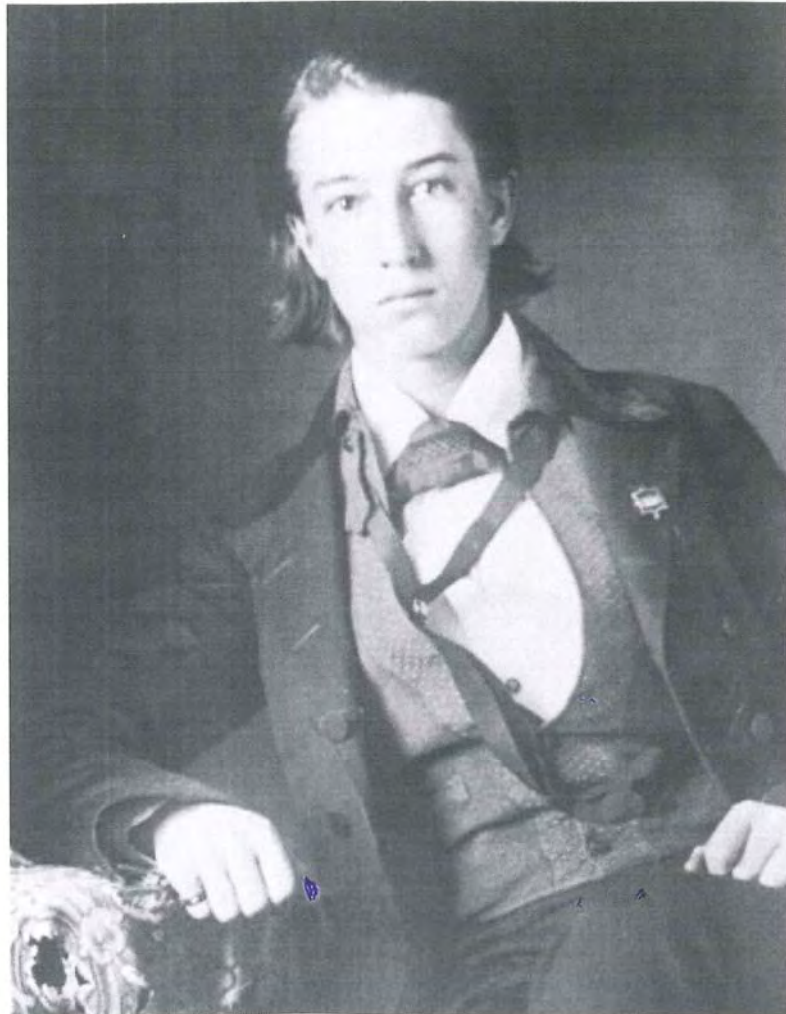


Sidney Lanier & his “Montvale Muse”

The Story of Two Poets

by F. Lanier Graham



PHOTOGRAPH OF SIDNEY LANIER in 1857 at the age of 15 when he began spending summers at Montvale Springs and listening to the poetry of his aunt, Mary T. Lanier, whom he called his “Montvale Muse.” Ex. Collection: Mary T. Lanier & then Alberta Mankin Lanier. Promised gift to the East Tennessee Historical Society (ETHS).

About the Author

F. Lanier Graham is an art historian, a museum curator, and a poet. He also is a visual artist. His box-sculptures are in the permanent collections of major museums in the United States and Europe, including the Museum of Modern Art in New York, and the National Museum of Modern Art in Paris. In his youth, he often spent summers with family and friends in Chattanooga, his mother's hometown. Then he moved to California to be Chief Curator of the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco. For many years he has been teaching Modern Art, World Art, and World Religions at California State University. His profile appears in Who's Who in America and Who's Who in the World. He has written 21 art history books, a number of which are standard references in their field. He has also published many poetry collections, and written a good deal on the history of the Lanier family, a family that has included many poets, musicians, artists, and art collectors during the last 500 years. Here is a checklist of his work on the Lanier family:

The Earlier Life & Work of Nicholas Lanier (1588-1666),

Collector of Paintings & Drawings, 1966

"Sidney Lanier's 'Nirvana' – An East-West Vision," 1976 (revised 2004)

"The Connection between the Lanier Family in England & America: A Collection of Documents edited for the Sidney Lanier Archive, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore," 1976 (revised 2002)

"The Lanier Family in America: A Collection of Genealogies edited for the Sidney Lanier Archive, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore," 1990 (revised 2004)

"The Lanier Family in the Old South: A Biographical Genealogy of Martha Lanier Graham" (Profiles of her American ancestors back to the 17th century)

THE LANIER HOME PAGE @ mindspring.com/~wdlanier, 2004

"Sidney Lanier & the American Renaissance," 2004

"The Laniers in East Tennessee: An Album of Family Portraits & Original Documents Prepared as a Gift for the East Tennessee Historical Society, Knoxville," 2011



MARY T. LANIER (1838-1908) in a photograph of 1888. The former Miss Mary Theodora Brown in 1854 married Sidney Cooke Lanier, for whom Sidney Lanier, the famous poet, was named. The summer home of Sidney C. & Mary T. Lanier from 1858 to 1863 was Montvale Springs, near Knoxville. During four of those summers they were visited by their young nephew who was beginning to become a poet and musician. Collection of the East Tennessee Historical Society, Knoxville. Ex. collection: Mary T. Lanier

Sidney Lanier (1842-1881) is warmly remembered by many as the "Poet Laureate of the Old South." That was not a formal title, but it does express how he has been widely regarded, when he was alive, and ever since. In this essay, for convenience, he will be referred to as "the Poet." That is how he always has been referred to in my family. This convention prevents him being confused with the many other Sidneys in the family. He did not start his adult life as a poet. For years he followed his parents in thinking that it would be more socially responsible to be a professor, lawyer, or librarian, even though he loved music and musical words. He needed encouragement to follow the Muses into music and poetry. He received some of that encouragement from his Aunt Mary, the wife of his father's brother, Sidney Cooke Lanier (1821-1866), for whom the Poet was named. [1] "Auntie Mary" as he called her was a poet herself. She gave her nephew encouragement at critical times, first when he was young and again in 1871.

"Auntie Mary" was Mary Theodora Lanier, the former Mary Theodora Brown (1837-1908). She grew up in New York City. Her father was George Leonard Brown (died 1840) of Holland and New York. He was a prosperous partner of John Jacob Astor in the fur trade. Her mother was Eliza Kirby Taylor Brown (1816-1883) of Virginia. Mrs. Brown's second husband was Judge A. D. Russel. The Russels were prominent in New York and are buried in the historic Greenwood Cemetery. Mary's 1854 debut was at the first New York City opera house when a floor was laid over the seats.[2] Mary married Sidney Cooke Lanier in 1854 and was known thereafter as Mary T. Lanier. [3] They had two sons. Their primary home was Montgomery, Alabama until 1863, when the War changed everything. Their summer home from 1857 to 1863 was Montvale Springs, Tennessee. She spent her final years being cared for at first in the Birmingham home of her granddaughter, Mary Munds, and finally in the Chattanooga home of her son, A. D. Russel Lanier during 1904-1908. There she passed away, with both sons at her side. [4]

1. For this naming, see Starke, *Sidney Lanier*, 1933 & 1964, p. 10. Much of what is being recorded here is oral history from my grandmother, Mrs. A. D. Russel Lanier, Mary T. Lanier's daughter-in-law, and from my great aunt, Mary Munds, Mary T. Lanier's granddaughter, during the late 1950s and early 1960s when I was compiling genealogical data on the Lanier family that began to be published in 1965. Much of this data first appeared in Louise Ingersoll, *Lanier*, 1965, still a standard reference. See also F. Lanier Graham, *Nicholas Lanier (1588-1666)*, 1966, and "The Lanier Family in America: A Collection of Genealogies edited by F. Lanier Graham for the Sidney Lanier Archive, Johns Hopkins University," 2004.

