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<https://doi.org/10.18297/etd/1448>

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THE GREY EAGLE OF GLEN LILY:  
SIMON BOLIVAR BUCKNER'S PLACE IN THE LOST CAUSE, REUNION, AND  
POLITICS OF THE LATE NINETEENTH CENTURY

By

Whitney K. Todd  
B. A., Transylvania University, 2011

A Thesis  
Submitted to the Faculty of the  
College of Arts and Sciences of the University of Louisville  
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
For the Degree of

Master of Arts

Department of History  
University of Louisville  
Louisville, Kentucky

May 2014

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A Thesis Approved on

April 18, 2014

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Rediscovering Simon Bolivar Buckner has been a group effort and there are many people to credit in the creation of this thesis. I would like to thank Dr. Thomas C. Mackey for his wisdom, guidance, and patience in this process. As one of my first professors in graduate school, he helped me gain the confidence and skills to realize my academic goals. I would also like to thank my other committee members, Dr. Daniel Vivian and Dr. Jasmine Farrier, for their insight and perspectives on Buckner.

This project would not have been possible without the Filson Historical Society. While working as an intern, the Filson received a new collection of Buckner papers that I was fortunate enough to explore. Through this collection, the idea for my thesis and my interest in General Buckner grew exponentially. Fostering my interest in the subject and helping with research, I need to thank Jim Holmberg, Jenny Cole, Mike Veach, Heather Fox, Sarah Jane Poindexter, Eric Willey and Heather Stone.

I also received unbelievable encouragement and understanding from my co-workers in the education department at the Kentucky Historical Society: Leslie McWhorter, Tim Talbott, Greg Hardison, Cheryl Caskey, Jenny Lee, Ashlee Chilton, Jody Blankenship, Scott Alvey, Kate Sowada, Stuart Sanders, Becky Riddle, Alexis Schuman and Megan Sauter. For many months, these people dealt with my enthusiasm for Buckner and his bear skin cape. Also during my time at KHS, I met Dr. Brian

McKnight. Unexpectedly, I found someone sharing my journey of researching Buckner, and he graciously shared source materials and ideas with me.

Additionally, I survived months of the writing and researching by commiserating with my fellow grad students at the University of Louisville. I also need to acknowledge the support from the ladies of the University of Louisville's history department, Lee Keeling and Robin Carroll.

Thank you to my canine companion Auggie. He faithfully sat beside me while I wrote the pages of this thesis. A dog is a historian's best friend. Also, many thanks to Caitlin Marshall for providing me with friendship and encouragement throughout my two years of graduate school in Louisville. Finally, all my love and gratitude to my family: Mom, Dad, and Mandy. Each of you encouraged me to pursue my goals with unconditional love and patience. I am forever grateful for the educational opportunities and guidance you have given me throughout my life.

## ABSTRACT

### THE GREY EAGLE OF GLEN LILY: SIMON BOLIVAR BUCKNER'S PLACE IN THE LOST CAUSE, REUNION, AND POLITICS OF THE LATE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Whitney K. Todd

May 10, 2014

Simon Bolivar Buckner (1823-1914) lived a long and distinguished life. He began his career as soldier at West Point and fought for the Confederacy as lieutenant general during the Civil War. Buckner took the skills, influence, and connections gained from his early life and transformed them into a postbellum political career. In the late nineteenth-century, he earned supporters by becoming a symbol for Civil War memories, both in the Lost Cause and reunion movements. Buckner's popularity led to his success as governor of Kentucky from 1887 to 1891. His roots to the past also presented difficulties as the nation's economic and political demands changed as the masses fell on hard times. In 1896, he tried but failed to maintain the status quo by running for vice-president on a third party ticket for the Gold Democrats. Again in 1914, his death stirred up Civil War memories and brought his popularity to new heights, but over time historians forgot about this prominent Kentuckian. This thesis illuminates Buckner's forgotten journey through the complex and complicated political landscape of the late nineteenth-century.



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## INTRODUCTION AND HISTORIOGRAPHY: DIGGING UP BUCKNER

He did not live in the past but in the present and future.<sup>1</sup>  
-Louisville *Courier-Journal* upon Simon Bolivar Buckner's death

Born in Kentucky on April 1, 1823, Simon Bolivar Buckner lived a long and distinguished life. His career ranged from farmer, lieutenant general, businessman, governor, and vice-presidential candidate. Fighting in both the Mexican War and Civil War, Buckner participated in many of the major events affecting the United States in the nineteenth century and lived to see the turn of the twentieth century. Surprisingly, historians of the era have overlooked Buckner's importance and life, particularly his post-Civil War aspirations. Scholarship mentioning Buckner only covered his achievements and surrenders as a Confederate general. Occasionally, historians wrote about his post war life as an after note to their central narrative. This study challenges that perception and brings to light the enigmatic life of Buckner after 1865.

Formerly a professor at Western Kentucky University, Arndt Stickles holds the distinction as the sole full biographer of Buckner. Published in 1940 by the University of North Carolina Press, Stickles' book *Simon Bolivar Buckner: Borderland Knight* provided its readers with an account of Buckner's life from birth through his death.<sup>2</sup> While Stickles achieved this goal, the book placed a heavy emphasis upon Buckner's

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<sup>1</sup> "Gen. Simon Bolivar Buckner. Kentucky Soldier and Statesman. Yields in Battle with Dead," *Courier-Journal*, January 9, 1914.

<sup>2</sup> Arndt Stickles, *Simon Bolivar Buckner: Borderland Knight* (Durham: The University of North Carolina Press, 1940).

Civil War career. Those reviewing the book craved this military history, even going so far as to request more. One reviewer commented that “Dr. Stickles is more interested in General Buckner’s career prior and subsequent to the Civil War than in the four years of his Confederate service.”<sup>3</sup> On the contrary, half of the twenty-two chapters of the biography spoke about the four years of the war, 1861 to 1865. Buckner’s other eighty-six years are covered in broad brush strokes, with little analysis. Stickles used a wealth of primary sources, but became distracted at times by small anecdotes and unnecessary details. Despite its problems, this book remains an invaluable reference for any scholar interested in Buckner’s life.

In 1940, another reviewer of the biography noted that “it was Buckner’s misfortune always to be a secondary figure.”<sup>4</sup> Historians viewed Buckner as a peripheral figure due the lack of additional biographies and secondary works mentioning his achievements within Kentucky and elsewhere. In over sixty years, Buckner only received short entries in encyclopedias and Kentucky historian Lowell Harrison wrote the majority of these entries. Lowell’s texts can be found in reference books such as *Kentucky’s Governors* (1985)<sup>5</sup>, *The Kentucky Encyclopedia* (1992)<sup>6</sup>, and *Kentuckians in Grey* (2008)<sup>7</sup>. The entries do not provide new information on Buckner’s life and do not place

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<sup>3</sup> Thomas Robson Hay, review of *Simon Bolivar Buckner: Borderland Knight* by Arndt Stickles, *The Journal of Southern History* 6 (Aug 1940): 412-413.

