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Marjorie Ann Reeves

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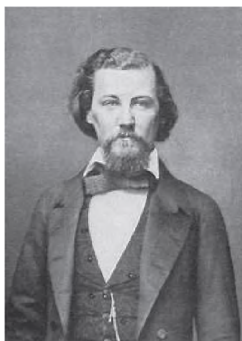
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Alabama Senator Clement Claiborne Clay, Jr.

By Marjorie Ann Reeves

Nostalgia was the 19th century term for what we call Post Traumatic Stress Disorder today. Even though Clement Claiborne Clay Jr. was never on the battlefield during the War Between the States, he was imprisoned in isolation for almost a year after the war charged with participation in the assassination of President Lincoln. His imprisonment by the Federals was unnecessarily cruel and affected him for the rest of his life. In the end, the prosecution for a crime, in which he did not take any part, was not carried out.



C. C. Clay Jr.

C.C. Clay Jr. was born on December 16, 1816, in Huntsville and educated at the Greene Academy. He attended the University of Alabama, afterward he entered University of Virginia gaining a law degree. He returned to Huntsville to become a partner in his father's law firm. His father Clement Comer Clay arrived in Huntsville in 1811 opening a law practice. He became a judge for the circuit court and served as the state's first chief justice for the state supreme court. He chaired

the Committee of Fifteen that drafted the state constitution. He served as a state Representative, Governor of Alabama, and in the U.S. Senate. His belief in state rights and hatred of the Union made him one of the strongest Unionist enemy. After the invasion of Huntsville by the Federals in 1862, he was imprisoned which broke his health, and he died soon after the war.

Clement Comer Clay's oldest son C.C. Clay Jr. followed his father's footsteps into politics being elected county judge in

Madison County and served in the U.S. Senate. He only missed 5.2 % of the voting in congress making his voting record one of the best in history. He wrote during his time in the Senate that “The South is now powerless in Congress and getting weaker in the Union every year.” In 1858 his speech contained, “The Union of the Constitution, which our fathers made, I love and revere and would preserve, but this Union without the Constitution, or with it as construed by the Northern Republicans, I abhor and scorn, would dissolve, if my power were equal to my will.”

When secession came, C.C. Clay Jr. give a farewell speech to Congress from his heart:

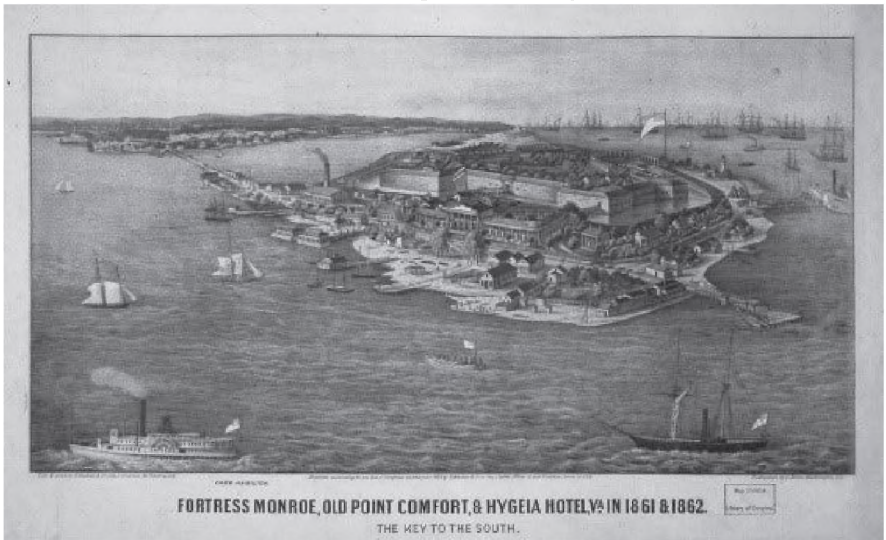
“Identified as I am with Alabama by my birth, education, interest, and affection – regarding her as my nursing mother and my grave – indebted to her for the highest honors and greatest trusts she could bestow, and standing here as one of her ambassadors, I feel it my duty to justify all her acts relating to the Federal Government.”

After the Clays left D.C., they came back to Madison County, Alabama, to their home, *Cozy Cot*, on Monte Sano Mountain to work on Clay Jr’s strength from his chronic illness. He was prone to asthmatic attacks so bad the doctors thought he had consumption. A few months later he ran for a Confederate Senate seat. Even though an old friend of the Jefferson Davis from the Washington days, he still criticized Davis’ governing methods as the Confederacy’s President. Being a close friend, Clay Jr. would spend many hours including nights at Jefferson Davis’ side when he would be bedridden by his illnesses.

Clay Jr. spent two years as the Alabama Confederate Senate in Richmond but was defeated for reelection. Davis appointed him and Jacob Thompson as commissioners to Canada to support Confederates in that country. He took

part in organizing a raid into Vermont, several citizens were wounded and one killed. Clay Jr. paid the legal fees for the defense of the raiders. The strain of the trial affected his weakened health convincing him to return to Alabama which he did after the end of the war. When Clay Jr. heard that there was a reward for his arrest, he surrendered to Federal Soldiers hoping it would show his innocence of the charge of plotting Lincoln's assassination. Clay Jr. and Davis with their families were arrested and sent together to Fort Monroe, Virginia. Before they arrived at the fort, the wives and children were sent back South, after the soldiers went through their luggage and took what they wanted from the travelers.