2. For these birth/death dates, see "Genealogy of Mary Louise Banister Lanier," 1922. An 1867 letter from General Grant (later President Grant) to Judge Russel at the headquarters of the U.S. Army was sold at Christies, New York, 5 Dec. 1991. Grant thanks Russel for the gift of a pipe. This was the Academy of Music house (1854-66). The Metropolitan Opera opened in 1883.

3. *Ibid.* This well documented wedding date differs from the mistaken 1859 date in Ingersoll's book. A letter from SCL to MTL who was then his wife is dated 1858. (promised gift)

4. Obituary of Mary Theodora Lanier in *Birmingham Age Herald*, 2 Sept. 1908.

The Poet and his aunt got to know each other at Montvale Springs near Knoxville during his annual summer visits between 1857 and 1861 when he went off to war. The beautiful hotel and spa at Montvale Springs was widely known as the "Saratoga of the South." It started to be managed by Sterling Lanier and his son Sidney Cooke Lanier in 1857. They purchased it in 1860 with the idea of it becoming the regular summer home for their large and growing extended family. [5] During the summer of 1860 the visiting Lanier clan numbered about 25. [6] In his classic biography, Sidney Lanier, Edwin Mims wrote about that summer:

His flute-playing and extensive reading did not prevent Lanier from graduating at the head of his class in July, 1860.*

His oration was on the ambitious subject, "The Philosophy of History". One of the most important events in his early life was the vacation following his graduation. His grandfather had bought in the mountains of East Tennessee, at Montvale Springs, a large estate, on which had been built a beautiful hotel. During the summer his children and grandchildren -- some twenty-five in all -- visited him. Here they enjoyed the pleasures of hunting, fishing, and social life. There were many visitors from the Southern States to this "Saratoga of the South". "What an assemblage of facilities for enjoyment," Lanier writes, "I have up here in the mountains, -- kinsfolk, men friends, women friends, books, music, wine, hunting, fishing, billiards, tenpins, chess, eating, mosquitoless sleeping, mountain scenery, and a month of idleness." This experience, somewhat idealized, is the basis of the first part of "Tiger Lilies". Here Lanier had the opportunity of seeing at its best the life of the old South just before it vanished in the cataclysm of the Civil War. ...

But while Lanier was thoroughly identified with this life, he was at the time dreaming of a career which was not fostered by it -- a career in which music and poetry should be the dominating figures. The scene in the first book of "Tiger Lilies" of a band of friends gathered on the balcony of John Sterling's house -- a palace of art reared by Lanier's imagination in the mountains of East Tennessee -- ...

[7]

5. Two articles featuring Sterling Lanier are Lena E. Jackson & Aubrey Starke, "New Light on the Ancestry of Sidney Lanier" in THE VIRGINIA MAGAZINE OF HISTORY & BIOGRAPHY, 1935, pp. 160-168, and Natalie Wright, "Montvale Springs under the Proprietorship of Sterling Lanier" in THE EAST TENNESSEE HISTORICAL SOCIETY'S PUBLICATIONS, 1947, pp. 48-63. Wright (p.58) records the Poet at Montvale "in the summers from his fifteenth to his nineteenth years." More details in Inez E. Burns, HISTORY OF BLOUNT COUNT, TENNESSEE, 1957. Sterling Lanier's obituary: 4 Feb. 1879 in GEORGIA WEEKLY TELEGRAPH & MESSENGER.

6. Noted in Edwin Mims, Sidney Lanier, 1905, pp. 35. Sidney Lanier's visit to Montvale in 1860 is discussed in a number of books. Mary Munds and Alberta M. Lanier both recalled the Poet's regular summer visits to Montvale over several years. See above Note 5 and also Parks, Sidney Lanier, 1968, p. 5.

7. Mims, Op. Cit., pp. 34-35.

The Poet was not sure what path to follow. Auntie Mary encouraged him to follow his heart into music and poetry. Her specific injunction was: "Draw strength from your roots, from the physical roots of your artistic ancestors and from the spiritual roots of all religions." [8]

In the process of explaining aspects of "all religions," she introduced her devout Christian nephew to Buddhism and Nirvana. [9] She later became a member of the Theosophical movement which was (and still is) engaged in integrating the Wisdom of the West with the Wisdom of the East. [10]

Those seeds would grow inside her nephew, but Auntie Mary would not be there to water them. The War put aunt and nephew on very separate paths. They would not see each other again for several years. Shortly before the War, the Poet began to study the roots of his Family Tree. After the War, this hobby became a passion. He became convinced that his gifts for music and poetry came from his artistic ancestors in England. [11]

Lincoln was elected in November of 1860. South Carolina seceded from the Union in December. War Clouds gathered rapidly. Sidney became a Confederate soldier in 1861, serving until early 1865. He would write little poetry until after the War. In a prison camp he contracted TB, and never really regained his health. When he was released from prison camp in Maryland he walked most of the way home to Macon, Georgia. Not long after the Poet's arrival, President Jefferson Davis surrendered and was taken into custody at the Lanier House in Macon, a hotel also owned by the Poet's grandfather, Sterling Lanier.

8. Both my grandmother and my great aunt quoted "Mother Lanier," as they called her, with almost identical words. Both had been her caregiver for years and heard of her encouragement of the Poet many times. I am citing only statements both made independently. Sidney began studying his family tree in 1859 inspired by Auntie Mary. His letter to Iverson L. Harris, requesting genealogical data, is dated Feb. 25, 1859.

9. "Nirvana" of 1869 is one of Sidney's first major poems. It was first published in 1870.

10. Her Theosophical interests were passed on to her son, Russel. Russel's wife, my grandmother, kept a number of Theosophical books from her husband's large library of religion and philosophy. She told me these books were "expansions of the Christian Doctrine." Included were books by Annie Besant and C. W. Ledbetter on the chakras, etc., as well as the The World's Parliament of Religions, Chicago, 1893, which was an historic survey of World Religions. These books were part of my "required reading" when I began a systematic study of world religions and sacred art under the guidance of my godfather Arthur B. B. MacLeMore from 1953 to 1958 at the suggestion of my grandmother.

11. The Poet wrote two genealogical reports to his cousin J.F. D. Lanier in 1877 and 1879. He used 1859 notes from Harris as well as books by Samuel Pepys and Horace Walpole that he found in Baltimore. He felt "a sense of gratitude to old Nicholas [Lanier] for restoring me...to the pure stock of Laniers." Quoted in Lincoln Lorenz, The Life of Sidney Lanier, 1935, p. 5. For my biography of Nicholas Lanier in England, with a genealogy of the English Laniers, see above Note 1.

When East Tennessee decided not to be part of the Confederacy, the Laniers sold the Montvale Springs property in 1863. [12] Their beautiful building called "Seven Gables" with its 125 rooms burned down in 1896. Another version with 5 gables was built in 1901, flourished during the '20s, and burned down in 1933. Nothing remains on the site except the original stone steps to the entrance. Auntie Mary's husband, Sidney Cooke Lanier, was an active member of the Cotton Exchange, selling Southern cotton to Europeans to raise funds for the Confederacy. That of course was considered illegal in the North. He was captured in New York and convicted of treason. Mary's stepfather, Judge A. D. Russel, was a justice of the Supreme Court of the City of New York. Being sympathetic to the situation of his stepdaughter, he commuted the sentence to exile. A letter from Sterling Lanier shows that Sidney Cooke Lanier in 1863 closed their hotel, the Exchange, in Montgomery. That hotel is where Jefferson Davis and his Cabinet first met in 1861. [13]

It was in 1863 or 1864 that Sidney Cooke and Mary T. Lanier were exiled to Jalapa, Vera Cruz, Mexico with their young son, Sterling Sidney. He had been born in 1860 in Montvale Springs. Their second son, A. D. R. Lanier, was born in Jalapa in 1865. [14] Mary's husband died of TB in Jalapa in 1866. His sad father, Sterling, sent her a letter of grief in Jalapa where Sidney Cooke Lanier's tombstone can still be seen. [15] Mary and her two young sons returned to the United States in 1871, when she was trying to secure insurance money from a hotel in New York City co-owned by Sterling and Sidney Cooke Lanier. She managed to get between \$10,000 and \$20,000. [16]

12. Wright, Op. Cit., p. 62. See also Burns, Op. Cit.

13. Letter cited in Jackson & Starke, Op. Cit., pp. 165-66. Davis remained a friend of Auntie Mary. One letter from Davis to her after the War recalls her effort to disguise herself as a man and join the Confederate Army. She wore a picture of Davis around her neck in a locket all her life. She is wearing that locket in the photograph at the beginning of this article. See Library of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Manuscripts Department. Mary T. Lanier Papers #1488. Those unpublished letters from Davis to her are reproduced below in the Appendix. Portraits of Mr & Mrs S. C. Lanier, and photographs of Judge & Mrs. A.D. Russel are in the collection of the East Tennessee Historical Society.