<sup>4</sup> Charles W. Ramsdell, review of *Simon Bolivar Buckner: Borderland Knight* by Arndt Stickles, *Southern Historical Quarterly* 40 (July 1940): 150-151.

<sup>5</sup> Lowell H. Harrison, “Simon Bolivar Buckner,” in *Kentucky’s Governors*, edited by Lowell H. Harrison (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1985), 119-122.

<sup>6</sup> Lowell Harrison, “Buckner, Simon Bolivar,” in *The Kentucky Encyclopedia*, editor in chief John E. Kleber (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1992), 136-137.

<sup>7</sup> Lowell Harrison, “Lt. Gen. Simon Bolivar Buckner,” in *Kentuckians in Grey*, edited by Bruce S. Allardice and Lawrence Lee Hewitt (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2008), 43-48.

him within his historical context. In addition, Lowell cited only Stickles' work for reference further diminishing the depth of scholarship on Buckner. In *A New History of Kentucky* (1997), Lowell, collaborating with James C. Klotter, changed the pattern by including Buckner as a player in Kentucky history but mentions of him are brief considerations of a few key moments. Again, these historians used *Borderland Knight* as their major source and perpetuate Buckner's status as a secondary figure.

Buckner also can be found within some recent Civil War histories. In volume three of *Confederate Generals in the Western Theater* (2011), Stuart Sanders devotes a chapter entitled "A Name Worth a Division: Simon Bolivar Buckner and the 1862 Kentucky Campaign" to the general.<sup>8</sup> This chapter detailed the general's actions at Fort Donelson, Munfordville, and Perryville. It perpetuates the focus on Buckner's Civil War career and cripples the understanding of the last fifty years of his life, particularly his late political career.

In 1978, Jo Ann O'Connor wrote a short essay on Buckner. A freelance Louisville writer, O'Connor penned an entry for the Kentucky Biographical Notebook in the *Filson Club History Quarterly* titled "Simon Bolivar Buckner: Kentucky's Misunderstood Gentleman." While O'Connor's facts are not incorrect, she did not cite any of her source material and made large inferences in the process. She stated that "In truth Buckner fought for the South as a retaliation against the government that wanted to

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<sup>8</sup> Stuart Sanders, "A Name Worth a Division: Simon Bolivar Buckner and the 1862 Kentucky Campaign," in *Confederate Generals in the Western Theater: Volume 3: Essays on America's Civil War*, edited by Lawrence Lee Hewitt and Arthur W. Bergeron, Jr. (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2010).

force him to fight against it.”<sup>9</sup> This study will show that Buckner’s decision was not that simple. He held connections with the North and the South and felt pulled in both directions. In addition, he never clearly stated his reasons for joining the Confederacy.<sup>10</sup> This historiography mentions O’Connor’s short essay to point out the scarcity and patchiness of scholarship available on Buckner. Other amateur historians have taken on Buckner as a subject, but they repeat the same information found in other works and add little to his life story.<sup>11</sup> Overall, Buckner remains absent from recent scholarship. He is stuck in 1940 with Arndt Stickles as a borderland knight.

One reason for this lack of scholarship is the access to the primary sources for Buckner. The wide availability of his military papers explains the emphasis on his Civil War career, combined with the public’s fascination with this period of United States history. Government agencies gathered many records from the war. These sources have been archived for public use or published in books. The documents for the rest of Buckner’s life, before and after the Civil War, are not as readily available. In addition, the primary source material available lacks Buckner’s voice. The archives contain letters

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<sup>9</sup> Jo Ann O’Connor, “Kentucky Biographical Notebook, Simon Bolivar Buckner: Kentucky’s Misunderstood Gentleman,” *The Filson Club History Quarterly* 52 (1978): 363.

<sup>10</sup> Some of Buckner’s biographers, like O’Connor, refer to a letter Buckner wrote to his son late in his life on this subject. The location of this letter has not been identified, but O’Connor recorded that, “He [Buckner] had been incensed at the idea that Lincoln had suspended the writ of habeas corpus and had allowed people to be arrested arbitrarily without a warrant and imprisoned without trial.” But this reasoning and the late recording of these thoughts still leave the true nature of his Confederate choice a mystery. Cited from O’Connor, 363.

<sup>11</sup> Other biographical entries include Helen Hawes Hudgins, *A Sketch of Simon Bolivar Buckner* (Franklin, TN: Family History Center, 1983), mention of him in Howard Randolph Bayne, ed. *The Buckners of Virginia and the Allied Families of Strother and Ashby* (New York: The Genealogical Association, 1907), and Robert A. Powell, “Simon Bolivar Buckner,” *Kentucky Governors* (Frankfort, KY: Kentucky Images, 1976), 68.

and notes written to Buckner, but few that Buckner wrote himself. His voice and thoughts remain elusive and are only captured in brief moments of his life. This study seeks to bring this influential gentleman into the light of today's scholarship.

The most accessible collections are Buckner's official gubernatorial papers at the Kentucky Department of Libraries and Archives (KDLA). Covering 1887 to 1891, these papers detail his term in office. Although, useful for a study focused solely on politics, the KDLA resources, like the Civil War focus, limit Buckner's long life into only four years. Other Buckner letters and materials are held at the Kentucky Historical Society (KHS). This collection concerns the years 1861 to 1913 and thus cover a wider scope of Buckner's life, but it alone does not contain enough material to properly research Buckner's career and provides no information about his life prior to the start of the Civil War.

A more comprehensive collection can be found at the Huntington Library in California. Buckner's papers came to be at this location because of his son, Simon Bolivar Buckner, Jr. The Huntington received the papers as a gift from Mrs. Simon Bolivar Buckner, Jr. in 1956. The large collection covers nearly the entire span of the life of Buckner, Sr. The issue with these papers rests with the ease of accessibility. The Huntington Library requires application for entry and the site is located far from other archives with Buckner's papers. These issues leave the collection unused which in turn has led the library to devote little time to updating the organization and its access. In this study, the Huntington Buckner collection went unused for these reasons. If tackling a full biography of Buckner, these materials would need further investigation and analysis.

