



# Lincoln Lore

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## CONFEDERATE LINCOLNIANA

by Mark E. Neely, Jr.

The title of this article may sound like an oxymoron, but it is not. Though Confederate works on Lincoln are rare, they are by no means non-existent. The standard listing of printed Lincolniana, Jay Monaghan's *Lincoln Bibliography, 1839-1939*, noted several pieces printed in the Confederate States of America: *Liquor and Lincoln*, a temperance tract published perhaps in Petersburg, Virginia; Edward A. Pollard's *Letters of the Southern Spy*, articles by a prominent Richmond newspaper editor who accused Lincoln of tricking the South into firing on Fort Sumter; *The Devil's Visit to "Old Abe"*, satirical verse by a Georgia preacher, written in answer to Lincoln's proclamation of a day of prayer and fasting after the Battle of Bull Run; William Russell Smith's *The Royal Ape*, a four-act satirical drama written in verse; and *Old Abe, the Miller*, still another piece of Confederate poetry.

Other pieces of Confederate Lincolniana than those listed by Monaghan exist, and it might prove a fruitful realm for investigation before publication of the next big Lincoln bibliography. The existing bibliography appears to have been constructed by what might be called a "likely repository" approach. That is to say, the bibliographer seems to have asked himself where he might find Lincolniana in some abundance and then taken himself to those places. It is not as clear that a "categorical" approach was taken: that is, he does not seem to have asked himself *who* was interested enough in Abraham Lincoln to have been likely to publish materials about him. The answer to that question would, of course, have included Lincoln's bitterest enemies, the people and especially the government of the Confederate States of America. Such an answer might have suggested a search of rather different repositories than those actually visited. Whether such an approach to bibliography might produce other areas of overlooked Lincolniana remains to be seen. But the Confederacy definitely produced more works on Lincoln than previously thought. Maybe the Democratic party in the North did, also. And perhaps there are other neglected sectors of intense sentiment on the sixteenth President of the United States.

Applying the logic suggested here, one might think first of Jefferson Davis, who must have held intense feelings about his Union counterpart and who moreover had opportunity to vent them and get them in print. And so he did. Jay Monaghan found one of these documents, Davis' *Message of 1865*, which reprinted documents stemming from the ill-fated Hampton Roads peace conference of February 3, 1865.

Another Davis document, not to

be found in the *Lincoln Bibliography* but richer in content than the one published after the Hampton Roads peace conference, is the *Message of the President*, dated July 20, 1861. This 14-page pamphlet included the Confederate executive's response to Lincoln's July 4 message to the special session of Congress.

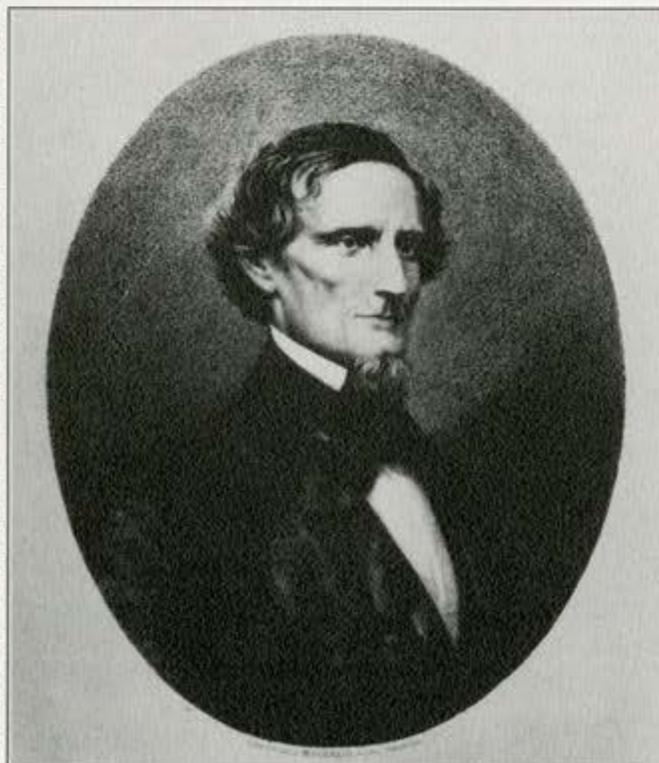
It is not surprising to find Davis hooting and jeering - in a dignified and presidential way, of course - at Lincoln's message. The Confederate president described the early actions of the Republican administration in Washington thus:

