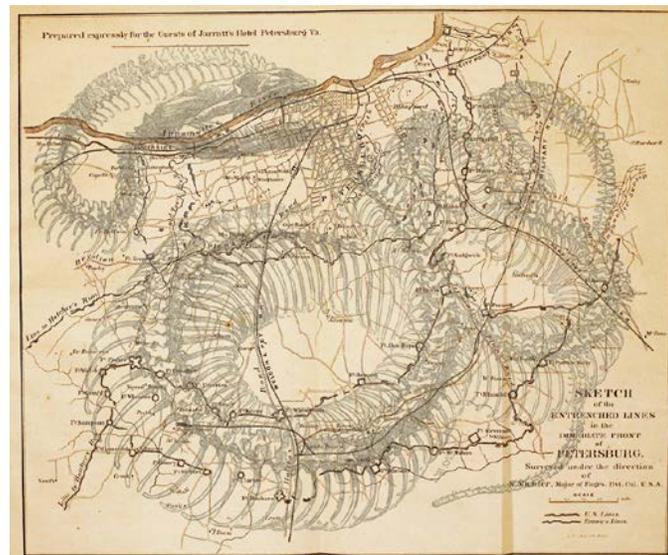


The Garden of Death: The Fallen Sparrows of Fort Mahone

YOU CANNOT CHANGE HISTORY, BUT HISTORY CAN CHANGE YOU

My research journey over the last five years centered on Antebellum Richmond and a remarkable series of images taken in Charlestown in 1859. My particular focus was in documenting how one of them, containing John Wilkes Booth's "Shadow from Richmond," ironically evolved from a simple shared moment of brotherhood with his pre war band of brothers, The Richmond Grays, to become the iconic group image chosen by numerous publications to represent "The Face of the American Civil War."

While walking this path, another series of images, lurking in the shadows, haunted me, the photographs taken by Thomas Roche on April 3rd, 1865 in a garden of death at Petersburg. Unlike the Richmond Grays series, Roche's death studies do not show happy men in a moment of shared camaraderie, taken in the fullness of life before that war. Instead, we see the faces of teenage boys and men caught in the death agony of the Confederacy, trapped within the anaconda's coils encircling its "last ditch," the trenches of Fort Mahone.



"The anaconda folds of Grant's army hugged closer and closer the doomed city..."¹

The sacrifice of these "Fallen Sparrows," like the bird of that name, small, common and ordinary, brings to mind the Biblical widow's mite. Like the poor widow's few

coins, their sacrifice seems but an insignificant offering, paling in comparison with those offered by others. Yet in each instance, an act of extraordinary providence revealed its true worth and the depth of each sacrifice.

When gazing upon the faces of The Fallen Sparrows of Fort Mahone, we behold the true "face" of The Civil War, its overwhelming human loss.

Walk with me though the Garden of Death as I seek to return a name to at least one of these men or boys now known only by a number. Learn of their agony in that garden, recalled by those who survived. This year, the sesquicentennial of the Thomas Roche photographs, befittingly falls on Good Friday, April 3rd 2015. Sometimes history and serendipity walk hand in hand. *In very rare instances, such as this, the footsteps are indeed one and the same.*

In this Garden of Death you will not find "glory" written from the standpoint of the privileged "Captains and Kings" who viewed that war "on horseback," but the words of those who, like the Fallen Sparrows of Fort Mahone, "went-afoot."

"Apparently not many privates survived the war. At least very few have spoken or written about it. Perhaps like me they feel they haven't much to brag of. Then, too, nobody expects much from a private; therefore, he is not obliged, as his superiors are, to explain and contradict, and generally prevaricate, in an effort to sustain his reputation.

The glowing accounts of battles and campaigns have nearly always been written by general officers, or by non-participants who style themselves historians. It seems hardly fair that we privates should be entirely ignored; because without us, there would have been no generals, nor would there have been a war to write about.

In choosing my subject "The Last Days of the War, as Seen by a Private", I certainly have no desire to parody Gen. Gordon's famous lecture, "The Last Days of the Confederacy." He was my general and I entertain only respect and admiration for the man. I have never heard his lecture and if in any way I differ from his statements, such discrepancy is doubtless due to the fact that we looked at events from different standpoints. **The general rode on horseback and I went afoot.** ...

Private Henry T. Bahnson, Company B, 1st North Carolina Sharpshooters Battalion, Age 20 at Fort Mahone

(To Enter “The Garden of Death” Click on Sparrow)



A WALK IN THIS GARDEN WILL CHANGE YOU

i Bartlett, Napier. A soldier's Story of the War: Including the Marches and Battles of the Washington Artillery, and of other Louisiana Troops, New Orleans, Clark & Hofeline, Book Printers, 1874, Pg. 202.