When Arndt Stickles wrote the 1940 biography, he used documents still held in private hands by Buckner's family members. Repeatedly, he references the Belknap papers as a source. Lily Buckner, Simon Bolivar Buckner's daughter, married Morris B. Belknap. Recently, these Belknap papers have become available for public use at the Filson Historical Society in Louisville, Kentucky. In 2013, the Filson acquired these private papers. Upon working through this large collection, many of the Belknap paper citations from Stickles match documents and letters in the Filson collection. These newly available sources provide depth and detail needed for a study on Buckner, particularly his later years. Their scope covers from before his birth with his father's businesses in the early nineteenth century through Buckner's death in 1914. The papers even contain notes and correspondence of Stickles when he was writing his biography. This study relied on these papers for its main source material and allowed Buckner to be freed from Stickles' interpretations.

Aside from the primary source limitations, secondary scholarship relating directly to Buckner remains scarce. Notably, Kentucky inhibited investigation into his life. For decades, general Kentucky history rested with amateurs more often than with academics. By the later twentieth century, the historiography for the state finally achieved more academic attention, but rested in the hands of a few including Lowell Harrison, James Klotter, and Thomas D. Clark. These historians' general histories are invaluable, but due to space constraints lack depth of analysis. In addition, these general histories of the state often do not change but just receive updates. The more recent work of Klotter and Harrison's, *A New History of Kentucky*, provided a base history of the state for the present research on Buckner.



Topical histories of Kentucky often only cover the frontier period, the Civil War years, or the twentieth century. Late nineteenth-century Kentucky is often overlooked by scholars. James Klotter tackled the period with Hambleton Tapp in their book *Kentucky: Decades of Discord, 1865-1900* (1977).<sup>12</sup> The book acknowledged this gap in Kentucky scholarship during the preface when stating that, “The general histories of the Commonwealth treat the post-Civil War period rather cursorily.”<sup>13</sup> The preface proceeds by revealing that most surveys of Kentucky history devote only small percentage of their space on the years 1865-1900. Tapp and Klotter succeeded in their attempt to show that “Kentucky society was one of contradictions” during that era in the Commonwealth’s history.<sup>14</sup> The book often mentioned Buckner and included a full chapter on his run and term in office titled, “Old Bolivar’s First Victory.”<sup>15</sup> Aside from Stickles, this book provides the most comprehensive look at Buckner’s post-war career.

The utilization of Civil War memories made Buckner’s postbellum accomplishments possible. In the late nineteenth century, Americans transformed their memories, celebrations, and commemorations of the war into tools wielded for political, social, and cultural goals. Most scholars of Civil War memory look from just after the war in 1865 to the beginning of World War I around 1914. This timeframe fits neatly into the Buckner’s lifespan as he died in early 1914. He lived as an example of how one

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<sup>12</sup> Hambleton Tapp and James C. Klotter, *Kentucky: Decades of Discord, 1865-1900* (Frankfort, KY: Kentucky Historical Society, 1977). Klotter also wrote the brief work, *William Goebel: The Politics of Wrath* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1977). This book details the political life of assignment Kentucky Governor Goebel, approximately covering the years 1887-1900. Buckner’s name appears a few times sporadically in the book.

<sup>13</sup> *ibid*, xii.

<sup>14</sup> *ibid*, xiv.

<sup>15</sup> *ibid*, 239-255.

element of the war, a Confederate general, could be utilized in a variety of ways to suit the needs and desires of America into the new century. Buckner found friends within two separate causes, the Lost Cause and reunification. The Lost Cause romanticized the antebellum South and glorified the achievements of Confederates.<sup>16</sup> In a similar way, the reconciliation of the nation after the war became glamorized, orchestrated, and exaggerated to heal and forget the wounds inflicted by the war. The studies of these two causes overlap to a degree and contain similar themes. By highlighting select scholarship, a spectrum of the historians' perspectives regarding Civil War memory can be gathered to explain Buckner's transition from soldier to politician.<sup>17</sup>

Paul H. Buck argued in his work, *The Road to Reunion, 1865-1900* (1937), that memories of the war initially divided the nation but, by the end of the century, the North accommodated to the South's wishes which led to peace within the nation.<sup>18</sup> This

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<sup>16</sup> The name "Lost Cause" may have originated with Edward Pollard's book *The Lost Cause: A New Southern History of the War of Confederates* (New York: E. B. Treat and Co. Publishers, 1867).

<sup>17</sup> The beliefs and more detailed platform of the Lost Cause can be found reaching back to Rollin G. Osterweis, *The Myth of the Lost Cause, 1865-1900* (Hamden, CT: Archon Book, 1904) and then to more modern analyses in Charles Reagan Wilson *Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause, 1865-1920* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1980); William C. Davis, *The Cause Lost: Myths and Realities of the Confederacy* (Lawrence: The University Press of Kansas, 1996) and W. Stuart Towns, *Enduring Legacy: Rhetoric and Ritual of the Lost Cause* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2012). Other views of southern memory can be found in the anthologies Gary W. Gallagher and Alan T. Nolan, ed., *The Myth of the Lost Cause and Civil War History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000) and W. Fitzhugh Brundage, ed., *Where These Memories Grow: History, Memory, and Southern Identity* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000). Northern perspectives and ideas of reunion are less plentiful than the Lost Cause and a more recent influence in the historiography, but the anthology from editors Alice Fahs and Joan Waugh, *The Memory of Civil War in American Culture* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004) lays out several essays that start to show the range of ideas present in reunion discussions.

<sup>18</sup> Paul H. Buck, *The Road to Reunion, 1865-1900* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1937).

outdated viewpoint favors the southern cause and fails to explain the complicated era of the Gilded Age in regards to race, class and gender. Nevertheless, Buck's work laid a foundation for more contemporary scholarship and raised questions about the role of remembrance in the process of sectional reconciliation.

Gaines Foster changed Buck's ideas in his book *Ghosts of the Confederacy* (1987).<sup>19</sup> Foster expanded the timeframe beyond 1900 to 1913. The book focuses on how the South gained influence using veterans' organizations and remembrance celebrations of Confederates that shaped the Lost Cause ideals. By the twentieth century, the North validated the South's celebrations by participating in Confederate traditions and thus healing sectional divisions. These Lost Cause actions worked as coping mechanisms for dealing with the defeat of the war. Nina Silber complimented Foster's explanation in *The Romance of Reunion* (1993) by detailing the North's journey to this reconciliation.<sup>20</sup> She explains that northerners created their own myths, similar to the Lost Cause, to deal with the reforming of class and gender roles in the Gilded Age.<sup>21</sup> The North used southern symbols of military valor to counter the anxieties of their transforming society. Buckner's popularity among his southern relations connects neatly

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<sup>19</sup> Gaines M. Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy: Defeat, The Lost Cause, and the Emergence of the New South, 1865 to 1913* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

<sup>20</sup> Nina Silber, *The Romance of Reunion: Northerners and the South, 1865-1900* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1993).