14. This 1865 date appears in several places, e.g., a book from his mother and a silver cup from his namesake A. D. Russel, both in the collection of the East Tennessee Historical Society. ADR Lanier enjoyed telling the story that he could not speak English until he was 5 or 6, when he came to the United States with his mother and brother. The birthdate of his brother, Sterling Sidney Lanier, whose combined name honored his father and grandfather, appears in the "Genealogy of Mary Louise Banister Lanier," 1922.

15. 1866 letter from Sterling Lanier in the collection of the author; gift of Mary Munds. His tombstone is recorded in the "Colonial Dames Genealogy of Martha Lanier Graham," 1990.

16. My grandmother, Alberta Mankin Lanier, recalled \$10,000. Mary Munds, my great aunt (daughter of Sterling Sidney Lanier), recalled \$20,000. Mary T. Lanier and her sons settled in Birmingham in 1881. With those funds, the boys studied Civil Engineering at the University of Alabama in Birmingham and together started the Monro-Warrior Coal & Coke Company. All three are buried in Birmingham at the Elmwood Cemetery, as is my grandmother.

The Poet was in New York City on business when his Auntie Mary arrived there in 1871. It was a warm reunion. They saw each other often. One of the Poet's letters to his wife in the fall of 1871 speaks of how fond he had become of Auntie Mary's two sons:

This afternoon I took the boys, Sterling and Russell [sic], to Central Park, to see the animals, and we had a great time among the bears and monkeys. Russell [sic], the younger...has fallen so in love with me that he could hardly be persuaded to leave. [17]

When aunt and nephew met again, he was about to make a very important decision. Since the end of the War in 1865, he had not been living life to the full. His world had crumbled when The South lost the War. As a prisoner of war he had contracted TB and he would be plagued by ill health the rest of his life. What was he to do? Starke described the landscape in his excellent biography, Sidney Lanier, 1933 & 1964:

Everything had been lost. The lovely estate at Montvale Springs no longer belonged to Lanier's grandfather; members of the Lanier family "who used to roll in wealth are, every day," he wrote, "with their own hands plowing the little patch of ground which the war has left them, while their wives do the cooking and washing." [18]

He had hoped to teach metaphysics at the University of Alabama, where he would have lectured on the physical-metaphysical synthesis that the Wisdom Traditions of the East & West teach is essential in order to attain the fullness of our humanity. [19] He was beginning to find that ideal balance within himself. But he did not get the post. He had begun to publish a few poems and German translations in New York's Round Table, but that would not feed him. And he was not yet writing great poems.

He needed to do something practical. So he became a bookkeeper and clerk at the Exchange Hotel, which the Lanier family had reopened in Montgomery. He worked there from December of 1865 to April 1867, with plenty of time to write.

17. Letter from the Poet to his wife, signed "thy Lanier," Oct. 27, 1871. Sidney Lanier Archive, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, MS 7, Box 9.4 Quoted in Graham, "The Lanier Family in America," 2004. "Russell" was A.D. Russel Lanier, my mother's father. His portrait, and a portrait of his wife, Alberta Lanier, are in the East Tennessee Historical Society.

18. Quoted in Starke, Op. Cit., pp. 82-83.

19. Discussed in Ibid., p. 133.

Later in 1867 the Poet went to New York City for the first time, hoping to find a publisher for his novel Tiger-Lilies. There he became friendly with J. F. D. Lanier, a wealthy distant cousin who had developed railroads in Indiana and was a financial advisor to President Lincoln. J.F.D. Lanier funded the publication of that novel. [20] Feeling hopeful, Sidney married Mary Day in Macon in December of 1867. She would be his primary Muse for the rest of his life. To support his family, which would eventually include four sons, Sidney reluctantly studied law and joined his father's law firm, Lanier & Anderson, in Macon in 1868. There he would remain, competent but bored, until the end of 1872.

1869 found the Poet in New York City again, this time as a lawyer. He spent a good deal of time socializing with the family of J.F.D. Lanier whose son Charles became a lifetime friend and afterwards a donor of handsome statues of the Poet to Johns Hopkins University (where the Poet taught). The Poet was back in New York City in 1870 and 1871. As the 1870s began, he was slowly coming into his own as a poet. He was moving beyond his thick, overworked early style and starting to write poems that express fluidly and lucidly transcendental psycho-cosmic unity, poems such as "A Song of Eternity in Time" of 1867, and "Nirvana" of 1869. [21]

In 1871 Auntie Mary was deeply moved by these two poems, and she told him so. She is quoted by both Mary Munds and Alberta Lanier as saying to him words like these: "Anyone can be a lawyer. Only you can write poems like these." [22a] And she told her family that she repeated what she had told him at Montvale Springs in the 1850s: Draw strength from your roots, from the physical roots of your artistic ancestors and from the spiritual roots of all religions. [22b] Auntie Mary was not the only one encouraging Sidney, to be sure; but he regarded her with special warmth and respect. In honor of her earlier encouragement he called her his "Montvale Muse." They stayed in close communication for the rest of his life. Warm letters from him to her survive. [23]

20. There are two biographies of J. F. D. Lanier: an autobiography, Sketch of the Life of J. F. D. Lanier, New York, 1870; and Bill Bruggen, J. F. D. Lanier: America's Forgotten Patriot & Financier, Madison, Indiana: Lanier Mansion Foundation, 2000.

21. See F. Lanier Graham, "Sidney Lanier's 'Nirvana' – An East-West Vision" in Iconography of Infinity: Essays on Art & Philosophy, 2004, vol. 23D.1.

22a Oral history from Alberta Mankin Lanier (1958-1960), and Mary Munds (1962).

22b. Ibid.