Commencing in March last, with an affectation of ignoring the secession of the seven States which first organized this government: persisting in April in the idle and absurd assumption of the existence of a riot which was to be dispersed by a *posse comitatus*: continuing in successive months the false representation that these States intended offensive war, in spite of the conclusive evidence to the contrary, furnished as well by official action, as by the very basis on which this government is constituted: The President of the United States and his advisors succeeded in deceiving the people of those States into the belief that the purpose of this government was not peace at home, but conquest abroad: not the defence of its own liberties, but the subversion of those of the people of the United States.

What Davis was probably doing in the message was exploring themes that could be exploited systematically in verbal attacks on the Lincoln administration - in modern language, casting about

for a convincing sinister image to pin on Lincoln and the Northern cause. An obvious theme was gigantism: scoring Washington for the Goliath-like size of its efforts to crush the Confederacy. Such an image, bad enough in itself, held the further advantage of flattering the strength of the Confederacy. "These enormous preparations in men and money," Davis wrote, "for the conduct of a war on a scale more gigantic than any which the new world has ever witnessed, is [sic] a distinct avowal, in the eyes of civilized man, that the United States are engaged in a conflict with a great and powerful nation: they are at last compelled to abandon the pretence of being engaged in dispersing rioters and suppressing insurrection; and are driven to the acknowledgement that the ancient Union has been dissolved."

"Ancient" Union indeed! It was notorious to nineteenth-century men that American was a country without a long past, a place with no ancient history. Romantics fretted that our landscape lacked any picturesque ruins or other signs of a long history. But Jefferson Davis



From the Louis A. Warren Lincoln Library and Museum

FIGURE 1. Jefferson Davis.

probably did not want to say "old" Union: that had too much of the ring of nostalgic fondness about it, as one might speak of an old friend. "Ancient" put it in the past and made it seem outmoded in the bargain. This was a carefully crafted document apparently, and Davis calculated his words with precision.

He was perhaps too precise. The document seems a bit stiff and too legalistic to supply catchphrases for rallying the Southern spirit. Thus at one point in the message Davis referred to his desire to "enlarge on parole" certain prisoners of war. Using the word "enlarge" to mean "set at large" was legal fustian and not the stuff of stirring oratory. Like the message of Lincoln to which this was a reply, the document was the product of a president still learning his job and not yet certain of the best means of communicating with his countrymen.

Even those inclined to sharp criticism would have to admit that Davis showed genuine promise in this message. Amidst legalisms and tedious constitutional points, he hit upon the criticism of the Union war effort that has most consistently nagged its reputation throughout history: the allegation of unnecessary, even un-Christian force. The summer of 1861 stood a long way from William T. Sherman's march to the sea; indeed, the first Battle of Bull Run had not yet been fought when President Davis drafted this message. Nevertheless, he sounded the protest that would ring from Dixie for years to come:

...they [the U.S.] have repudiated the foolish conceit that the inhabitants of this Confederacy are still citizens of the United States, for they are waging an indiscriminate war upon them all, with a savage ferocity unknown to modern civilization. In this war, rapine is the rule: private residences, in peaceful rural retreats, are bombarded and burnt: grain crops in the field are consumed by the torch: and when the torch is not convenient, careful labor is bestowed to render complete the destruction of every article of use or ornament remaining in private dwellings, after their inhabitants have fled from the outrages of a brutal soldiery.

...Mankind will shudder to hear of the tales of outrages committed on defenceless females by soldiers of the United States now invading our homes: yet these outrages are prompted by inflamed passions and the madness of intoxication.

The Confederate president was also able to indulge a constitutional point and initiate another lasting criticism of the Lincoln administration by ridiculing "another assertion of the Message [of President Lincoln], that the Executive possesses the power of suspending the writ of *habeas corpus*, and of delegating that power to military commanders, at his discretion: and both these propositions claim a respect equal to that which is felt for the additional statement of opinion in the same paper, that it is proper, in order to execute the laws, that "some single law, made in such extreme tenderness of the citizens' liberty, that practically it relieves more of the guilty than the innocent, should, to a very limited extent, be violated." To this Davis replied, "We may well rejoice that we have forever severed our connection with a government that thus tramples on all the principles of constitutional liberty, and with a people in whose presence such avowals could be hazarded."