<sup>21</sup> A similar thesis is present in Stuart McConnell's *Glorious Contentment: The Grand Army of the Republic, 1865-1900* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1992) about the Union veteran's organization, the Grand Army of the Republic, attempting to deal with social changes in the decades after the war. The GAR's struggle with the new era and racial issues also can be found in Barbara Gannon's *The Won Cause: Black and White Comradeship in the Grant Army of the Republic* (Chapel Hill: The University of Carolina Press, 2011).

to Foster's ideas regarding Confederate traditions and Buckner's role as an honorable lieutenant general works as a symbol in Silber's narrative.

Foster and Silber both find a healed nation at the end of the narratives. Others followed this interpretation, but increased the complications present in the narrative of the late nineteenth century. David Blight's *Race and Reunion* (2001) emphasizes the racial tensions present in remembering the war within a nation adjusting to African American's gaining rights.<sup>22</sup> Blight argued in order for Americans to use the war's memories, the role of blacks and stain of slavery needed to be washed away. This white washing left the war narrative with a focus on valor, courage, and independence that favored the Southern Confederate image over the Northern Union soldier. This cleaned image of the soldier appealed to the white, middle class American citizen and helped to reunite the North and the South. Buckner's silence and inactivity regarding issues of the race placed him with those seeking to erase the blemish of slavery from the Confederate image for purposes of reunion. William Blair continued Blight's vision in *Cities of the Dead* (2004).<sup>23</sup> He restated the need to scrub the image of the Confederate veterans, like Buckner, to facilitate reconciliation at the grassroots level. Additionally, Blair saw some African Americans as active participants in this trend by moving away from celebrating Emancipation Day by the early twentieth century. Blair differed from Blight by showing how commemorative practices conflicted and overlapped each other.<sup>24</sup> These scholars

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<sup>22</sup> David Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001).

<sup>23</sup> William Blair, *Cities of the Dead: Contesting the Memory in the Civil War in the South, 1865-1900* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

<sup>24</sup> While Blight and Blair engage discussions about racial tensions, other scholars have considered how Civil War memories, particularly the Lost Cause, dealt with gender. Caroline Janney investigates the early southern women's memorial organizations in

worked through the idea that the true reasons for the war were forgotten in order to move forward and ignore the tensions brought about from the war.<sup>25</sup>

Carol Reardon also advocated the reunion sentiment in *Pickett's Charge in History and Memory* (1997).<sup>26</sup> Her interpretation centered on the memories from the Battle of Gettysburg with Pickett's infantry attack. Reardon views the veterans' reunions as true friendships being formed between the northerners and southerners. On the surface Buckner's rekindled friendships with Union generals like Ulysses S. Grant, reinforced her thesis. Under the surface, these reunions contain scripted elements that Reardon did not speak to in her study and their orchestrated nature indicated continued sectional tensions.

Not all historians agree with the assessment that the Lost Cause and reunion made Americans forget the wounds of war by the early twentieth century. Conversely, other scholars argue that images of the war continue to perpetuate the tensions between the North and South. John R. Neff in *Honoring the Civil War Dead* (2004) found that

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*Burying the Dead but Not the Past* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008) and the anthology *Monuments to the Lost Cause: Women, Art, and the Landscapes of Southern Memory* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2003) edited by Cynthia Mills and Pamela H. Simpson tackles similar ideas to Janney. Karen L. Cox also analyzed the efforts of the national women's organization in *Dixie's Daughters: The United Daughter of the Confederacy and the Preservation of Confederate Culture* (Gainesville: The University Press of Florida, 2003). Cecelia O'Leary also discussed the United Daughter of the Confederacy in *To Die For: The Paradox of American Patriotism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999). This book also provides insight into northern women's participation through the Women's Relief Corps. It studies the control of American nationalistic symbols through these women's organization and also veteran groups as well.

<sup>25</sup> Another interpretation of how the nation came together after the war presents in Heather Cox Richardson's *West from Appomattox: The Reconstruction of America after the Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007). She argues that images of the West bonded the North and South which created a new American identity.

<sup>26</sup> Carol Reardon, *Pickett's Charge in History and Memory* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

commemorations of the war discouraged reconciliation because they opened emotional sores and reminded people of mass death and suffering.<sup>27</sup> Similarly, *Sing Not War* (2011) by James Marten showed how veterans, particularly disabled and Union soldiers, struggled to reenter American society after the war.<sup>28</sup> He argued that citizens wanted reunion, but the veterans' hardships and war experiences did not allow them to forget. Caroline Janney builds upon their ideas in *Remembering the Civil War* (2013).<sup>29</sup> She makes the distinction that the nation may have reunited but reconciliation did not occur. Union and Confederate soldiers could meet at battlefield reunions, but their friendships were only at the surface.

Simon B. Buckner's involvement with Civil War memory lies in between these interpretations. His friendships with northerners and Union generals appeared more genuine than Janney or Neff implied. This genuineness may stem from how he exited the war physical unharmed with his white privilege and wealthy connections intact, unlike the men that Neff references in his study. However, he and his supporters utilized and orchestrated these reunification links for specific purposes, not just for friendship's sake. In addition, Buckner never lost his Confederate connections or forgot about the war. Instead, he held dual popularity throughout his life and even in death.

From a regional perspective, the classic work of E. Merton Coulter's *The Civil War and Readjustment in Kentucky* (1926) started the investigation into Kentucky's use

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<sup>27</sup> John R. Neff, *Honoring the Civil War Dead: Commemoration and the Problem of Reconciliation* (Lawrence: The University of Kansas Press, 2004). Also, see Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008).

<sup>28</sup> James Marten, *Sing Not War: The Lives of Union and Confederate Veterans in the Gilded Age* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011).

<sup>29</sup> Caroline Janney, *Remembering the Civil War: Reunion and the Limits of Reconciliation* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2013).

of Civil War symbolism.<sup>30</sup> Throughout the book, Coulter revealed his southern sympathies and diminished Unionists sentiments, but the book laid the groundwork for all future studies of the subject. This base includes the widely remembered idea that Kentucky seceded after Appomattox. Recent scholarship helps to give depth to the state's relatively shallow pool of scholarship on Kentucky's role in the Lost Cause and reunion. Anne E. Marshall takes a look at Kentucky's use of war commemoration in *Creating a Confederate Kentucky* (2011).<sup>31</sup> She identifies a long-lasting Confederate identity in the border state that grew out of white Kentuckians finding common ground as African Americans gained rights and racial tensions mounted in the postwar era. Buckner's story builds upon their ideas, but also adds a layer of politics that Marshall's book is missing.