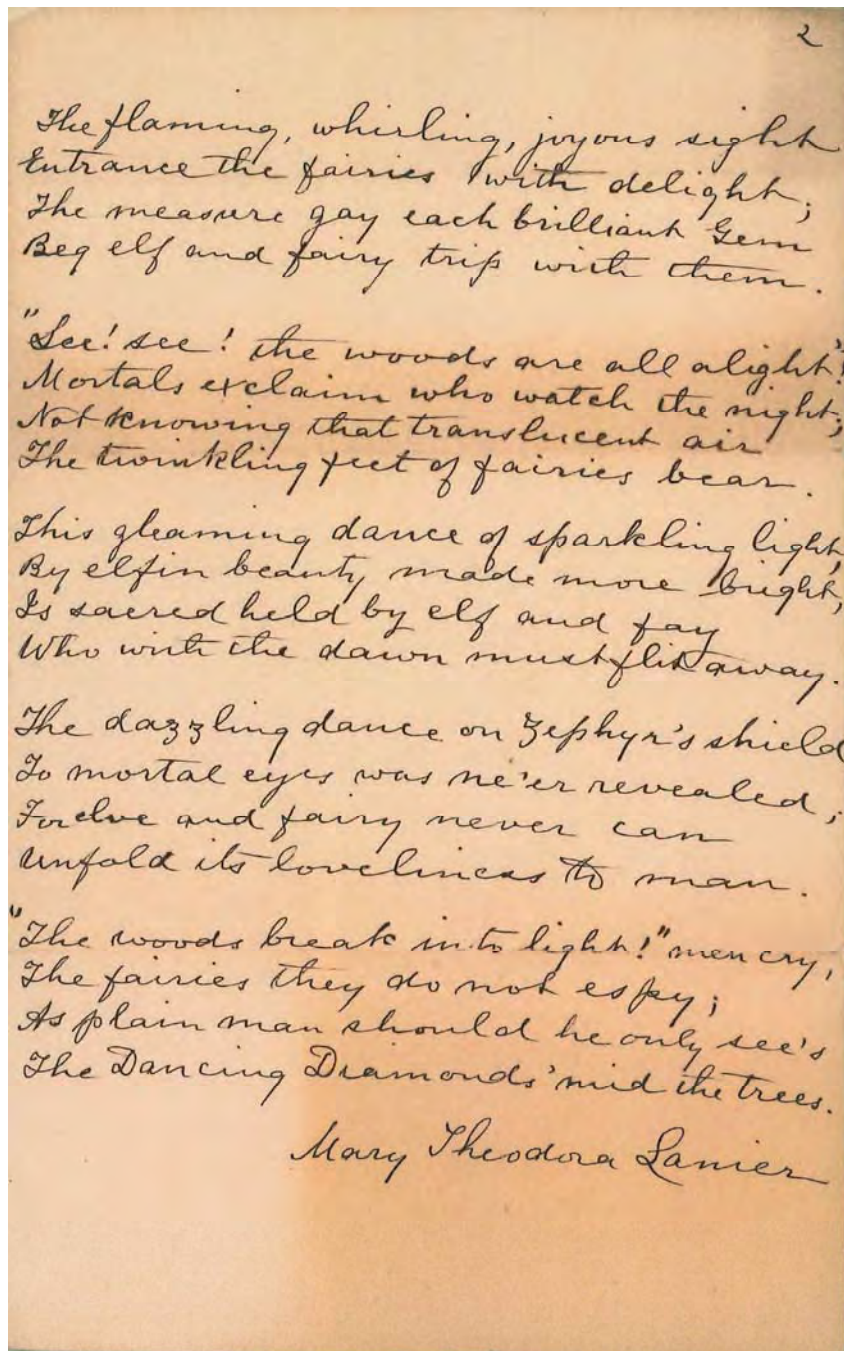
23. Oral history from Alberta Mankin Lanier and Mary Munds, and letters of 1877 and 1880 from the Poet to Mary T. Lanier, which now are in the Library of the University of North Carolina, Manuscripts Department. Mary T. Lanier Papers #1488. The full text of these two letters are reproduced below in the Appendix.

Another form of early support for the Poet from Auntie Mary and her husband, S. C. Lanier, was their financing of his first musical publication. This was a brochure featuring his flute composition "Little Ella," with a portrait of the Poet on the cover. "S. C. Lanier" is named on the cover over the date of May 10, 1866. [24]



24. This cover was first reproduced in Starke, "Sidney Lanier as a Musician" in *The Musical Quarterly*, Oct. 1934, on an unnumbered page between p. 386 & 387. Starke illustrated what was the only known copy of this brochure at that time. I inherited this particular copy from my grandmother. It was given to her by Mary T. Lanier who explained that she actually did the funding. Her husband, S.C. Lanier, had died the previous month, Apr. 22, 1866. This rare lithograph is a promised gift to the ETHS.

Auntie Mary wrote a good deal of poetry, especially for young people, starting when she was a teenager. Here is a page of her poem "Dancing Diamonds" (in her own hand) from her days in the Montvale woods:



[25]

25. Mary Munds (Auntie Mary's granddaughter) recorded that this poem was written in the summer of 1859 at Montvale's "Seven Gables" after a walk in the forest. She wrote poems for the rest of her life. All of her surviving manuscripts are promised gifts to the ETHS.

Auntie Mary recalled to Mary Munds (her granddaughter) and to Alberta Lanier (her daughter-in-law) that the Poet admired particularly a little poem called "Christian Nirvana" that she wrote in Mexico, where she converted to Catholicism. She carried the original manuscript with her the rest of her life. The poem relates to a small silver Mexican Catholic icon that seems to show the traditional system of seven chakras in the body of the Virgin who stands on a crescent moon. While a series of symbols rise up her center, five wheels or flowers rise up her sides to a sixth point where sun and moon unite before a blaze of Divine Light (where all dualities dissolve). The poem reads:

Mother Mary, Queen of Light
Guide us up to God's True Sight.
Up the Ladder spirit climbs,
Up to where the Sun-Moon shines. [26]

She sent this little poem of 1867 from Mexico to the Poet in Macon. She told Mary Munds and Alberta Lanier (who both repeated the story to me) that this poem inspired the Poet to write his profound poem "Nirvana" in 1869. Auntie Mary also said to Mary Munds that "Nirvana," in her opinion, marked the turning point in her nephew's life both as a poet and as a person. From all reports, Auntie Mary was a modest person. She was not given to egoistic flares or exaggerations. It seems reasonable to accept her claims. She was not a great poet herself. But she was proud to have encouraged her nephew to become a poet. And she regarded as a "gift from God" that her little poem about Nirvana was a seed that grew into a great poem from the pen of a great poet.

Auntie Mary and her son, A.D.R. Lanier, became Theosophists in the latter part of the century. Alberta Lanier eventually joined them when she married A.D.R. They were attracted to the teaching that the spirit of "One God" glows at the heart of all religions. It was not uncommon for Auntie Mary and her son to discuss Nirvana and Enlightenment. These concepts were not new to Auntie Mary. She grew up with them. Her stepfather, Judge A.D. Russel, was a collector of Asian art and a student of Asian philosophy. I also grew up chewing on such metaphysical terms. Mrs. A.D.R. Lanier, my grandmother, in conversations with me from time to time, defined Enlightenment as "getting out of the way of God's Light," and/or "Becoming Love."

26. Mrs. A.D.R. Lanier, my grandmother, gave me this icon and all her mother-in-law's surviving poetry and prose in the 1960s. When I asked her to interpret this poem she said: "It's another way of understanding Jacob's Ladder. It illustrates how the soul becomes more and more clear, until God's Light can shine through us clearly, with nothing in the way - no ego to block the Light. There are steps, stages, up through which awareness grows, up through which consciousness expands, until we can connect with the all-loving spirit of Jesus." She also told me that my grandfather and Auntie Mary both translated the motto of the Lanier family, "Murus Aeneus Conscientia Sana," as 'A Wise man's consciousness is his strength.' Or 'One's consciousness is one's strength.' This silver icon, and a transcription of this poem by Auntie Mary's granddaughter (Mary Munds) are now in the collection of the ETHS.



QUEEN OF LIGHT. Auntie Mary's Mexican Icon of the Virgin Mary collected by her about 1866 the year she became a Catholic.

"Queen of Light" was her name for this icon.

During 1872-73 the Poet finally resolved in favor of the Muses. In response to a letter from his father, who was still urging the more practical life as a lawyer, the Poet wrote the following letter, which was in effect a Declaration of Independence:

"I have given your last letter the fullest and most careful consideration. After doing so I feel sure that Macon is not the place for me. If you could taste the delicious crystalline air, and the champagne breeze that I've just been rushing about in, I am equally sure that in point of climate you would agree with me that my chance for life is ten times as great here as in Macon. Then, as to business, why should I, nay, how *can* I, settle myself down to be a third-rate struggling lawyer for the balance of my little life, as long as there is a certainty almost absolute that I can do some other thing so much better? Several persons, from whose judgment in such matters there can be no appeal, have told me, for instance, that I am the greatest flute-player in the world; and several others, of equally authoritative judgment, have given me an almost equal encouragement to work with my pen. (Of course I protest against the necessity which makes me write such things about myself. I only do so because I so appreciate the love and tenderness which prompt you to desire me with you that I will make the fullest explanation possible of my course, out of reciprocal honor and respect for the motives which lead you to think differently from me.) My dear father, think how, for twenty years, through poverty, through pain, through weariness, through sickness, through the uncongenial atmosphere of a farcical college and of a bare army and then of an exacting business life, through all the discouragement of being wholly unacquainted with literary people and literary ways—I say, think how, in spite of all these depressing circumstances, and of a thousand more which I could enumerate, these two figures of music and of poetry have steadily kept in my heart so that I could not banish them. Does it not seem to you as to me, that I begin to have the right to enroll myself among the devotees of these two sublime arts, after having followed them so long and so humbly, and through so much bitterness?"