The message was an able paper, not to be overlooked by anyone interested in Davis - or Lincoln. Yet by those interested in Lincoln it has been ignored, by and large. Whether other neglected pieces of Confederate Lincolniana offer such rich materials for comparison and historical criticism will be known only when they are more deeply studied. More such items do exist. For example, Thomas Smyth gave South Carolinians a sermon called *The War of the South Vindicated, and the War against the South Condemned: A Discourse Preached on Occasion of the Appointment by the Now Sectionalized General Assembly of the O.S. Presbyterian Church, on the Fourth of July as a Day of Prayer and Lincoln Usurpation*. For those whose taste runs to those queer attacks in satirical drama or verse, there remains the rare *Ahab Lincoln: A Tragedy of the Potomac*, published in Georgia, probably in 1861. Even a work by an author as famous as Edward A. Pollard has been heretofore ignored by Lincoln bibliographers: see his pamphlet entitled *The Rival Administrations: Richmond and Washington in December, 1863*, published in Richmond in 1864. Interesting, too, might be the Charleston edi-

tion of *The Correspondence between the Commissioners of the State of So. Ca. to the Government at Washington and the President of the United States; together with the Statement of Messrs. Miles and Keitt*.

If one broadened the boundaries of Lincolniana to include broadsides, then Confederate imprints might offer at least twenty previously ignored publications. The important point here, if there is one, lies not in the number of publications but in the richness of their content. A proper appreciation of Lincoln requires study of his critics as well as his admirers. The voices mentioned in this *Lincoln Lore* deserve a hearing, and inclusion in the next substantial Lincoln bibliography will help them gain it.

## A NEW COLLECTION OF McCLELLAN'S CORRESPONDENCE

by Sarah McNair Vosmeier

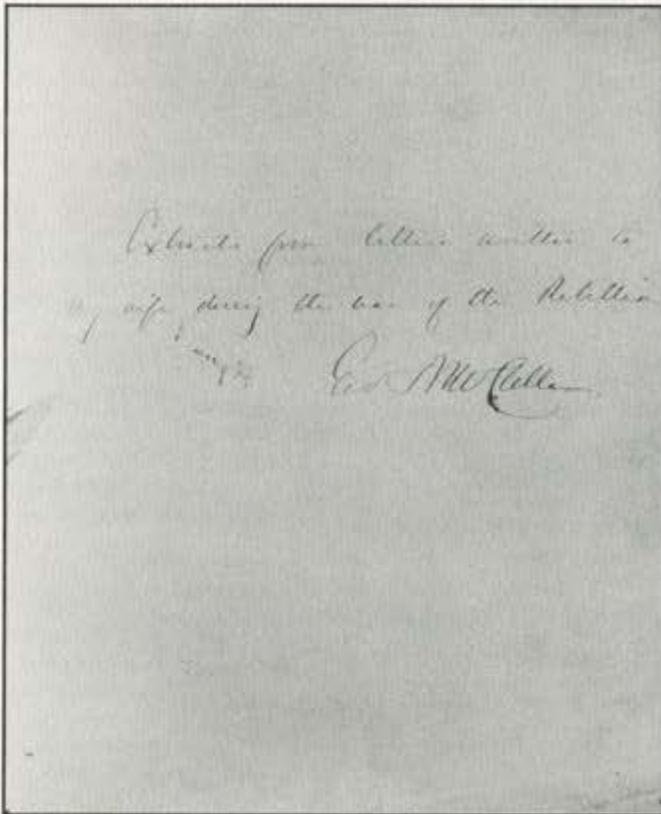
Scholars who want to understand George B. McClellan or his contemporaries will find *The Civil War Papers of George B. McClellan: Selected Correspondence, 1860-1865* (edited by Stephen W. Sears) to be indispensable - especially since the previously published collections of primary material are inaccurate and inadequate. Before now, the best published source for McClellan's letters was his posthumous autobiography, *McClellan's Own Story*. This book is a collection of McClellan's writings edited by his friend and literary executor, William Prime. Almost half of the book is based on McClellan's notebook, "Extracts from letters written to my wife during the war of the Rebellion." Unfortunately, Prime took great liberties with McClellan's prose, sometimes drastically changing the meaning of a sentence by removing important clauses from it. In one case he added punctuation to make what McClellan must have intended to be sarcastic seem sincere (October 16, 1861; *McClellan*, p. 170; Sears p. 107).

