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Rice: Prison Memories
PRISON MEMORIES
An Introduction by Charles S. Rice

Colonel John David Weeden, who wrote the following short sketch of his life as a prisoner of war in the North, was a distinguished Huntsville citizen in the nineteenth century. Born in Huntsville on July 27, 1840, Weeden was an older brother of the famous poet-painter Maria Howard Weeden. John David Weeden received his early education at the Green Academy on Clinton Street. He graduated from the University of Alabama in 1858 and began the practice of law in Huntsville in 1860. With the outbreak of the War Between the States, Weeden volunteered as a private in Company K, 9th Alabama Infantry Regiment. He was commissioned a second lieutenant three weeks later. Weeden was soon transferred to the 49th Alabama Infantry Regiment and was promoted to major in May 1862. He rose steadily through the ranks to colonel, and was captured while leading his regiment on the second day of the Battle of Nashville.

John Weeden returned to Huntsville after his release at the end of the war and resumed his law practice. He received his master of arts degree from the University of Alabama in 1884 and became a professor of law there in 1885. He resigned from the faculty in 1888 and opened a law practice in Florence, where he resided until his death on November 16, 1908. Weeden was active in both the United Confederate Veterans and his Masonic lodge.

John Weeden probably wrote his prison recollections some time around the turn of the century. The Heritage Room of the Huntsville-Madison County Public Library has an undated typewritten copy which bears a handwritten note across the top: "copy of original ms. given by Mary Weeden [illegible word] a granddaughter." He begins his tale with a lament for the removal of General Joseph E. Johnston from command of the Army of Tennessee and his replacement by General John Bell Hood. Johnston had been following the tactic of forcing the enemy to attack him, thus sparing his own men and causing Sherman's invading army to suffer heavy casualties. However, Confederate President Jefferson Davis became impatient with this Fabian policy and replaced Johnston with the daring Hood, a gambler who was willing to risk everything in toe-to-toe combat with the larger Union force. Disaster followed and the Confederate Army of Tennessee was virtually destroyed under Hood's leadership. After the crushing defeat at the Battle of Nashville, General Johnston was recalled to pick up the shattered pieces of his once great army. There was little he could do with his few remaining troops to oppose Sherman's destructive march across the South.

Sources:

Thomas McAdory Owen, History of Alabama and Dictionary of Alabama Biography. Chicago: S. J. Clark, 1921, vol 4, p. 1741.

Completed Service Record, John David Weeden, 9th Alabama Infantry and 49th Alabama Infantry Regiments.