[27]

27. Sidney Lanier to his father, Nov. 29, 1873, as printed in Poems of Sidney Lanier edited by His Wife, (1884) 1925, pp. xx-xxi.

After resolving to follow the Muses, the Poet had only a decade of life left. Following years of almost constant physical pain, but without bitterness, he would pass away from his TB in 1881 at the age of 39. However, that last decade would be a decade of extraordinary flowering. His late poems moved much of the United States and many in Europe. Best known are "The Song of the Chattahoochee" (1877), "The Marshes of Glynn" (1878), and "Sunrise" (1881).

What did contemporary poets think of him? Tennyson said he was "worth more than a hundred Longfellowes." Whitman said he had "clairvoyant genius." Swinburne said he was "one of the only two real poets yet produced in America - the other being Poe." [28] Textbooks started with 10 or 12 lines of his work and soon contained 10 or 12 pages.

In 1873 the Poet moved to Baltimore to join the newly formed Peabody Orchestra as First Flutist. Many were astonished by the performances. Since his college days, his flute playing had haunted audiences large and small. One highly respected composer and conductor of the time, Asger Hamerik, said of Lanier that he was "the greatest flautist of all time." [29]

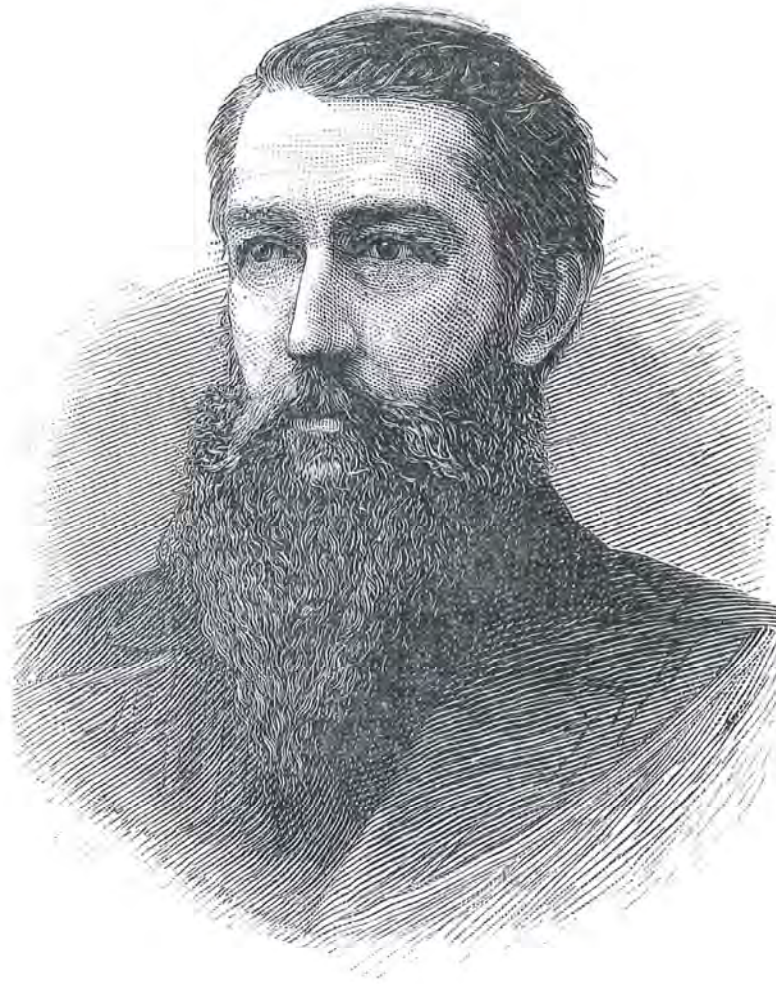
In 1879 he joined the faculty of Johns Hopkins University where he lectured to fascinated students on literature, especially Chaucer and Shakespeare. He also wrote remarkable books, including The Science of English Verse (1880), The English Novel (1883), and Music and Poetry (1898). They still command respect among students of literature, music, and aesthetic theory. How rare for an artist to also be a scholar. How many are there? How rare for a major poet to be also a widely respected professional musician.

It is the musicality of his poems that seems to move most readers. He would have agreed with the poet Alexander Pope when he said: "The sound should seem an echo of the sense." And with Edgar Allan Poe who defined poetry as "the rhythmical creation of beauty." Both Poe and Lanier had an amazing sensibility that made it possible for them to treat words as words and also as musical tones. Lanier once said of the sister arts: "Music is love in search of a word."

During his last years, Lanier gave the world a number of matchless poems, poems in which the core of Being is seen as Love, poems that demand social consciousness, poems in which Romanticism moves toward Symbolism, poems in which words and music are united, poems in which spirit and matter mingle and merge.

28. C. R. Anderson, ed., Centennial Edition of the Works of Sidney Lanier, 1945, vol.1:lx. For other opinions, see F. Lanier Graham, "Sidney Lanier & the American Renaissance: Reflections on Fellow Poets" in Iconography of Infinity: Essays on Art & Philosophy, 2004, vol. 23D.3.

29. Quoted in H. S. Thorpe, "Sidney Lanier: A Poet for Musicians," in The Musical Quarterly, Oxford University Press, 1925, p.374.



PORTRAIT OF SIDNEY LANIER. Wood engraving on the cover of *The Critic*, vol. 1, no. 22, Nov. 5, 1881. The cover story of his obituary. Ex. collection: Mary T. Lanier & Alberta M. Lanier. Promised gift to the ETHS.

APPENDIX ONE

Two unpublished letters given by Mary T. Lanier to Mary Munds (Mrs. James T. Munds, her granddaughter), and given by Mary Munds in 1948 to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

1.

Letter to Mary T. Lanier
from Sidney Lanier
in New York City, Aug. 17, 1877
"My dear little Auntie"

2.

Letter to Mary T. Lanier
from Sidney Lanier
in Baltimore, Jan. 25, 1880
"My dear Aunt Mary"

New York, N. Y.
Aug. 17th 1877.

My dear Little Auntie:

Your letter
came to us during the excitement
of the strikes, which was
raging in a rather unpleasant
proximity to my immediate
family. It happened that
our boarding-house in West
Philadelphia was quite close
to the West Philadelphia
station - one of the most
seriously threatened points -
and I was actively engaged
for several days in scouting
around among the crowds
which thronged that

Copy from the Mary T. Lanier Papers (#1488-2) in the Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. For personal reference only. This document should not be added to the holdings of another library or repository without the express written consent of the Southern Historical Collection. Permission to publish must be requested. Please note that this document may be protected under copyright.

I could run
neighborhood; with a view
to getting my dear little
chickens out of harm's
way as soon as any
necessity should arise.

that At the same time I was
very unwell (and still
am so). Moreover, soon after
the strike we moved into
the country, having made
our arrangements before
your letter came. Thus,
between excitement, illness,
and commotion, your letter
was allowed to pass
unanswered, though Mary
and I spoke constantly of

Copy from the Mary T. Lanier Papers (#1488-z) in the Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. For personal reference only. This document should not be added to the holdings of another library or repository without the express written consent of the Southern Historical Collection. Permission to publish must be requested. Please note that this document may be protected under copyright.