Much of Sears' book is based on the same notebooks, but as he writes in his preface, "in this volume, the editorial license practiced by Prime has been revoked" (p. xiii). Of the 813 pieces of correspondence Sears includes, 192 are letters that were garbled or censored in *McClellan's Own Story*. In addition, 260 of the 813 pieces have never been published before. Because Prime carefully edited out many of McClellan's insulting comments about the president, Lincoln scholars, especially, will appreciate Sears' setting the record straight. They will also appreciate the letters about Lincoln that Sears has printed here for the first time. Finally, Lincoln scholars may find that even previously published letters deserve reconsideration.

An example of the latter category is McClellan's letter to his wife on November 17, 1861 (Sears, pp. 135-136; McClellan, p. 176). Prime published parts of this letter, and more recently, historians have used other parts to illustrate McClellan's insolence toward the president. Lincoln scholars may value the complete letter even more, however, as an indication of Lincoln's movements in the midst of the Trent affair. Earl Schenck Miers' *Lincoln Day by Day* does not outline Lincoln's activities on November 17, but McClellan describes running into him twice and even repeats a conversation they had.

This letter also serves as an example of the way Prime concealed McClellan's derogatory attitude toward the president. Prime has McClellan writing only, "I went to the White House shortly after tea," but Sears prints the complete sentence: "I went to the White House shortly after tea where I found 'the original gorilla,' about as intelligent as ever. What a specimen to be at the head of our affairs now!" Later in the day, McClellan ran into the president again. He described that meeting in his letter, too:

I went to [Secretary of State William H.] Seward's, where I found the "Gorilla" again, & was of course much edified by his anecdotes - ever apropos, & ever unworthy of one holding his high position. I spent some time there & almost organized a little quarrel with that poor little varlet Seward.... It is a terrible dispensation of Providence that so weak & cowardly a thing as that should now control our foreign relations - unhappily the Presd't is not much better, except that he is honest & means well....



*From the Library of Congress*

**FIGURE 2.** Title page of McClellan's notebook. Because few McClellan letters still exist, scholars depend on the accuracy of the transcriptions McClellan made into this notebook from his original letters.

As I parted from the Presdt on Seward's steps he said that it had been suggested to him that it was no more safe for me than for him to walk out at night without some attendants; I told him that I felt no fear, that no one would take the trouble to interfere with me, on which he deigned to remark that they would probably give more for my scalp at Richmond than for his.

William Prime deletes most of the first paragraph quoted here, including only "I went to Seward's, where I found the President again... The President is honest and means well" (Prime's ellipsis). (Although Prime modified several words in the second paragraph quoted here, he did accurately reproduce the sense of it.)

Among the letters Sears apparently has published here for the first time is one including this Lincoln anecdote. McClellan wrote that,

Herr Hermann, "a great Magician" volunteered to give us a private entertainment, so I invited all the staff etc [to] it. The most striking feature of the performance was that the Magician asked the Presdt for his handkerchief - upon which that dignitary replied promptly "You've got me now, I ain't got any"!!!! (November 21, 1861, p. 137).

McClellan must have been especially pleased to be able to retell this story because it reinforced his opinion of Lincoln as incompetent and uncultured.

McClellan's attitude toward Lincoln was complex: he seems never to have respected Lincoln greatly, but he did not always dislike him. Thus, although Prime sometimes changed the meaning of McClellan's words, he did not so much create a good relationship between the two men as emphasize the good part of a relationship that was complex and changing. In fact, Prime may have felt that if McClellan had written his autobiography himself, he would have been equally generous to Lincoln. Certainly the last letters Sears includes in his collection (written in May and July of 1865) suggest that McClellan eventually

stopped thinking of Lincoln as "the original gorilla." McClellan was traveling in Europe with his family when they received news of the war's end and of Lincoln's assassination. On May 4, 1865, he wrote to a friend in New York about his reaction to these events.

