

# Thaddeus Stevens and the Southern States

---

Thaddeus Stevens was very bitter in his political enmity to the Southern States. He resented the influence in both the Houses of Congress of the members from that section, which usually returned, by re-election, most of its able men, therefore giving it preponderance of influence owing to the ability and experience of its representatives who were trained in politics. For this reason, at the close of the Civil War, he was opposed to the trial of Jefferson Davis and others for treason, as it was only the individual and not a State who could commit the crime; therefore, if the individual was convicted there would be nothing to prevent the other voters of a State from electing representatives to Congress, especially if the North held that the Southern States would not secede from the Union. This stand would make his ground tenable, that the United States recognized the belligerency of the South during the war, and, therefore, the Confederate States become conquered territory and would not be entitled to Congressional representation. His idea was to wipe out State lines and organize the territories of Lincoln, Grant, Sherman, Sheridan and other territories to be named after Union officers and govern them the same as the other territorial governments in the United States.

This view of Stevens doubtless, to a great extent, influenced his course in the case of Senator C. C. Clay, Jr., of Alabama, at the close of the war.

Clement Claiborne Clay, Jr., 1819-

1882, was United States Senator from Alabama, from 1853 to 1861, and after the breaking out of the Civil War he was a member of the Confederate Senate and was sent to Canada, in 1864, on a secret mission, with a view to arousing in the public mind there a sympathy for the Southern cause that would assist in inducing a suspension of hostilities. He was a son of C. C. Clay, Sr., who had also represented Alabama in the United States and was at one time Governor of that State.

Richard Jacobs Haldeman, 1831-1885, whose letters to Mrs. Clay follow, was a son of Jacob Miller Haldeman 1781-1856. The latter was born in Lancaster county, and removed to Harrisburg in 1830. He married, in 1810, Elizabeth E. Jacobs, 1789-1844, daughter of Samils Jacobs, of Spring Grove, Lancaster county. His son, Richard, married Margaret, a daughter of the late Senator Simon Cameron. Richard was a full cousin to the late Professor S. S. Haldeman, of Chickies. He graduated at Yale in 1851, and also at Heidelberg and Berlin Universities. He was an attache to the American Legation to France, during President Pierce's administration, and a member of the U. S. House of Representatives from the 19th district (Cumberland, Adams and York counties) during the 41st and 42d Congress. For several years he was the editor of the Harrisburg Patriot and Union and founder of the Harrisburg Daily Patriot. Mr. Haldeman was a friend of C. C. Clay, Jr., in the ante bellum days.

After the assassination of President Lincoln, the charge was made that Clay was a party to the plot, and that the conspiracy was formed while he was in Canada. President Johnson issued a proclamation offering a reward

for the capture of Davis and Clay, the amount of the reward for the latter being \$25,000, although at the time it was frequently incorrectly given as \$100,000.

When Clay learned of Lincoln's assassination, he exclaimed, "God help us! If that be true, it is the worst blow that has been struck at the South," and on hearing of the reward for his capture, instead of attempting to escape, as he was advised to do by many friends, he said to his wife, "As I am conscious of my innocence, my judgment is that I should at once surrender to the nearest Federal authorities," and sent the following telegram:

"Bt. Major General Wilson, United States Army:

"Seeing the proclamation of the President of the United States, I go to-day, with the Honourable P. Phillips, to deliver myself to your custody.

"C. C. CLAY, JR."

Clay started at once for Macon, Ga., where he surrendered to General Wilson, in May, 1865, from where he was removed to Fort Monroe with Jefferson Davis, who had been captured.

It seems that the first intention was to try Clay as a party to the plot to assassinate Lincoln and, when this was abandoned, then to try him for treason. Mrs. Clay at once started her indefatigable efforts in her husband's behalf and interested many prominent men of the North, among them Charles O'Connor, the great New York lawyer; T. W. Pierce, of Boston; Robert J. Walker, Benjamin Wood, editor and proprietor of the New York Daily News; Horace Greeley, Judge Jeremiah Black, of York, and Richard J. Haldeman, of Harrisburg.