It, particularly regretting that we did not hear of the place you are at before we had concluded engagements otherwise.

We are at "Lehadd's Ford, Pennsylvania," and that is our address. Lehadd's Ford is a small station on the "Baltimore Central R.R.," about thirty miles from Philadelphia. We will remain there until October, when it is likely that we will go to Washington for the winter.

I came over here last Tuesday night - though scarcely able to drag about - on business which I could not well neglect. Will probably return

up into your beautiful Westchester country, and spend
some time with you and those dear boys of yours.
But the pot has to be boiled: and the fire is
very contrary; being, at this present, almost
out. It is particularly hard to blow it up, with
a cracked old bellows of a lung like mine.

But I will hope to see you soon. When do
you return to New York? Write to us at
Chad's Ford. Mary would send you cordial messages
if she were by me. Kiss the boys for

Yours aff. J. L.

New York, N. Y.

Aug. 17th, 1877

My dear little Auntie:

Your letter came to us during the excitement of the strikes, which was raging in a rather unpleasant proximity to my immediate family. It happened that our boarding-house in West Philadelphia was quite close to the West Philadelphia Station – one of the most seriously threatened points – and I was actively engaged for several days in scouting around among the crowds which thronged that neighborhood, with a view to getting my dear little chickens out of harm's way as soon as any necessity should arise.

At the same time I was very unwell (and still am so). Moreover, soon after the strikes we moved into the country, having made our arrangements before your letter came. Thus, between excitement, illness, and commotion, your letter was allowed to pass unanswered, though Mary and I spoke constantly of it, particularly regretting that we did not hear of the place you are at before we had concluded engagements otherwise.

We are at "Chadd's Ford," Pennsylvania, and that is our address. Chadd's Ford is a small station on the "Baltimore Central R. R.," about thirty miles from Philadelphia. We will remain there until October, when it is likely that we will go to Washington for the winter.

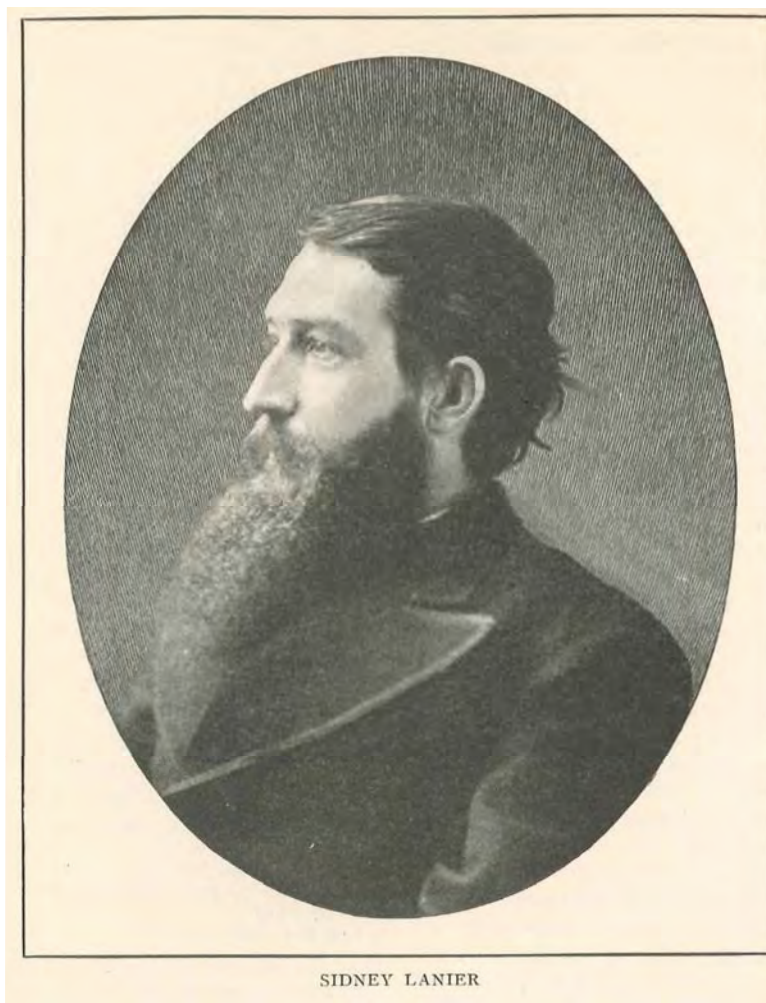
I came over here last Tuesday night – though scarcely able to drag about – on business which I could not well neglect. Will probably return [*insert: tomorrow. I wish sincerely that I could run*] up into your beautiful Westchester country, and spend some time with you and those dear boys of yours. But the pot has to be boiled; and the fire is very contrary; being, at this present, almost out. It is particularly hard to blow it up, with a cracked old bellows of a lung like mine.

But I will hope to see you soon. When do you return to New York? Write to us at Chadd's Ford. Mary would send you cordial messages if she were by me. Kiss the boys for

Your aff.

S. L.

<<FINAL DRAFT>>



greatest poetry is made that it transcends the
 ideas of poetry of the best quality, and
 shows us what its characteristics must be.
 It is not easy to speak disparagingly of
 Sidney Lanier. His life was too short for
 the ripe maturing of his splendid nature
 and the finding into free expression of his
 in the moment of transition from the litera-
 ture of sections to the literature of a Nation.
 For Sidney Lanier was distinctly a
 National poet—one who felt the stir of the
 great movement of coordination which did
 not begin with the close of the war, but
 which revealed itself then for the first time.

PHOTOGRAPH OF SIDNEY LANIER near the end of his short life
 as reproduced in The Outlook Magazine, 1902

Ex. collection: Mary T. Lanier, Alberta M. Lanier (promised gift)

435 N. Calvert St.

Baltimore, Md.

July 25th 1880.

My dear Aunt Mary:

Excuses for failure to write letters are usually considered quite out of the range of the Ten Commandments, and lies, in this connection, are not generally supposed to appear on the final account. Soak among the charges against one's conscience. This current mode of thought makes me hesitate to say that one has been silent for lack of time, lest it be taken in the general Pickwickian vagueness of such allegations. But, really and literally, I have not had time to write you. Two severe illnesses since September have

Copy from the Mary T. Lanier Papers (#1488-2) in the Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. For personal reference only. This document should not be added to the holdings of another library or repository without the express written consent of the Southern Historical Collection. Permission to publish must be requested. Please note that this document may be protected under copyright.

cast a frightful load of
work on my well days and
nights, and I have cut
short both my meals and
my sleep very rigidly for
several months in order to
get through with my daily
task.

My poor Mary, too, is very
unwell, and the daily sight of
her sufferings helps to diminish
my stock of strength.
I send this brief note merely to let
you know that we think of you,
and to greet your boys. How are
they, and what are they doing?
Has Russell a copy of my Boy's
Tricent, published by Scribner last
year? If not, I'll send him one.
And dear Aunt Jane has
gone.

We five send love to you three,
and a thousand wishes for this
and all, & well-bears.

Your affectionate,
Sidney J.

435 N. Calvert St.

Baltimore, Md.

Jan'y 25th 1880

My dear Aunt Mary:

Excuses for failure to write letters are usually considered quite out of the range of the Ten Commandments, and lies, in this connection, are not generally supposed to appear on the final Account Book among the charges against one's conscience. This current mode of thought makes one hesitate to say that one has been silent for lack of time, lest it be taken in the general Pickwickian vagueness of such allegations. But, really and literally, I have not had time to write you. Two severe illnesses since September have cast a frightful load of work on my well days and nights, and I have cut short both my meals and my sleep very rigidly for several months in order to get through with my daily task.

My poor Mary, too, is very unwell, and the daily sight of her sufferings helps to diminish my stock of strength.

I send this brief note merely to let you know that we think of you, and to greet your boys. How are they, and what are they doing? Has Russell a copy of my Boy's Froissart, published by Scribner's last Xmas? If not, I'll send him one.