In regards to Buckner's political climb in the Gilded Age, scholarship on the time period must supplement Civil War memory studies. The issue with placing Buckner into the scholarship rests with the fact that he was located in Kentucky. As mentioned, studies on Kentucky in the late nineteenth century are limited so additional national studies must be viewed. Since the Commonwealth had a largely rural population concentrated on small farms, the economy contained similarities to the South's economic recovery.<sup>32</sup> Thus, looking at C. Vann Woodward's celebrated work *Origins of the New*

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<sup>30</sup> E. Merton Coulter, *The Civil War and Readjustment in Kentucky* (Chapel Hill: The University Press of North Carolina, 1926).

<sup>31</sup> Anne E. Marshall, *Creating a Confederate Kentucky: The Lost Cause and Civil War Memory in a Border State* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

<sup>32</sup> According to Klotter and Tapp's *Decades of Discord*, in 1890 out the population in Kentucky of 1,858,645 people, 1,501,922 people living in rural areas with approximately 179,264 farms. These numbers showed that eighty percent of the population resided in rural areas mainly and were involved in agricultural industries like tobacco. See appendix I on page 458.

*South, 1877-1913* (1951) helps contextualize Buckner's life.<sup>33</sup> He possessed many of the qualities of Woodward's "Redeemers," the white pro-business men. Buckner differed by trying to limit railroad corporations rather than promote them, but, overall, Buckner favored and mingled with his elite class and did little to advance social causes for the masses.<sup>34</sup>

Buckner's political struggles reflected the larger issues present with the Democratic Party at the time. The Gilded Age encountered many power struggles as commanding politicians tried to figure out the right solution for the nation's growing pains. In the political scholarship for the era, the Democrat Party typically receives harsh criticism for corruption and a lack of modernization. Historians place blame on President Grover Cleveland's Democratic administration, which Buckner supported. This view of a negligent Democrat Party and praise for the Republican Party at the end of the century can found in H. Wayne Morgan's *From Hayes to McKinley: National Party Politics, 1877-1896* (1969).<sup>35</sup> Mark Wahlgren Summers' attempted to balance out this view in *The Gilded Age or, The New Hazard of New Functions* (1997).<sup>36</sup> A subtitle to one of his chapters reads "Cleveland Tries So Hard to Do Right."<sup>37</sup> He argues more that the

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<sup>33</sup> C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Press and Littlefield Fund for Southern History, The University of Texas, 1951).

<sup>34</sup> For a more national context on the era, Jackson Lear's cultural history *Rebirth of a Nation: The Making of Modern America, 1877-1920* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2009) provided insight, and the social history by Morton Keller, *Affairs of State: Public Life in Late Nineteenth Century America* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1977).

<sup>35</sup> H. Wayne Morgan, *From Hayes to McKinley: National Party Politics, 1877-1896* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1969).

<sup>36</sup> Mark Wahlgren Summers, *The Gilded Age or, The New Hazard of New Functions* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1997).

<sup>37</sup> Summers, *The Gilded Age*, 211.



Democratic Party was not irresponsible, but just inadequate to meet the needs of the nation in its times of crisis.<sup>38</sup>

The third party movement of the era resulted from the failure of the major political parties to address the leading concerns at the century's end. The Democratic Party, including Buckner, represented and fought for a world of white, well-to-do business men. The increasing demands and hardships experienced by workers and farmers could not be met by this old guard of politicians. Elizabeth Sanders explored this topic in *Roots of Reform: Farmers, Workers, and the American State* (1999).<sup>39</sup> The book argued that the factory workers and farmers' discontent transformed the political landscape of the late nineteenth century. Buckner indeed dealt with these pressures during his gubernatorial term, but their momentum had not reached its peak at that time.<sup>40</sup>

These third party issues presented Buckner with more of a challenge during his part in the presidential election of 1896.<sup>41</sup> Here he brought Kentucky politics to the national stage as the vice-presidential candidate for the newly-formed National Democratic Party. R. Hal Williams focuses on this pivotal election in *Realigning*

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<sup>38</sup> For more on the Gilded Age, see Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982) and Rebecca Edwards, *New Spirits: Americans in the Gilded Age, 1865-1905* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

<sup>39</sup> Elizabeth Sanders, *Roots of Reform: Farmers, Workers, and the American State, 1877-1917* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999).

<sup>40</sup> For a Kentucky perspective on Sander's ideas see the article by Thomas J. Brown, "The Roots of Bluegrass Insurgency: An Analysis of the Populist Movement in Kentucky," *The Register of the Kentucky Historical Society* 78 (Summer 1980): 219-242.

<sup>41</sup> For general information on this decade see H. W. Brand's *Reckless Decade: America in the 1890s* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995) and to get a snapshot of the aftermath of the century see Noel Jacob Kent's *America in 1900* (Armonk, New York: M. E. Sharpe, 2000).

*America: McKinley, Bryan, and the Remarkable Election of 1896* (2010).<sup>42</sup> This election split the Democrats over the fate of the silver in the nation's economy and illuminated growing tensions between the elite and masses. Populist-oriented Williams Jennings Bryan won the Democrats nomination on the platform of free coinage of silver, more favorable to the farmers and workers. Buckner and other Democrats could not compromise their fiscal foundation and thus created a new party. Their group became known as the Gold Democrats for their faith in upholding the gold standard. Buckner's popularity, partially a product of Civil War memories, influenced his state to such a degree that Kentucky went to the Republicans for the first time ever.<sup>43</sup> These analyses of Civil War memory and political narratives provide the backdrop to reinstate Buckner's place in the late nineteenth-century scholarship.

Simon Bolivar Buckner utilized his connections to Civil War memory, in both the Lost Cause and reunion movements, to launch a political career in the Gilded Age. He gathered the tools for his success during the first half of his life as soldier. During these years, Buckner also developed a vision for the nation center on the wealthy, white southern man. In the late nineteenth-century, friendships with northerners and his status as a Confederate lieutenant general generated support that transformed him into a symbol of stability in the nation experiencing social, cultural and political upheaval. During the

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<sup>42</sup> R. Hal Williams, *Realigning America: McKinley, Bryan, and the Remarkable Election of 1896* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2010). For more general information on the power of party politics in the era, see Mark Wahlgren Summers, *Party Games: Getting, Keeping, and Using Power in the Gilded Age Politics* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

<sup>43</sup> See Kentucky's experience in the election with Leonard Schlup's "William Lindsay and the 1896 Party Crisis," *The Register of the Kentucky Historical Society* 76 (January 1978): 22-33.

Gilded Age, his rise through politics confirmed the power of his image, but the masses demands on Buckner's vision also showed the limitations of Civil War memories.

