

APPOMATTOX COURT HOUSE

THE REST OF THE STORY

On April 7th, 1865, the Confederates had suffered a catastrophic defeat at the battle of Sailor's Creek. Grant asked Lee to surrender. Lee, still believing he could escape, refused to surrender, but asked about the possibility of a peace agreement. Grant tactfully replied "No" but would consider a military surrender. Lee, realizing his army was cornered, asked to discuss the terms of surrender. On Palm Sunday, April 9th, at Appomattox Court House, Lee surrendered to Grant.

In less than 200 words, Grant laid out his proposal. The Southern soldiers would stack their rifles, powder, battle flags and artillery, sign their parole agreements not to take up arms against the American government and go home. It was also agreed the officers would be able to keep their private horses, side arms and baggage. Lee also asked if his troops could keep their military horses as well. Grant agreed to this as spring was approaching and their horses would be needed for farming. In an hour and a half, they reached an agreement, signed the document, shook hands, and departed, Grant to Washington, Lee to his headquarters in Lynchburg and then to home in Richmond.

But, as Paul Harvey would have said, here is the rest of the story.

The actual surrender took place on April 12th, 4 years to the day, to the start of the war. Grant had chosen Major General Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain to accept the surrender on the road leading to Lynchburg and in the field in front of the home of Wilmer McLean, where the agreement was signed three days earlier.

Chamberlain was not a military man, having graduated from Seminary. He was a professor of rhetoric, oratory, and modern languages at Bowdoin College in Maine. At Gettysburg, he would be given a brevet promotion to Major General by Grant for holding ground, saving the left flank, earning him the Congressional Medal of Honor. During the war he was wounded five times, twice critically, earning him the nickname "Bloody Chamberlain". He was a member of United Lodge No. 8 in Brunswick, Maine.

The Confederate Army of Northern Virginia was under the command of Major General John Brown Gordon, and he was to surrender and lay down all arms. Gordon, the son of a prominent minister, also had no prior military training. He, however, would be one of the most successful Generals in Lee's army. He was a lawyer, plantation owner, and had invested in coal mines in Georgia and Tennessee. During the war, he was wounded five times, the last, surviving a mini ball to the face.

Gordon commanded troops in many major engagements, including Battle of the Wilderness, Spotsylvania Court House, and the assault on Fort Stedman. He oversaw the army of Northern Virginia at the Battle of Appomattox Court House at the cessation of hostilities. Gordon, likewise, was a Mason, belonging to Atlanta Lodge No. 59 in Atlanta, Georgia.

April 12th dawned a damp early spring morning. Chamberlain arranged his troops on one side of the road and the Confederates, numbering just over 27,000, assembled in the field and on the road by units. As the first Confederate units began to march by with General Gordon riding in the lead, the figure of a very dejected and soulful sight, approached the Union troops. General Chamberlain having decided beforehand to show respect, ordered the bugle sounded as Gordon approached and ordered his troops

to "Present Arms". Gordon, upon hearing this, instantly assumed the posture and demeanor of the military man that he was, spurred his horse to slightly rear and wheel around, facing Chamberlain, not 10 feet away, the horse slightly bowing. Chamberlain then saluted Gordon. Gordon placed the tip of his sword to the tip of his boot, returning the salute.

The columns of troops behind Gordon, unit by unit, affixed bayonets, stacked their rifles, placing their powder boxes over them or on the ground. It would take until nightfall for the process to be completed and the paroles signed. Chamberlain also saw to it that the starving and ragged Confederates were given food and a blanket.

Appomattox was the first of many surrenders and set the tone for the protocol that should be shown throughout the South, as the war wound down over the next two months. The war was not proclaimed over until August 20, 1866, by President and brother Andrew Johnson, 16 months after Appomattox.

Both brothers, Chamberlain, and Gordon, would go on to honorably serve their respective states in the reuniting of the country for years to come. Joshua Chamberlain, after returning to Maine, served four 1-year terms as a Senator, then six years as the 32nd Governor of Maine. Retiring from politics, he returned to Bowdoin College as its President. John B. Gordon also entered politics in his home state of Georgia. He was first elected to one term in the Senate, then six years as Governor and then back again to the Senate, working tirelessly on reunification.

I do not know if they knew each other as Masons and we may never know. We have no evidence that they ever met face to face again. What we do know is they each practiced three great tenets of our professions as Masons—Brotherly love, Relief and Truth. To relieve the distressed, to protect, aid and assist each other, to be good and true to these virtues is incumbent on all of us today, as it was with them.