The first we hear of Mr. Stevens'

interest in the matter is the following letter to Mrs. Clay from Mr. Halde-  
man:

“Harrisburg, July 24, 1865.

“Mrs. C. C. Clay:

“My Dear Madam: Your exceedingly affecting letter did not reach me until long after it was written..... So soon as it was practicable, I visited Honorable Thaddeus Stevens at his home in Lancaster city. I selected Mr. Stevens more particularly on account of his independence of character, his courage, and his disposition, intellectual and official leadership in the lower House of Congress, and in his party. It is not necessary for me to tell you, Madam, that, knowing your husband, I never had a suspicion of his complicity in the assassination of Mr. Lincoln, but you will be gratified to learn that Mr. Stevens scorned the idea of either his guilt or that of any prominent sojourners in Canada.

“Mr. Stevens holds, that as the belligerent character of the Southern States was recognized by the United States, neither Mr. Davis nor Mr. Clay can be tried for treason..... That, if tried, Mr. Clay should be tried in Alabama. You will perceive, then, my dear Madam, that connected with the proposed trial of your husband, there are profound questions of statesmanship and party. On this account, Mr. Stevens would not like to have his name prematurely mentioned. He is using his great political influence in the direction indicated, and it is, of course, much greater when he is not known as the counsel of Mr. Clay.....I promised to see Mr. Stevens so soon as the form and place of trial are announced..... Mr. Stevens will be a tower of strength, and command attention and

respect from President, Secretary and Congress.

"Hoping, Madam, when I address you again, it will be under happier auspices, I am

"R. J. Haldeman."

"Several years later Mr. Stevens reiterated these statements to one of the editors of the New York Tribune, who again quoted Mr. Stevens' remarks in an able editorial."

Judge Joseph Holt, of Kentucky, who was at the time Judge Advocate General of the Army and Judge Advocate of the Military Commission which tried those accused of the plot to assassinate Lincoln, seems to have had a personal animosity against Clay. Holt had been a member of President Buchanan's Cabinet as Postmaster General and Secretary of War, and also, at that time, a strong personal friend of Clay's. The latter claimed that Holt's animosity to him and Davis was owing to the fact that on the breaking out of the Civil War Holt had espoused the cause of the South and they had knowledge of this. One of Clay's friends said that Holt was "a man who had forsaken his own section for gain." Secretary Stanton supported Holt in his persecution of Clay.

Mrs. Clay interested General Grant in her husband's case, who wrote President Johnson, on November 26, 1865:

".....I now respectfully recommend the release of Mr. C. C. Clay. The manner of Mr. Clay's surrender, I think, is full guarantee that if released on parole, to appear when called for, either for trial or otherwise, that he will be forthcoming."

The continued incarceration of Clay

without trial began to raise criticism in the North. Mrs. Clay writes: "Early in the month of February two important letters reached me through Mr. R. J. Haldeman. They were addressed to the President, and bore the signature of Thaddeus Stevens and Robert J. Walker, respectively. Since my letter addressed to him in May, 1865, Mr. Haldeman's efforts had been unremitting in my husband's behalf with those whose recommendations were likely to have most weight with the President and his advisors. He now wrote me as follows:

"Mrs. C. C. Clay, Jr.

"My Dear Madam: I enclose you a very handsome letter from the Honourable R. J. Walker to the President. I also sent you the letter of Mr. Stevens, which has become of some importance in view of Mr. Stevens' recent utterances. Mr. Walker considers it of the highest importance, and wonders how I obtained it.

"After seeing you, I called on Mr. Stevens in reference to the proposed visit (to you), but found him brooding over the violent speech which he has since made. I did not, therefore, deem it prudent to insist upon the performance of his promise and am confirmed in my judgment by events.