The first chapter of the thesis provides a brief biographical timeline of Buckner's life from his birth to his return to Kentucky after the end of the Civil War and through his business ventures in the 1870s. This period of Buckner's life is vital to understanding his postbellum political climb because it laid the foundation for his connections with northern friends and popularity among Confederates. Covering almost sixty years of Buckner's life, the chapter highlights important moments of his life, such as his time at West Point, where he met Ulysses S. Grant. His Civil War years are covered quickly, but the narrative provides the necessary information about the war. The study steps away from the traditional historiographical approach of emphasizing these four years. Ending with just before Buckner enters politics, the chapter provides context for Buckner's viewpoint as a prosperous, independent minded, white privileged Democrat.

Chapter two reveals the attitudes of the northerners and southerners towards Buckner after 1865. The first part of the chapter deals with the general's place within the Lost Cause. Buckner encouraged southern sympathies by involving himself in various veterans' organizations. He also retained correspondence with Confederate generals and many southerners wrote to Buckner expressing their admiration of him. These actions transformed him into a symbol of pride for southerners facing the realities of their past and defeat. The focus then shifts to understanding how Buckner fit into notions of reunion. Buckner's connections with his wife's family in Chicago and his friendships with high-ranking Union officers such as Ambrose Burnside allowed him to gain northern praise and popularity. Reunionists propped him up as evidence of a healed

nation. The chapter demonstrates Buckner's unique ability to be a figure of the Lost Cause and an emblem of reunion.

Praise of Buckner from both sides continued throughout his life and helped him start a career in politics. Chapter 3 suggests how Buckner transformed his popularity among southern sympathizers and played to the feelings of reunion during the Gilded Age. At first, he was reluctant to politics; but, with encouragement, Buckner began see himself as a gubernatorial candidate in Kentucky. He won the 1887 race to become governor of the Commonwealth, despite never having held any other political office. Buckner remained popular throughout his term, but political tensions foreshadowed the splintering of the Democratic Party. As a supporter of the gold standard, he broke away from the main Democrat Party to run as the vice-presidential candidate on the National Democratic Party ticket in 1896. Despite his popularity, the nation's shifting needs could not be solved by Buckner's traditional political platform.

Chapter 4 surveys Buckner's retirement from the turn of the century to his death in 1914. Although, he stepped away from the public, he continued to receive letters of praise. In fact, Buckner's popularity grew during his last two decades because he became one of the few remaining high-ranking officers on either side still living. Buckner's death on January 8, 1914, revealed the culmination of his popularity. Obituaries and remembrances found their greatest audience in his home state but showed that support for Buckner reach throughout the nation. From California to Maryland down to Louisiana, newspapers celebrated his accomplishments and valor. Slowly after 1914, history forgot about this important figure of nineteenth-century Kentucky and national politics.

The postwar career and life of General Simon Bolivar Buckner revealed a path founded through connections to the past transformed into influence. This one man traversed the rocky road of late nineteenth-century politics using the power of military memories. His roots to the past also presented difficulties as the nation's economic and political demands changed as the masses fell on hard times. Buckner's enigmatic life allowed him to bounce back from his defeats as a Confederate general to become a prominent politician and a symbol within a nation healing from its war wounds and grappling through new growing pains.

CHAPTER ONE:  
SIMON BOLIVAR BUCKNER'S LIFE FROM BIRTH TO HIS RETURN FROM  
EXILE

“Everything must have a beginning”  
-Mary Shelley<sup>1</sup>

Simon Bolivar Buckner's life, particularly his life before the Civil War, remains in the shadows. Until recently, the private ownership of the sources from his earlier years prevented historians from engaging with Buckner's full biography.<sup>2</sup> Illuminating Buckner's childhood and younger years provides explanations into the complexity of his life in the post-Civil War era. On April 1, 1823, his life began in a log cabin near Munfordville, Kentucky. His parents were Aylett Hartswell Buckner and Elizabeth Ann Morehead Buckner. Aylett “liked men who distinguished themselves in military and civil manner in countries other than his own.”<sup>3</sup> With his influence rising in South America, Simon Bolivar became the ideal name for Aylett's newborn son in 1823. This strong name set an expectation that Simon Bolivar Buckner rose to in the first half of his life through a decorated military career that laid the foundation and connections for his later calling as a politician.

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<sup>1</sup> Shelley, Mary Wollstonecraft. *Frankenstein; or The Modern Prometheus*. (New York: Tor Books, 1988), ix. Originally published anonymously in 1818.

<sup>2</sup> The only exception to this statement is Arndt Stickles who had access to the private family papers while writing his biography of Buckner.

<sup>3</sup> Arndt Stickles, *Simon Bolivar Buckner: Borderland Knight* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1940), 5.

Both of Virginia ancestry, Aylett Buckner and Elizabeth Morehead married on December 8, 1819, in Bowling Green, Kentucky.<sup>4</sup> Elizabeth Buckner bore him six children, but only three lived to adulthood – Turner Hartswell, Simon Bolivar, and Mary Elizabeth. Turner Buckner was the oldest, born in 1820. He lived an adventurous life outdoors as a bear trapper. His brother once described him as “a thorough back-woodsman.”<sup>5</sup> In 1854, Turner drowned. Mary Buckner was the youngest, born in 1831. She married John A. Took and had two children with him.<sup>6</sup> Simon Bolivar Buckner’s family wrote frequently to him. They provided him with motivation and support throughout his life.

His father provided him with more than support; Aylett Buckner also instilled the ideals of manhood based on military and government service. Aylett served himself in the military during the War of 1812 and involved himself with local politics. In 1828, he ran for a seat in the Kentucky State Senate, but failed to win the election.<sup>7</sup> His father’s lessons in childhood would carry through for Simon throughout his life.

Simon Buckner, or as his parents called him, “Bolivar”, spent his childhood in Hart County, Kentucky. His father became involved in several business ventures including farming, an iron ore furnace and the Green River Manufacturing Company. These businesses were important to Simon Buckner’s life because they exposed him to

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<sup>4</sup> Stickles, 3.

<sup>5</sup> “Simon Bolivar Buckner to Mary Kingsbury Buckner (1851)” Box 1, Folder 17, 2013 SBB collection, Filson.

<sup>6</sup> Stickles, 4.