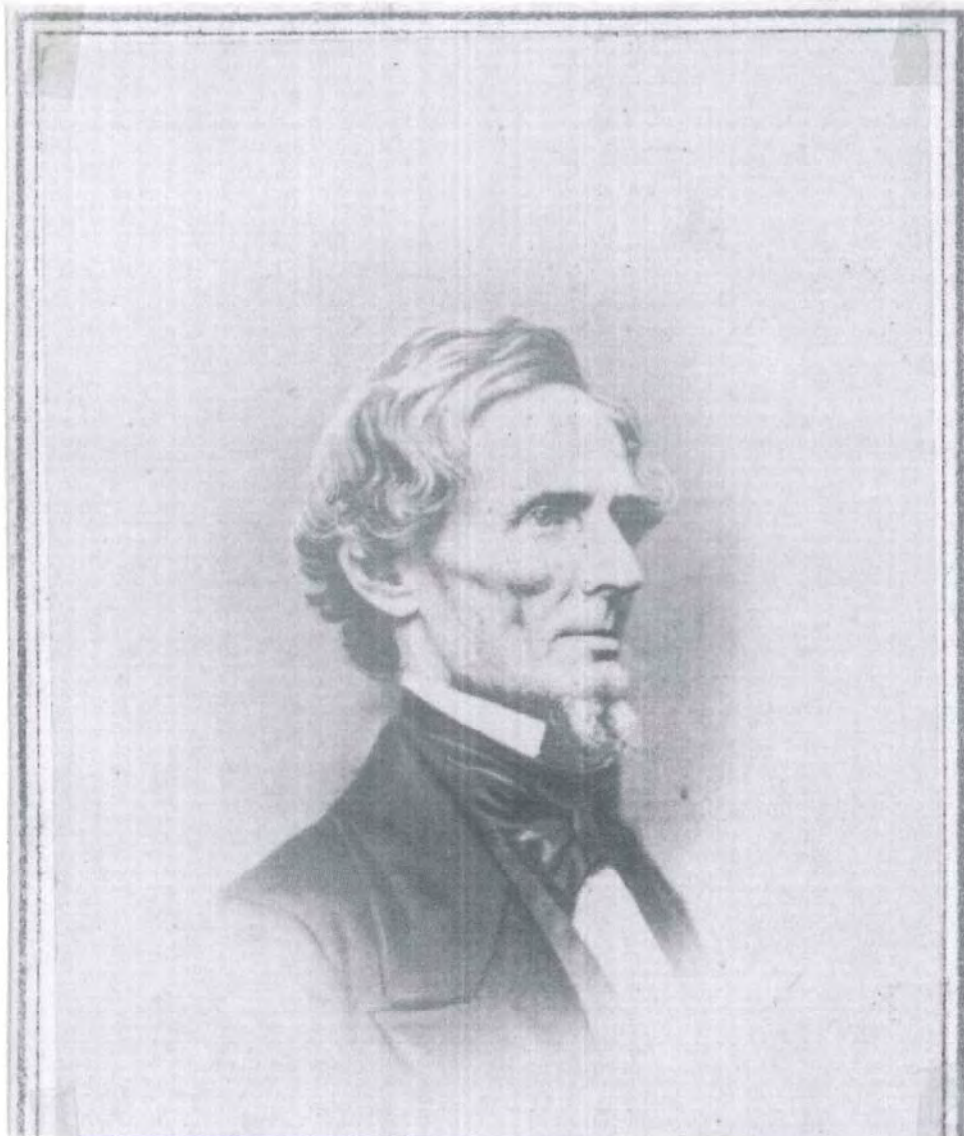
And dear Aunt Jane has gone.

We five send love to you three, and a thousand wishes for this and all New Years.

Your affectionate,

Sidney L.

<<FINAL DRAFT>>



PHOTOGRAPH OF JEFFERSON DAVIS (1808-1889) by Mathew Brady, c1860 on a carte-de-visite. Davis was a U.S. Senator and U.S. Secretary of War before becoming President of the Confederacy. The financial support given to the Confederacy by the Lanier family was considerable. Mary T. Lanier and President Davis were quite close. Their friendship started in 1861 when President Davis and his Confederate Cabinet met for the first time in the Montgomery hotel owned by her family (The Exchange), and continued for the rest of his life. Several portraits of Davis survive from her collection, all of which are promised gifts to the ETHS. She wore a photograph of him in a heart-shaped locket around her neck from the time of the Civil War for the rest of her life. That locket is seen in her 1888 photograph at the beginning of this article. The locket and the photograph inside it have disappeared. I wanted to try to determine which image it was. So I showed to the surviving women who knew her best several portraits of Davis. According to the recollection of both her granddaughter, Mary Munds, and her daughter-in-law, Alberta M. Lanier, the image in that locket was his cut-out head from this Brady photograph. (This illustration is from a reproduction). Two letters from Davis to her survive.

APPENDIX TWO

Two unpublished letters given by Mary T. Lanier to Mary Munds (Mrs. James T. Munds, her granddaughter), and given by Mary Munds in 1948 to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

1.

Letter to Mary T. Lanier
in Birmingham
from Jefferson Davis
in Memphis, Oct. 6, 1874
"My dear friend"

2.

Letter to Mary T. Lanier
in Birmingham
from Jefferson Davis
in Beauvoir, Mississippi, Jun. 14, 1888
(Beauvoir, Davis' last home, is now a museum.)

[To: Mary T. Lanier
Birmingham
Ala.]

Dear Mother

of Feb. 1898

My dear friend,

your welcome letter of the

29th inst. has been received. It gives

me to know how narrowly I escaped

during your and your dear sister, who

back in New York. I stay there and

now have been so brief, had the pleasure

to have a long conversation with

me here known. I have a nice

and grateful memory of your

kindness to me during my residence

in Montgomery, and would rejoice

again to meet you, as well as your

dear children. Should I be in New

York this fall, it will be a privilege

to see you, and to make

the personal acquaintance of your

dear ones, who for his connection with

you, as well as the fact that he was a

P.S. There is no L. in
my name, though in my
last one which seems to
be.

work of which is rather a severe
burden to one of those mentioned by
you. It is taken from the person
who had said your inquiry, you will
see the resemblance, though we are almost
an inch apart. I must be made for change of dress
and the mark of time.

I have heard of a woman who in
advice, tried the way, as in the
case, and see to the work of the, as at
subsequently wounded and her eye was
by the exposure, which in surgery, that
month. Which, on a better notion of them, in
the woman now in New York, I cannot say.

Please return the photograph, it is one
of my wife's arranged a board for the
purpose of sending it to you.

It will always give me sincere pleasure to
hear from you, and I earnestly hope it may
be presented to me to see you again.

These are for you, as your letter of with
you, the constant affection of your friend
Johnston Davis



Compendate Soldier, I have been glad to
claim as my friend.

Re regard to your inquiry about one
who claims to have been a soldier in
our army though a woman, I will
give you the facts as I recollect them.

One day, date not recollect, as I was
leaving my residence in Richmond, Va.,
a small person in the uniform of our
army met me at the door, and requested
a private interview. We went into a
room where we could not be interrupted,
and upon being assured of that fact, the
soldier said, I am a woman, My
husband and brother volunteered for
the army, and I unwilling to be left
alone amidst male attire, and so
disguised myself in the same
company with them. One after another
they have all fallen in battle, and de-
prived of their companionship, and drawing
when thus alone the sadness of my way.

I have come to you to ask for a
discharge from the army; after a while
that she did not wish to abandon
the service, and would like to be con-
sidered as a female attendant in some
of the hospitals. Her application for
discharge was of course granted, and
I offered to recommend her to a lady
of the highest character, who then had
charge of a hospital near to Richmond.
She expressed a preference for service
at a field hospital, stating that she had
during the previous campaigns in which she
had engaged, formed many friendships
and would like to be near to her former
comrades, so as in case of necessity to
attend to her personal friends. Indeed
more given in accordance with her
preference, and I did not hear again of
her. My memory is not distinct in
regard to the name she gave me.

