

Lee's Table



Reproduction of Lee's Table in the McLean Parlor



An excerpt from Three Years with Grant as Recalled by war Correspondent Sylvanus Cadwallader edited by Benjamin P. Thomas

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“Generals Grant and Lee were scarcely gone from the house when the craze for mementoes of the occasion seemed to spread among officers and privates. Large sums were offered Major Wilmer S. McLean for the chairs in which the generals sat during the meeting- for the tables on which the writing was done- for substantially every article of furniture. There were two tables in the room. On one of these the minutes of the meeting were first made out. This table Gen. Custer obtained for twenty five dollars, and his widow still has it in her possession. The other table was the one at which Grant and Lee sat when they affixed their signatures to the final notes which completed the surrender. This table Gen. Ord purchased for fifty dollars; and it is still in possession of Mrs. Ord. There has been much sharp contention between the families of these distinguished officers, as to which of them owned the celebrated table used on the day of the surrender. Numerous offers were made for the chairs in which Grant and Lee sat, but Major McLean steadily refused to part with them. It seems that a couple of cavalry officers, finding they could not obtain the chairs by any other means, seized them by force and carried them away. They tried to induce McLean to accept pay for them; but he flung the ‘greenbacks’ on the floor indignantly. Sometime after the chairs were carried off a

cavalryman rode up, thrust a ten dollar 'greenback' into McLean's hands, and exclaimed as he rode away: "This is for the Major's chair." Search was made for the chairs, and the officers who confiscated them, but neither could be found."

An excerpt from Campaigning With Grant by Horace Porter

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"Mr. McLean had been charging about in a manner which indicated that the excitement was shaking his nervous system to its center; but his real trials did not begin until the departure of the chief actors in the surrender. Then relic-hunters charged down upon the manor-house, and began to bargain for the numerous pieces of furniture. Sheridan paid the proprietor twenty dollars in gold for the table on which General Grant wrote the terms of surrender, for the purpose of presenting it to Mrs. Custer, and handed it over to her dashing husband, who galloped off to camp bearing it upon his shoulder. Ord paid forty dollars for the table at which Lee sat, and afterward presented it to Mrs. Grant, who modestly declined it, and insisted that Mrs. Ord should become its possessor. General Sharpe paid ten dollars for the pair of brass candlesticks; Colonel Sheridan, the general's brother, secured the stone inkstand; and General Capehart the chair in which Grant sat, which he gave not long before his death to Captain Wilmon W. Blackmar of Boston. Captain O'Farrell of Hartford became the possessor of the chair in which Lee sat. A child's doll was found in the room, which the younger officers tossed from one to the other, and called the "silent witness."

This toy was taken possession of by Colonel Moore of Sheridan's staff, and is now owned by his son. Bargains were at once struck for nearly all the articles in the room; and it is even said that some mementos were carried off for which no coin of the republic was ever exchanged."

An excerpt from Biography of Wilmer McLean by Frank P. Cauble

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"As soon as Grant left the McLean House, a souvenir craze swept over the Federal Officers who were present at the surrender. Maj. Gen. P.H. Sheridan is supposed to have paid \$20.00 in gold for the table on which Grant drafted the terms of surrender. It is said that a "spirited auction" was held, and that Sheridan, given first choice, paid two ten dollar gold pieces for the table.

Maj. Gen. Edward O.C. Ord is supposed to have paid \$40.00 for the table with the marble top.

Other officers either appropriated or purchased virtually all of the furnishing in the McLean parlor. Even little Lula" McLean's rag doll, was carried away by Sheridan's aide-de-camp, Lt. Col. Thomas W.C. Moore, although it is said that a Union soldier tried to console her with a French china doll.

By the time that Matthew Brady and his assistant arrived from Petersburg there was little in the surrender room to photograph but emptiness. Souvenir hunters had carried away practically everything. Members of the McLean family have denied indignantly that any kind of sale took place and have said that the Union officers simply plundered McLean's home and stole what they wanted. They have resented the statement of Mrs. George A. Custer that McLean was glad to sell his furniture, and have considered the conduct of the Federal officers especially reprehensible after McLean graciously permitted the conference to be held in his home."