While we have been enjoying ourselves amongst these magnificent scenes, you at home have passed through the most wonderful transition of which history bears record. How strange it is that the military death of the rebellion should have been followed by the atrocious murder of Mr Lincoln! Now I cannot but forget all that had been unpleasant between us, & remember only the brighter parts of our intercourse. Most sincerely do I join in the sentiment of unmingled horror & regret with which his sad end seems to have inspired everyone (p. 631).

Sears' selection and printing of McClellan's papers are tremendously helpful, but his footnotes and index are disappointing. Sears explains that his editorial policy was to identify persons "the first time they appear but not subsequently...: the index serves as a guide to these identifications" (p. xv). Sears'



*From the Louis A. Warren  
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**FIGURE 3.** George B. and Mary Ellen (Marcy) McClellan. When they were separated, General McClellan wrote his wife nearly everyday, and his transcriptions of those letters remain the most significant primary sources on his life.

policy works perfectly for people McClellan refers to by their last names. It breaks down, though, for letters in which McClellan refers to his relatives by their first names, or even by their nicknames. Sears usually supplies full names in these instances, but not invariably. At the least, a list of McClellan's relatives showing their relationships to him would have been helpful.

Sears most often neglects to supply full citations when McClellan refers to his relatives off-handedly, as in "Mrs. M & Nelly send their love to all. Give mine to Mary, John & Maria" (p. 571). Perhaps readers could be expected to remember that "Mrs. M" was McClellan's mother-in-law, Mary M. Marcy (who frequently stayed in their home), and that "Nelly" was one of McClellan's nicknames for his wife, Mary Ellen (Marcy) McClellan. However, it is inconsiderate to expect the reader to remember that "Mary" was McClellan's sister, Mary McClellan; that "John" was his brother, John H. B. McClellan; and that "Maria" was his sister-in-law, Maria Eldredge McClellan (John H. B. McClellan's wife).

Furthermore, on occasion Sears' identification system breaks down altogether. For example, on June 28, 1862 McClellan telegraphed his wife to tell her that her uncle had been seriously injured. Sears does not supply the uncle's name in this instance, but on the next page, when McClellan sends his wife a letter (June 29, 1862) confirming her uncle's death, Sears notes that her uncle was Major Nathan B. Rossell (pp. 324-325).