<sup>7</sup> “Letter, A. L. Buckner to Hervey George (9 Aug 1828),” Box 3, Folder 3, 2013 SBB collection, Filson. 2013 SBB collection will be the abbreviation used for the 2013 Simon Bolivar Buckner collection (currently not cataloged) found at the Filson Historical Society, Louisville, KY. All other collections from the Filson Historical Society will be denoted with the abbreviation of Filson.

slavery. In Kentucky, the institution of slavery did not operate as in the Lower South due to the lack of large plantation farms. Kentucky slaveholders owned fewer slaves for their smaller farms or small businesses.<sup>8</sup> The Buckner's conformed to this standard. As indicated by tax statements from the early 1800s, Aylett father, Phillip Buckner, owned around fifteen slaves.<sup>9</sup> The mere fact of owning slaves also revealed that the Buckners held considerable wealth. Most Kentuckians could not afford to buy or own slaves.<sup>10</sup>

Letters do not specify Simon Bolivar Buckner's personal feelings towards slavery. One record indicated that in his youth he was to receive slaves as payment for clerical work he performed, but it unclear if he ever obtained these slaves or inherited any from his father. Historian Arndt Stickles downplayed this possibility in his Buckner biography. He stated records "led to the impression that Simon Bolivar Buckner was a slaveholder, which is only technically true and never actually true."<sup>11</sup> This debate continues, but the fact remains that slavery and white privilege constituted an aspect of Simon Buckner's childhood.

Furthermore, correspondence mentioned Aylett Buckner's mistreatment of slaves on several occasions. In 1838, family friend and business partner, Cadwalader Churchill, wrote to Aylett criticizing his angry temperament towards disobedient slaves.<sup>12</sup> The next year Churchill wrote again to Aylett inquiring about a controversial incident where Buckner hung his slave Isaac. In this same letter, Churchill defended his own slaves by

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<sup>8</sup> Lowell Harrison and James Klotter, *A New History of Kentucky* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1997), 167.

<sup>9</sup> "Tax Statements for Phillip Buckner (1810-1815)," Box 3, Folder 2, 2013 Buckner, Filson.

<sup>10</sup> Harrison and Klotter, 168.

<sup>11</sup> Stickles, 9.

<sup>12</sup> "Cadwalader Churchill to Aylett Buckner (28 Oct 1838)," Box 3, Folder 7, 2013 SBB collection, Filson.



saying that they had not been speaking ill of Buckner.<sup>13</sup> During this time, Aylett Buckner struggled with debt. In time, he sold most of his holdings in Kentucky, possibly many of his slaves as well, and found employment in Arkansas during the 1840s. In 1851, Aylett Buckner died. While his son did not carry on his legacy of cruelty, Simon Bolivar still held his father's ideals in politics and ambition.

In regards to his education, Simon Bolivar Buckner started late at the age of nine. However, this delay did not hinder him. Quickly, he excelled and became known as an avid reader with a good memory. This yearning for education showed Simon Buckner to be a boy with ambition. Taking a year off from working at his father's businesses, Simon enrolled in Christian County Seminary to focus on his education. That year allowed him to become proficient enough to enter the United States Military Academy at West Point in 1840. A chance opportunity occurred when a first year Kentucky cadet decided to resign his position in late 1838. With one Kentucky spot available, Buckner appealed to Congressman Phillip Triplett from Owensboro and received the appointment.<sup>14</sup> Aylett Buckner expressed great pride in his son's appointment.<sup>15</sup> Entering West Point set actions into motion that affected Buckner for the rest of his life.

Buckner found West Point challenging but remained confident that he would graduate.<sup>16</sup> Many family and friends wrote to him during his four years at the military school. Chas F. Wing provided the advice, "Be obedient to your orders and never say

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<sup>13</sup> "Cadwalader Churchill to Aylett Buckner (23 Jun 1839)," "Box 3, Folder 8, 2013 SBB collection, Filson.

<sup>14</sup> Stickle, 10.

<sup>15</sup> "Aylett H. Buckner to Simon B. Buckner (1840 Jun 3)," Box 1, Folder 4, 2013 SBB collection, Filson.

<sup>16</sup> "Simon B. Buckner to Aylett H. Buckner (1841 Jan 16)," Box 1, Folder 12, 2013 SBB collection, Filson.

they are too hard for a Kentuckyan [sic] to perform.”<sup>17</sup> Frequently, Buckner’s father wrote to his son. These letters advised him to follow the rules and praised his son’s accomplishments. While Aylett Buckner admired West Point, he suggested several times that Simon should become a lawyer after graduation.<sup>18</sup> At West Point, Buckner became friends with classmates such as Ambrose E. Burnside and Ulysses S. Grant. These budding friendships would grow stronger in decades to come. The Civil War, however, tested those bonds of friendship. In 1844, Buckner graduated middle of his class, eleventh out of twenty five.<sup>19</sup>

After graduation, the military assigned Buckner to Sackets Harbor New York. In 1845, Buckner went back to West Point as an instructor of geography, history, and ethics.<sup>20</sup> This appointment did not last long. On May 11, 1846, President Polk declared war against Mexico and Buckner quit teaching to go off to war. He outlined his journey to the Mexican battlefields in a diary. In July 1847, Buckner, now a lieutenant, joined the Sixth Infantry and boarded a ship headed south. His group finally reached the Texas coastline in August, but they did not immediately meet any foes. Buckner did not see battle for several months. His diary disclosed little about his participation in battles, but instead revealed Buckner to be an observant and intellectual man. He described in detail various aspects of Mexican culture including burial rituals.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> “Chas E. Wing to Simon B. Buckner (30 Sept 1840),” Box 1, Folder 4, 2013 SBB collection, Filson.

<sup>18</sup> “Aylett H. Buckner to Simon B. Buckner (29 Dec 1843),” Box 1, Folder 3, 2013 SBB collection, Filson.

<sup>19</sup> Stickles, 13.

<sup>20</sup> *ibid*, 15.

<sup>21</sup> “Simon B. Buckner partial Mexican War Diary (Undated),” Box 1, Folder 26, 2013 Buckner, Filson.

When stationed in New York before the war, Buckner became acquainted with Major Julius B. Kingsbury and his wife, Jane C. Kingsbury. He grew fond of their daughter, Mary Jane Kingsbury, and before he went off to war asked permission to write to her. He wrote to Mary throughout the war, but he also wrote to her mother. Buckner recounted some of his military movements in these letters to Jane Kingsbury. These letters told of his participation at Vera Cruz, a battle at the pass of Cerro Gordo, and the capture of Mexico City in fall 1847.<sup>22</sup> In the end, Buckner received two brevet promotions, battle experience, and a minor wound through his participation in the Mexican War.<sup>23</sup> He also gained the knowledge that people respected military valor and this respect can earn popularity.

One of Buckner's proudest moments occurred just after the war's end. He and group of officers climbed the volcano Popocatepetl, the second tallest point in Mexico. Buckner detailed this journey and group's feeling of national pride in conquering the Mexican mountain. In the group of officers with Buckner was Ulysses S. Grant. Like Buckner, Grant also wrote about the journey. He detailed the climb in Volume One of his *Memoirs*.<sup>24</sup> Their experience at Popocatepetl helped deepen the friendship started at West Point.

