around the Zanesville area.

With the outbreak of the Civil War he struggled with whether to stay at home with his young family and new farm or to fight for his country and advance his anti-slavery convictions. Despite financial inducements from family to stay, he and a cousin hiked up to Zanesville in August 1862 and enlisted in the 97th Ohio Volunteer Infantry (Company E).



Thomas J. Sheppard

Probably because of his education he was selected to be a Sergeant in his unit. After some expedited military training, the unit was sent down to the defenses outside of Covington, Ky., to protect Cincinnati from a threatened Confederate attack.

Over the following months, Sheppard saw war up close, fighting in a number of battles in the Kentucky, Tennessee and Georgia areas, rising in rank to First Sergeant. On June 8, 1864 he was captured by Confederate forces near Kennesaw Mountain, Ga. Sheppard could not have conceived of what the future held in store for him. He remained a prisoner for the next 10 months, confined in the notorious prison of Camp Sumter at Andersonville in Georgia. Struggling against hunger, thirst, overcrowded living conditions, typhoid, smallpox, dysentery and scurvy — a disease that nearly killed him — Sheppard watched as thousands of fellow prisoners suffered indescribable misery, squalor and death. As Andersonville was for enlisted POWs, there was a decided absence of ordained clergy in the compound as chaplains were usually commissioned officers.¹ Accordingly, he stepped up to minister and provide spiritual relief to the suffering POW population. At its worst, in August 1864, Union prisoners were dying at the rate of over 100 a day from disease and malnutrition, and Sheppard strove to attend to them during their dying moments.

With the end of the war in April 1865, Sheppard was released and slowly made his way home. His physical appearance was described as that of a "walking skeleton" and it took Sheppard considerable time to recover from the effects of his POW experience. Deciding to forgo farming, he entered Denison University in 1867 to pursue a religious education, graduating in 1870 at the "advanced" age of 36. Ordained in the Baptist Faith, he initially tended to several pastorates in Licking

County. Often travelling about the county for meager compensation, he exuded the same sincerity and tireless work ethic that held him in good stead at Andersonville. That said, several contemporaries remarked that these qualities compensated for his perceived speaking and intellectual shortcomings.

In 1876 he was appointed to a more financially secure position as financial secretary for the Ohio Baptist Education Society with the duty to solicit funds throughout the state in support of ministerial students attending Denison. He “expanded” this charter, spending much of his time persuading potential collegians of all denominations to enroll at Denison, Shepardson College and the prep school (later named Doane Academy). Deeply devoted to his *alma mater*, he was a generous donor to the school, usually earmarking a portion of his modest salary for that purpose. He also sold to Denison for a nominal sum the tract of land which bears his name,

Sheppard Place, now a development which for many years housed Denison faculty homes. Sheppard always considered Granville as his home.

Sheppard became increasingly debilitated by various ailments traceable to his POW experience. In 1910, physical infirmity and partial blindness necessitated moving into his daughter’s home in Bucyrus. Death came to Thomas J. Sheppard in August 1912, but in accordance with his wishes, his final resting place at Maple Grove Cemetery in Granville was near the school and community he loved. While his grave marker is a simple one, embedded in the stone is a brass emblem with the fitting inscription “Chaplain of Andersonville”.

¹ A Confederate chaplain, a Roman Catholic priest, attempted to minister to the Union prisoners above and beyond his assigned duties. Given the religious prejudices of the period, most Protestant prisoners probably did not avail themselves of his services.

Letters

(Continued from page 5)

action from President Lincoln for an exchange of prisoners to rescue his son and his fellow soldiers. In a petition and letter addressed “To the President of the United States” in August 1864s, “We, the undersigned, citizens of Licking County, and the relatives of about one hundred and sixty men...now in some Southern prison, do most respectfully ask of you, if in your power, to procure their release by special exchange or parol (sic) — These prisoners are from some of our best families...”. This correspondence is also part of the collection of Hayes letters.

“Since the 18th of July, not a letter has been received from the privates,” the elder Hayes wrote to the President. “We suppose they have been in Andersonville prison.”

“We ask you as a parent,” Elihu Hayes closed, “to consider their condition and also to ask that you endorse this petition...”.

The adjutant general of the War Department in Washington promptly replied in a letter dated Aug. 8 that “the case has been referred to Major General B. F. Butler, at Fortress Monroe, Virginia, for such favorable action as may be enabled to take now or at the earliest moment possible.”

Elihu Hayes then traveled to Washington in

October stating in a letter dated Oct. 9 to his wife that he met with President Lincoln, Maj. Gen. Ethan A. Hitchcock, chairman of the Ward Board, and Col. William Hoffman, the Commissary-General for prisoners. Elihu’s letter also lamented, “there will be no exchange for the next 60 days unless Richmond should fall sooner than that time.”

Less than 60 days after the meeting with Lincoln, the prisoners were released. The family does not know the reason why. However, a fragile Thomas Hayes was placed in an army hospital in Annapolis. His family learned of Thomas’ whereabouts when Elihu, passing by a drug store in Newark while in town running errands, heard from the druggist that his son’s name was published in that day’s newspaper as being in the Annapolis hospital, according to Delia Hayes Whitehead’s writings.

In a second trip east, according to Delia’s story, Elihu found his son in the Annapolis hospital.

“Grandfather could not recognize one feature in the boy as Thomas,” Delia penned. “His skin dark and weathered, he was a mere skeleton, and with temples so sunken they would accommodate half an egg.” But when Thomas said “Father,” the elder Hayes knew it was his son, Delia wrote.

Editor’s Note: Delia Hayes Whitehead’s recollections were published in the Spring 1991 edition (Vol. V, No. 2) of *The Historical Times*, which can be found online at www.granvillehistory.org.

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THE HISTORICAL TIMES

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Please visit Granvillehistory.org for further information about all that we do and how you can get involved.

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