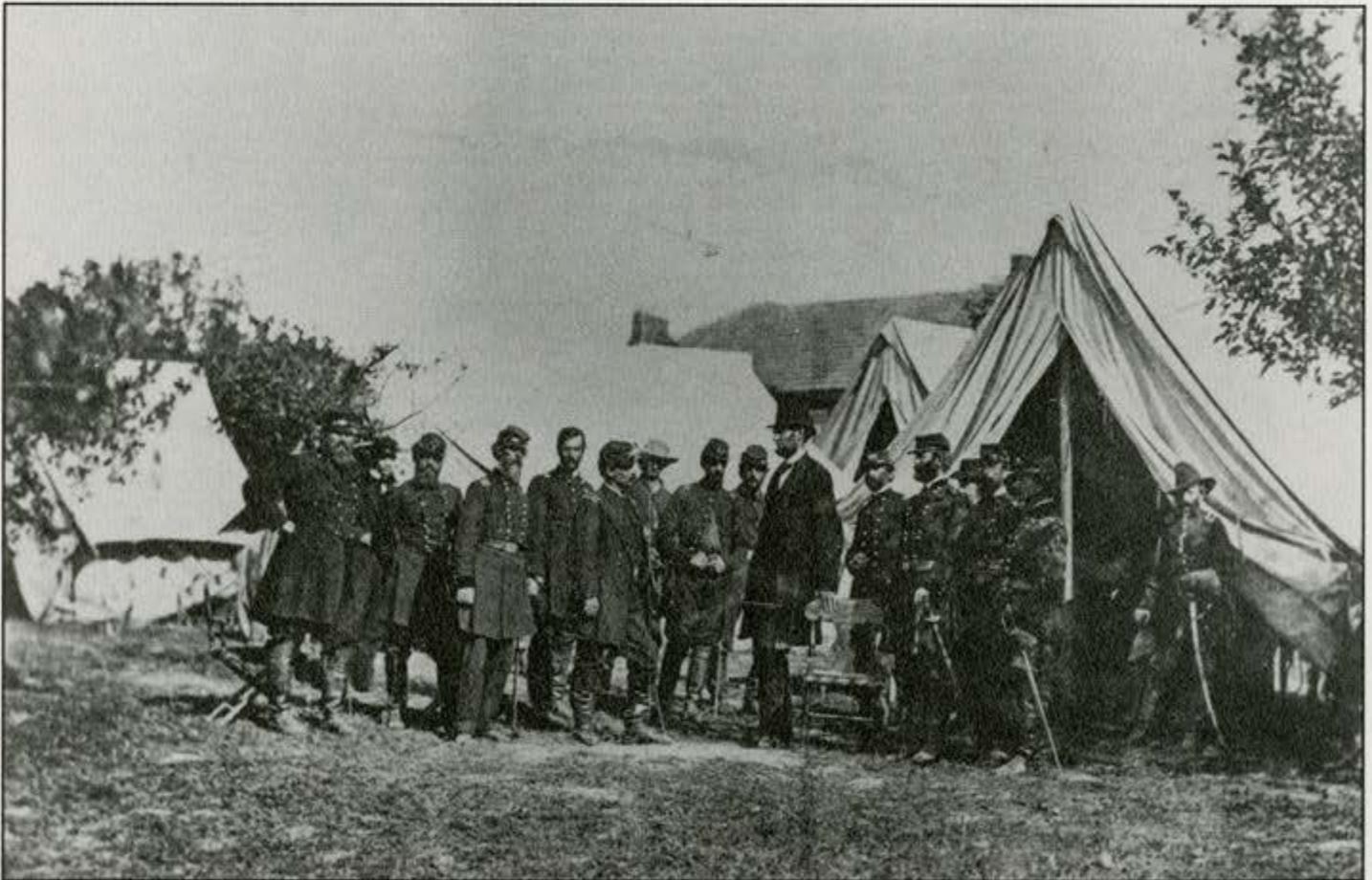
Sears' index suffers from a similar lack of comprehensiveness. In the above case, the second reference to Mary Ellen McClellan's uncle is indexed, but the first is not. In general, Sears does not index people to whom McClellan refers off-

handedly. For example, when McClellan added "My respects to Mrs Lincoln" at the end of a telegram to the president (September 13, 1862, p. 453), Sears did not index Mary Todd Lincoln for that page.

Lincoln seems to be indexed more comprehensively than his wife, but scholars looking for McClellan letters that discuss a particular aspect of their relationship will not find the index especially helpful. Sears provides only six sub-headings for 82 separate page citations on Lincoln. Thirty-three of those citations are merely listed under Lincoln's name without any indication of their subject matter. Furthermore, the Lincoln entry does not include any citations to the Harrison's Landing letter, which is indexed separately.

Even those scholars who want to focus exclusively on McClellan may be disappointed with the index because it is mostly an index to names, places and battles, including few references to abstract ideas. The most glaring omission is an index to McClellan's frequent references to God and God's will for the country or for him, although there is a sub-heading for "messianic complex" within the entry for McClellan himself. Slavery and abolition are indexed, but "slavery" is under the McClellan entry while "abolition" has a separate entry and the two are not cross referenced.

In sum, Sears' *The Civil War Papers of George B. McClellan: Selected Correspondence, 1860-1865* is essential for scholars doing research on McClellan, Lincoln, or the Civil War in general. Although scholars will no doubt use it frequently, doing so would be easier and more pleasant if it were more comprehensively footnoted and indexed.



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**FIGURE 4.** Lincoln visiting McClellan at Antietam, October 3, 1862. McClellan, the fourth man to the left of Lincoln, is standing in front of his officers. The two men's poses reflect something of their relationship. McClellan has assumed a cocky – almost insolent – posture. Lincoln seems to be edging away from him, using the chair for support. Incidentally, the man on the far right, standing alone, is George Armstrong Custer, who later became famous in the Battle of Little Bighorn.