Clay Jr. and Davis were imprisoned in cold, damp casemates at Fort Monroe guarded by three officers and



twenty soldiers. The Federals feared the prisoners would escape or commit suicide, so Clay Jr. and Davis were under tight, continuous security. In the book *Jefferson Davis, American*, their imprisonment was described, "A sentry stood inside the cell and outside the door. The men were under

constant observations, but the soldiers were not allowed to talk to the prisoners. The furnishings were sparse: a hospital bed, iron bedstead, one chair and table, stool chest, a bible, and Episcopal prayer book. They ate food prepared in the hospital but not allowed neither knives no forks. A lamp burned constantly. The lamp, changing of the guards every two hours, and incessant tramping of the sentinels made normal sleep impossible.”

From the *Prescott Journal* of July 8, 1865: “Clem Clay smokes with philosophic indifference. He occasionally addresses a pleasant remark to his guards. As a prisoner he has given very little trouble. From the beginning, he has subsisted on the army ration. He eats but little, smokes a great deal, and has evidently made up his mind that neither fretting nor grumbling will help his case, and the best course to be pursued is to take things easily and quietly.”

Clay Jr. was finally allowed to write to his wife, Virginia, which she quoted in her book, *Belle of the Fifties*. “For I must now tell you what I have heretofore thought I would conceal till my liberation or death, that I have endured the most ingenious and refined torture ever since I came into this living tomb; for, although above the natural face of the earth, it is covered with about ten feet of earth, and is always more or less damp like a tomb. With a bright light in my room and the adjoining room, united to it by two doorways, closed by iron gates, which cover about half the space or width of the partition, and with two soldiers in this room, and two and a lieutenant in the adjoining, until about 30th June; with the opening and shutting of those heavy iron doors or gates, the soldiers being relieved every two hours; with the tramp of these heavy, armed men, walking their beats, the rattling of their arms, and still more the trailing sabre of the lieutenant, the officer of the guard, whose duty is to look at me every fifteen minutes, you may be sure that my sleep has been often disturbed and broken. In truth, I have experienced one

of the tortures of the Spanish Inquisition in this frequent, periodical and irregular disturbance of my sleep. During the one hundred and twelve days of my imprisonment here I have never enjoyed one night's unbroken sleep; I have been roused every two hours, if asleep, by the tread of soldiers, the clank of arms and the voices of officers. I have never known the feeling of refreshment from sleep on arising any morning of my imprisonment. Besides, I have never been allowed retirement from sight, actual or potential, of my guards; having to bathe and do all the acts of nature in view of the guard, if they chose to look at me. I have never been allowed an interview with any one alone, not even with a minister of God, but have always been confronted with two or more witnesses, whenever minister or physician come to see me. I have never been allowed any clothes save those in present use. Where my other clothes are I do not know, as several of those who were represented as masters of my wardrobe denied the trust. I have found out that some things I valued have been stolen, together with all the little money I kept. I think it probable that you will never see half of the contents of my valise and despatch bag. The inclosed letters * present but a glimpse of my tortures, for I knew that the grand inquisitors, the President and Cabinet, knew all that I could tell and even more; and, besides, my debility of body and of mind was such that I had not power to coin my thoughts into words. . . . And to be frank, I was too proud to confess to them all my sufferings, and also apprehended that they would rather rejoice over and aggravate than relent and alleviate them. I now feel ashamed that I have complained to them instead of enduring unto death. My love for you, my parents and brothers, prevailed over my self-love, and extracted from me those humiliating letters. I have been reluctant to humble myself to men whom I regarded as criminals far more than myself, touching all the woes and wrongs, the destruction and desolation of the South."

After the doctor noticed the treatments were contributing to the prisoners' poor health, he wrote to the War Department requesting to have the lamp and guard removed from the cells. Davis and Clay Jr. were permitted to exercise outdoors but still not allowed to communicate with anyone. They were finally moved out of the damp casemate to Carroll Hall before winter set in.

The one thing Clay Jr. had going for himself was in 1843 he married a politically connected, charming Virginia Tunstall. He was the oldest of three siblings and she was the youngest of 24. She was an energetic, sociable, attractive, young lady that fit naturally into the political life in Washington and Richmond.



Virginia Clay

When her husband was imprisoned, she campaigned for his release. She managed to get President Johnson to pardon Clay Jr, and he was released April of 1866. After Clay Jr's release, he traveled back to visit Davis who was still being held in Fort Monroe without justification.

After Jefferson Davis was finally released a year later, he still had a family to support and went to work for Carolina Life Insurance. He would stop to see the Clays whenever his travels allowed. He wrote often to the Clays and Virginia, the letter writer in the Clay family, was the one that answered

Davis' correspondence. Davis appointed Clay Jr. an insurance agent, but Clay Jr. did poorly due to his health.



Jefferson Davis

His health grew worse during the imprisonment and he was basically a broken and financially ruined man when he returned to Huntsville. Their *Cozy Cot* home on Monte Sano had been burned by the Union. He tried to return to a law practice, but he couldn't keep that going so he moved

out to his country home in Gurley, *Wildwood*, until his death in 1882.



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