

## Captain O'Farrell & "General Lee's Chair"

This first unidentified newspaper clipping tells of a play given November 3, 1871 to assist the relief fund of the Nathaniel Lyon Post of the Grand Army of the Republic (a Union veterans' group) in Hartford Connecticut. The chair used by General Lee at the McLean's House was to be awarded that night by General E. W. Whitaker (the officer who originally obtained the chair) to the person selling the most tickets for the benefit performance. The next clipping tells how Captain Patrick O'Farrell became the chair's next owner. Mrs. O'Farrell eventually donated the chair to the Smithsonian Institution in 1915.

### \*\*\* **Home and Country - An Interesting Relic.**

This evening in the Opera House the military drama, *Home and Country*, which has been successfully presented for four nights, closing with Thursday evening last, will be repeated, and as the actors have been in good training by the repetition of the performance, there will be undoubtedly considerable improvement in many particulars, though the play has passed off most acceptably heretofore. The tableaux especially have been very fine. This closing entertainment, like the rest, will be given for the benefit of the relief fund of Nathaniel Lyon Post. Thirty young ladies of this city take part in the tableaux, and new features will be introduced in this, as well as in the military and musical part of the drama. The City Guard will assist as before.

#### GENERAL LEE'S APPOMATTOX CHAIR.

To aid the charity for which the above entertainment is given, a soldier of this city has given to the managers the chair which General Robert E. Lee sat in, in the house of Mr. McLean at Appomattox Court House, when he signed the articles of capitulation surrendering his army to General Grant. The managers will present the chair to the member of the company who shall sell the largest number of tickets for the entertainment. The chair was purchased by the gentleman who presents it, of Mr. McLean, owner of the house where the capitulation was signed, and there is no doubt of its being the chair occupied by the rebel chieftain after Grant had driven him to his "last ditch." During the evening the chair will be exhibited on the stage, either in one of the scenes of the play or between the acts. It is of bird's-eye maple, handsomely carved arms, and cane seat and back.

Reserved seats can be secured to-day at the Opera House box-office.

### \*\*\* **Home and Country—Captain O'Farrell Gets General Lee's Chair.**

The closing performance of the war drama of "Home and Country," was given at the Opera House last evening to quite a large audience. The play, as on the previous presentations, was performed greatly to the credit of the amateurs who have taken part in it, and the tableaux were excellent. An additional scene or tableau, showing the surrender of General Lee to General Grant, was given last night.

One matter of interest last evening was the award of the chair occupied by General Lee when he signed the articles of capitulation, to the person who sold the largest number of tickets to the entertainment. Captain Patrick O'Farrell earned this award, having succeeded in selling ninety-six tickets among his friends, and he is now the happy possessor of the interesting relic of the great closing event of the war. Captain O'Farrell, himself a patriotic defender of the old flag, places a high value upon this reminder of its final triumph. A gentleman offered him \$100 for it last night, but the captain declined to sell. He will deposit it in the Historical Rooms in this city.





*“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 *Three Years with Grant as Recalled by war*  
*Correspondent Sylvanus Cadwallader* edited by Benjamin P. Thomas  
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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 Campaigning With Grant by  
Horace Porter

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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 reprehensive after McLean graciously permitted the conference to be held in his home."*

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

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