Enclosed I send a photograph of the

Memphis (?)

6th Oct, 1874

My dear friend,

Your welcome letter of the 29th ...has been received. It {pains?} me to know how narrowly I missed seeing you and your dear sister when last in New York. My stay there would not have been so brief had ...

UCW

I have a vivid and grateful memory of your kindnesses to me during my residence in Montgomery, and would rejoice again to meet you, as well as your sweet children. Should I be in New York this fall, it will be a privilege, of which I will gladly avail myself, to call on you, and to make the personal acquaintance of your husband, who for his connection with you, as well as the fact that he was a Confederate soldier I shall be glad to claim as my friend. [**]

In regard to your inquiry about one who claimed to have been a soldier in our army though a woman, I will give you the facts as I recollect them. One day, date not recollected, as I was leaving my residence in Richmond, Va., a small person in the uniform of our army met me at the door, and requested a private interview. We went into a room where we would not be interrupted, and upon being [informed?] of that fact, the soldier said, I am a woman, My husband and Brother volunteered for the army, and I unwilling to be left alone [acquired?] male attire, and so disguised enrolled myself in the same company with them. One after another they have all fallen in battle, and deprived of their companionship, and dreading when thus alone the discovery of my sex, I have come to you to ask for a discharge from the army, she added that she did not wish to abandon the service, and would like to be employed as a female attendant in service of the hospitals. The application for a discharge was of course granted, and I offered to recommend her to a lady of the highest character, who then had charge of a hospital near to Richmond. She expressed a preference for service at a field hospital, stating that she had during the various campaigns in which she had engaged formed many friendships and would like to be near to her former comrades, so as in case of necessity to attend to her personal friends. Orders were given in accordance with her preference, and I did not hear again of her. My memory is not distinct in regard to the name she gave me.s

Enclosed I send a photograph of the back of which is written a name similar to one of those mentioned by you. If it was taken from the person who had caused your inquiry, you will see the resemblance, though some allowance must be made for change of dress and the work of time.

I have heard of a woman who in disguise entered the army, served in Lou'sa & Ga., and rose to the rank of Lieut., was subsequently wounded and her sex revealed by the exposure necessary in surgical treatment. Which, or whether either of them be the woman now in New York, I cannot say.

Please return the photograph, it is one of my wife's mementos & loaned for the purpose of sending it to you.

It will always give me sincere pleasure to hear from you, and I earnestly hope it may be permitted to me to see you again.

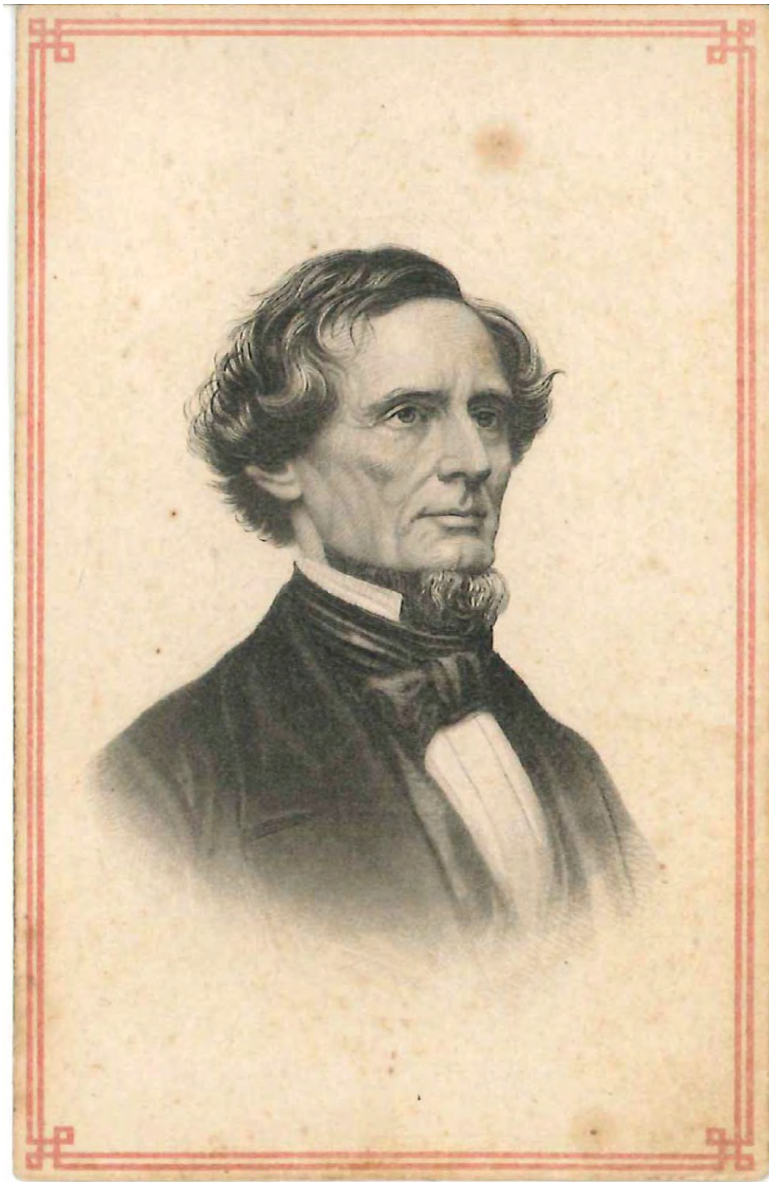
Please accept for yourself & your Sister if with you, the constant affection of your friend

Jefferson Davis

PS. There is no ... in my name though in my heart an ardent desire to see you. J. D.

[**] NOTE: Davis has misunderstood something Mary T. Lanier wrote to him. She did not marry again after S. C. Lanier passed away in 1866. Davis had known her and her husband in Montgomery by 1861 when the Confederate Cabinet met for the first time at the Lanier hotel (the Exchange). Davis also seems to have been friendly with the Poet to whom Davis refers by his first name. Perhaps Mary's sister had recently married. The only reference I have to Mary T. Lanier having a sister is in the 1867 letter to Judge Russel from U. S. Grant where there is mention of "Miss Russel," Judge Russel's daughter. That letter was auctioned at Christie's, New York, 5 Dec. 1991. That catalogue indicates General Grant had become President of the United States by that date, whereas he actually did not do so until 1869.

<WORKING DRAFT>



WOOD ENGRAVING OF JEFFERSON DAVIS on a carte-de-visite, c.1861-65 when he was President of the Confederate States of America. It is based on Brady's famous photographic portrait that Brady made c.1860 before Davis resigned from the U.S. Senate to lead the new Southern nation. Ex. collection: Mary T. Lanier & Alberta M. Lanier (promised gift to the ETHS).

[Mrs. Mary T. Lanier
Birmingham, Ala.]

Beaussein Miss

14th June 1888.

Dear Mrs Lanier,

I am very thankful
to you for your kind letter of June 3rd.
It is well that as Sidney is gone from
us, you remain to command admiration
of the poetic genius connected
with the name of Lanier.

It has been long since we have
met, but I hopefully pray that the
separation may not be forever.

The world of business men is drifting
towards your present home, but the
wear & tear of time does not permit
me to float with the current.

Thanks for the prayers you offer for
me and mine. Believe me

Affectionately your friend

Jefferson Davis.

Beauvoir, Miss.

14 June 1888

Dear Mrs. Lanier,

I am very thankful to you for your kind letter of June 3rd. It is well that as Sidney [*the Poet*] is gone from us you remain to command admiration of the poetic genius connected with the name of Lanier.

It has been long since we have met, but I hopefully pray that the separation may not be forever. The world of businessmen is drifting toward your present home, but the wear and tear of time does not permit me to float with the current.

Thanks for the prayers you offer for me and mine. Believe me

Affectionately your friend

Jefferson Davis

<<FINAL DRAFT>>

THE LANIERS in East Tennessee

