



## A Recently Discovered Photograph of Fred Gray

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- 4 “Abram S. Hewitt,” *The Encyclopedia of New York City, Second Edition*, ed. Kenneth T. Jackson (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), 594.
- 5 Edwin G. Burrows and Mike Wallace, *Gotham: A History of New York to 1898* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 662, 775.
- 6 Edward C. Mack, *Peter Cooper: Citizen of New York* (New York: Duel, Sloan and Pearce, 1949), 174.
- 7 Allan Nevins, *Abram S. Hewitt: With Some Account of Peter Cooper* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1935), 138-139.
- 8 The fact that Whitman misspelled Hewitt’s name and did not refer to him in any known correspondence suggests they were not acquainted, nor is there evidence the poet reached out to Hewitt as he did with Emerson. And why would he, especially in 1855, when Hewitt was only known, if he was known at all, as a talented entrepreneur in the iron industry and lucky husband of Amelia Cooper?
- 9 Ed Folsom, “The Sesquicentennial of the 1856 *Leaves of Grass*: A Daguerreotype of a Woman Reader,” *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review* 24 (Summer 2006), 33-34.
- 10 The fact that Whitman had published a handful of immature poems over seven years earlier in various local newspapers hardly explains the immediate success of *Leaves of Grass*.
- 11 Abram S. Hewitt, *Selected Writings of Abram S. Hewitt* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1937), 13, 224, 296, 311, 320.

## A RECENTLY DISCOVERED PHOTOGRAPH OF FRED GRAY

The photograph of Walt Whitman’s comrade John Frederick Schiller Gray (Fred Gray), first published in a volume of Civil War reminiscences and reproduced here, is a previously unknown image of Gray, a college student turned Union soldier whom the poet met at Pfaff’s beer cellar in New York during the summer of 1862, a few months before Gray enlisted. Whitman spent nearly every evening with the young man at Pfaff’s, forming lasting comradeships with Gray and the other members of a group of educated and well-traveled bachelors that the poet called the “Fred Gray Association.”<sup>1</sup> Before beginning his military service, Gray gave Whitman a prized copy of Frederic Hedge’s *Prose Writers of Germany* as a parting gift. Inside this volume, the poet kept two card photographs of Gray in his military uniform—one of which was dated September 3, 1862, only three days before Gray was mustered into service as a second lieutenant in the Twentieth New York Infantry Volunteers.<sup>2</sup> These photographs, which Whitman carefully preserved, were the only known extant images of Gray until my recent discovery of this picture of the twenty-two-year-old soldier during his time on the staff of Major-General John Ellis Wool.

This photograph of Gray, along with another image showing the remaining members of Wool’s personal staff, was published in an 1895 book entitled *Personal Reminiscences of the Rebellion, 1861-1866* by Le Grand Bouton Cannon.<sup>3</sup> When he was eighty years old, Cannon, who had been a capitalist and a “director in numerous banking and industrial corporations,” set to work



MAJOR C. T. CHRISTENSEN. CAPT. DE WITT CLINTON. LIUT. WILLIAM C. RAWOLLE. CAPT. JOHN F. S. GRAY.  
SURGEON-MAJOR CHARLES MCDUGALL. CAPT. CONGRESS.

making a record of his remembrances of the Civil War and his experiences serving the Union cause (Cannon, 7; “Colonel LeGrand B. Cannon,” 463).<sup>4</sup> On April 23, 1861, Cannon had accepted a position as a volunteer aide-de-camp responsible for organizing and equipping troops in New York at the request of General Wool, with whom he had served previously during the Canadian rebellion of 1838 (Cannon, 21; “Colonel LeGrand B. Cannon,” 464). Nearly two years later, on January 20, 1863, Fred Gray was also appointed as an aide-de-camp under the command of General Wool, who had been recently transferred to New York to take command of the Department of the East.<sup>5</sup> This staff photograph, in which Gray stands beside his fellow officers, his hand resting on the hilt of his sword, certainly pre-dates General Wool’s retirement and, therefore, was most likely taken sometime between Gray’s late-January appointment and the end of Wool’s active military service on August 1, 1863.<sup>6</sup>

Although Cannon and Gray both served as aides-de-camp for General Wool, it is unclear how well the two men knew each other or whether they ever worked closely together since Cannon’s book does not include any additional information about Gray or the young man’s military career. But correspondence between the members of the Fred Gray Association and Whitman details Gray’s military duties throughout this appointment. In a May 1, 1863, letter to the poet, for example, Gray expressed considerable frustration that he could no longer enjoy “disreputable cakes and ale” with Whitman at Pfaff’s because he was responsible for a number of “detestable clerical duties incidental to my position” including transcribing orders and answering letters. Gray explained that he had not written the poet a lengthy letter “befitting my earnest affection for you” since he had been “constantly on the go” attending

the General and “accompanying him on his tours of inspection” (Shively, 147).<sup>7</sup> Charles Kingsley, a member of the Fred Gray Association and mutual friend of both Gray and Whitman described Gray’s most recent assignment in a March 21, 1863, letter to the poet, reporting, “Fred is . . . just back from a tour of inspection among the forts down east, including Portland, Portsmouth, Boston, Newport, New London, Etc. Etc., firing off all the guns to test their effectiveness.” Kingsley ends his letter by adding that Whitman must be sure to ask Gray to tell him the entire history of his travels because the narrative was, according to Kingsley, a “very funny” one indeed (Shively, 153).<sup>8</sup> Gray concluded his own letter to the poet with a fond “Good Bye old Boy” and an apology for his inability to write more because General Wool, whom Gray dubbed “The Original Jacobo,” had just ordered the young man to “see about some d—d fortification” (Shively, 149).