"During the day I heard something which convinced me the President would not then act. This I could not bring myself to tell you, and therefore obeyed a hasty summons to New York by an unceremonious departure from Washington. As the future unfolds, I hope to be again at Washington and at the propitious moment. I hope you will keep up your good spirits, for, upon the faith of a some-

what phlegmatic and never oversanguine Dutchman, I think the period of Mr. Clay's release approaches rapidly.....Mr. Walker, however, desires me to say to you that 'as we must all go to Clay at last, why not go at once?' I think this pointed witticism would bear repetition to the President.

"I am, very respectfully, Madam,

"Yours,

"R. J. HALDEMAN."

"February 3, 1866."

Senator Henry Wilson, of Massachusetts, then took up the question of Mr. Clay's release and wrote the President the following letter. Mr. Johnson at the time made the remark, it is claimed, that Mr. Wilson would not commit himself to writing as "He fears the Radical press too much":

"His Excellency, the President of the United States.

"Sir: Mrs. Clay, the wife of Clement C. Clay, is now in the city, and has requested me to obtain permission for her husband to go to his home on parole. His father is said to be at the point of death, his mother recently deceased, and, if there be no objections or reasons unknown to me why the request of Mrs. Clay should be denied, I have no hesitation in recommending its favorable consideration, if only from motives of humanity, as I have no doubt Mr. Clay will be forthcoming when his presence is again required by the Government.

"I have the honor to be,

"Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

"H. WILSON."

Although many Confederates, who had held prominent official positions, had been released, among them Vice President Stephens, Secretary of the Navy Mallory and Admiral Semms, owing to the continued bitter opposition of Secretary Stanton and Judge Holt, the release of Mr. Clay was not effected until some six weeks after Mr. Wilson had written the President, when the following order was issued:

“War Department,

“Washington, D. C., April 17, 1866.

“Ordered:

“That Clement C. Clay, Jr., is hereby released from confinement and permitted to return and remain in the State of Alabama, and to visit such other places in the United States as his personal business may render absolutely necessary, upon the following conditions, viz.: That he take the oath of allegiance to the United States, and give his parole of honour to conduct himself as a loyal citizen of the same, and to report himself in person at any time and place to answer any charges that may hereafter be preferred against him by the United States.

“By order of the President,

“E. D. TOWNSEND,

“Ass't Adj't General.”

It is stated that this order was originally prepared for the signature of Secretary Stanton, but the words “Secretary of War” had been crossed out. The form of an adjutant general signing by order of the President instead of the secretary of war was unusual to say the least.

Mr. Clay's release at this time was no doubt owing to sacrifice and untiring energy of his wife, to whom Judge Black wrote: “Tell your great and



good husband I could do nothing for him, because his magnificent wife left nobody else a chance to serve him."

Mrs. Clay was the daughter of the Rev. Payton Randolph Tunstall. Her mother's father was General William Arrington, of North Carolina, who won his title in the Revolutionary War.

Much of the information in this paper was secured from the Memoirs of Mrs. Clay, entitled "A Belle of the Fifties," published in 1905, by Doubleday, Page & Co., New York.

HORACE L. HALDEMAN.

Author: Haldeman, Horace L.

Title: Thaddeus Stevens / by Horace L. Haldeman

Primary Material: Book

Subject(s): Stevens, Thaddeus, 1792-1868.  
Clay, C. C. (Clement Claiborne), 1816-1882.  
Lincoln, Abraham, 1809-1865 --Assassination.  
United States--Politics and government--1865-1869.

Publisher: Lancaster, Pa. : Lancaster County Historical Society, 1913

Description: 159-167 p. ; 23 cm.

Series: Journal of the Lancaster County Historical Society ; v. 17,  
no. 6

Call Number: 974.9 L245 v.17

Location: LCHSJL -- Journal Article (reading room)

+++++

Institution Name  
Institution Address  
Institution Phone Number  
Institution E-mail Address