Even though Fred Gray seems to have disliked some of his military responsibilities and sometimes adopted a humorous, even sarcastic, tone when writing to the poet about his position on General Wool’s staff, the young man excelled in the performance of his military duties. Following his stint as an aide-de-camp under General Wool, Gray became Assistant Adjutant-General of volunteers, and he took up his “detestable clerical duties” again, serving as an aide-de-camp on the staff of then Brigadier-General Edward R. S. Canby after Canby became the commanding general in charge of New York City and its harbor.<sup>9</sup> On August 5, 1863, Gray received orders assigning him to duty at Canby’s new headquarters of command, which was located at No. 44 Bleeker Street, not far from Pfaff’s beer cellar.<sup>10</sup> When Canby was named Commander of the Military Division West of the Mississippi in May 1864, Gray was ordered to Cairo, Illinois; in November of the same year, he served temporarily under Brigadier-General John W. Davidson, Chief of Cavalry of the West Mississippi Division, before returning to his post under Canby. Later, Gray was brevetted major for “meritorious services at the siege and capture” of Mobile, Alabama.<sup>11</sup>

Whitman always preserved the Hedge volume and the photographs of Gray in his uniform, suggesting that the poet wanted to remember the young man as a soldier. After all, even though Whitman may have eventually “lost track” of Gray, he did follow the young man’s military career during the war years, gleaning information about Gray’s whereabouts, health, and responsibilities, first from Gray’s parents and then from letters he received from Gray as well as those from other members of the Association, including Charles Kingsley. It is certain, therefore, that Whitman would have been proud to see Gray as he appears here, standing shoulder-to-shoulder with several other aides-de-camp and assistant adjutant generals, perhaps readying himself to attend General Wool on his tours of inspection in the east.

## NOTES

- 1 While visiting his family in New York in September 1864, Whitman wrote a letter to his friend William D. O'Connor in Washington, in which he described a reunion with his Fred Gray comrades as one of the highlights of the trip: "My health is quite re-established . . . I go out quite regularly, sometimes out on the bay or to Coney Island—& occasionally a tour through New York life, as of old—last night I was with some of my friends of Fred Gray association, till late wandering the east side of the City—first in the lager bier saloons & then elsewhere" (1:241). See Letter to William D. O'Connor, September 11, 1864; *Walt Whitman: The Correspondence*, ed. Edwin Haviland Miller (New York: New York University Press, 1961-1977), 1:241. Hereafter, *Corr.* I have written a detailed biographical portrait of Gray and an examination of Whitman's lifelong friendship with several of the Association's members; see "My Dear Comrade Frederickus": Walt Whitman and Fred Gray," *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review* 27 (Summer/Fall 2009), 49-65.
- 2 The Hedge volume and Whitman's card photographs of Gray are now housed in the Special Collections Department of Canady Library at Bryn Mawr College; see Frederic Hedge, *Prose Writers of Germany* (Philadelphia: Carey and Hart, 1848), from the library of Walt Whitman; with his notes and memorabilia of a former owner, John F.S. Gray. See also "Frances Gray," United States Congressional Serial Set, 58th Congress, 2d session, report no. 474 (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1904), 1-2.
- 3 Le Grand Bouton Cannon, *Personal Reminiscences of the Rebellion, 1861-1866* (New York: Burr Printing House, 1895), 142.
- 4 Cannon, 7; "Colonel LeGrand B. Cannon," *Genealogical and Family History of the State of Vermont: A Record of the Achievements of Her People in the Making of a Commonwealth and the Founding of a Nation*, ed. Hiram Carleton (New York: The Lewis Publishing Company, 1903), 462-465.
- 5 "The Department of the East: General Wool in Command," *The New York Times* (January 14, 1863); "Local Intelligence," *The New York Times* (January 23, 1863).
- 6 "Frances Gray," United States Congressional Serial Set, 58th Congress, 2d Session, Report no. 474 (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1904), 1-2; "News From Washington; Our Special Washington Dispatches" *The New York Times* (July 22, 1863).
- 7 Letter from Fred Gray to Walt Whitman, May 1, 1863, reprinted in Charley Shively, ed., *Drum Beats: Walt Whitman's Civil War Boy Lovers* (San Francisco: Gay Sunshine Press, 1989), 147-149.
- 8 Letter from Charles S. Kingsley to Walt Whitman, March 21, 1863, reprinted in Shively, 153.
- 9 Shively, 147; "Affairs at the Military Headquarters," *The New York Times* (July 18, 1863).
- 10 "Military Affairs," *The New York Times* (August 13, 1863).
- 11 *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, series 1, Vol. 34, Part III (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1891), 490-491; Hereafter, *Official Records*. *Official Records*, Series 1, Vol. 41, Part IV—Correspondence; 644; *Catalogue of the Sigma Phi with the Thesaurus*, (Printed for the society, Boston: T.R. Marvin & Son, 1891), 252-253.