After returning from Mexico, Buckner visited family and then returned to West Point Academy to teach. However, he began to stir controversy just after a year when he

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<sup>22</sup> "Simon B. Buckner to Jane C. Kingsbury (21 Apr 1848)," Box 1, Folder 15, 2013 Buckner, Filson.

<sup>23</sup> Harrison, Lowell, "Simon Bolivar Buckner," *Kentuckians in Gray: Confederate Generals and Field Officers of the Bluegrass State*, Bruce Allardice and Lawrence Hewitt, ed. (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2008), 43.

<sup>24</sup> Ulysses S. Grant, *Personal Memoirs* (New York: Charles L. Webster & Co, 1894), 108-114.

refused to comply with the mandatory chapel requirements.<sup>25</sup> This incident ended with the Army relieving him of his position and sending him to work at New York Harbor.<sup>26</sup>

During this time, Buckner found himself involved in complications in his personal life as well. Throughout the war, Buckner wrote to Mary Kingsbury and expressed his great affection for her. Before heading to battle he scribbled, “My ‘best friend,’ We move in a few hours to attack the enemy’s works. If I fall, believe that I remained until death, with fondest affection, Your ‘best friend,’ S. Bolivar Buckner.”<sup>27</sup> The two became engaged shortly after the war, but in the fall of 1849, their relationship ended abruptly. He wrote to her mother, Jane Kingsbury, about this break-up but did not describe the details.<sup>28</sup> Several months later Buckner reconciled with Mary and the engagement revived. On May 2, 1850, their marriage took place in Connecticut. This marriage changed Buckner’s personal life and cemented his relationship with the entire Kingsbury family. This connection became indispensable to his post-Civil War success.

Simon Bolivar Buckner’s military life continued after his marriage. He received orders to move to Fort Snelling in Minnesota. Taking his wife, they headed north. Fort Snelling did not suit Mary well and he wrote to Jane Kingsbury stating how he is sending “one rebellious little wife” back to her. After Minnesota, the military sent him west to

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<sup>25</sup> This incident stands as one of the few indicators of Buckner’s religious views and suggests that Buckner did not participate readily in those parts of the Lost Cause connected with Christian symbolism. Insights into this religious interpretation of the Lost Cause can be found within Charles Reagan Wilson’s *Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause, 1865-1920* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1980) and David Goldfield, *Still Fighting the Civil War: The American South and Southern History* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Press, 2002).

<sup>26</sup> Stickles, 21-23.

<sup>27</sup> “Simon B. Buckner to Mary J. Kingsbury (Aug. 15, 1847),” Miscellaneous Buckner, Filson.

<sup>28</sup> “Simon B. Buckner to Jane C. Kingsbury (1849 Apr 29),” Box 1, Folder 15, 2013 SBB collection, Filson.

Fort Leavenworth and then to Fort Atkinson in what is now Kansas. In 1852, the military ordered Buckner to New York. Here he achieved the rank of captain in the commissary department of their Sixth Infantry. In addition, Captain Buckner used his argumentative skills as an advocate for military courts.<sup>29</sup> These successes did not outweigh his desire to become a businessman. In March 1855, Buckner resigned from the army to help his ailing father-in-law with the Kingsbury property and affairs in the expanding new city of Chicago.<sup>30</sup>

In 1858, Mary Buckner's father, Major Julius Kingsbury, died and Buckner took on more responsibility for the family when he inherited the Chicago properties. Major Kingsbury had a son, Henry W. Kingsbury, but he was too young to manage the family affairs.<sup>31</sup> Buckner moved to Chicago for a few years. While in Illinois, he became involved in a variety of activities. Buckner held the titles of "superintendent of the customhouse, officer in the Illinois militia, adjutant general of the state, as well as manager of the Kingsbury estate."<sup>32</sup> Apart from the family business, he resigned from most of the positions after only holding the title for several months.

The call of Kentucky brought Simon B. Buckner back to his birth state in 1858. He and his wife settled in Louisville. However, Buckner traveled frequently to Chicago to manage the Kingsbury wealth. In Kentucky in March 1858, the Buckner family added a new member, a daughter named Lily. Never too far from military affairs, Buckner helped organize the Citizens' Guard, a Louisville militia. He served as the company's

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<sup>29</sup> Stickle, 28-29.

<sup>30</sup> *ibid*, 32.

<sup>31</sup> See letters between Simon B. Buckner to Henry Kingsbury (1856) in Box 1, Folder 19, 2013 SBB collection, Filson.

<sup>32</sup> Stickle, 38.

captain until 1860, which led many to refer to the group as the Buckner Guard.<sup>33</sup> By 1860, he found himself prosperous, well respected, and in positions of power.

Social divisions challenged Simon Bolivar Buckner's convictions. These disputes centered on slavery and political power struggles. Concerns about slavery had existed since the creation of the United States. Particularly, the expansion of slavery became a major concern in the first half of the nineteenth century and the South feared loss of social and economic power to the rapidly industrializing North. Famed senator from Kentucky, Henry Clay, composed two compromises that helped to ease anxieties, but nothing solved the problem.

Positioned in the middle of the country, Kentucky experienced worries of the South and North simultaneously. One worry for all slave states was a slave uprising, possibly aided by radical northerners. This fear grew after John Brown's raid on Harper's Ferry in October 1859. Due to these mounting worries, the newly elected Kentucky Governor Beriah Magoffin, a Democrat, decided that his state needed a stronger, more organized military force. Due to his experience in the military, Magoffin called upon Simon Bolivar Buckner to fulfill this task. Buckner penned "An Act for the Better Organization of the Kentucky Militia." On March 5, 1860, this act quickly received approval from the Kentucky General Assembly and the Kentucky State Guard officially formed. Governor Magoffin elected Buckner to the position of state inspector general.<sup>34</sup> Magoffin stated, "I was peculiarly fortunate in securing the services of Gen. S. B. Buckner, a native Kentuckian." He continued his praise with, "He has brought to

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<sup>33</sup> *ibid*, 43.

<sup>34</sup> Lt. Col. John A. Boyd, "Intimidation and Conspiracy, Provocation and Intrigue: The Militias of Kentucky, 1859-1861," *Army History*, 69 (Fall 2008): 9.

the position [Inspector General] an amount of experience, ability, and patriotic labor.”<sup>35</sup> Even before the Civil War, Kentucky recognized Buckner’s merits earned through his military service.

As State Inspector General, Buckner found himself at the center of Kentucky’s neutrality debates. In the fall of 1860, the presidential election went to Abraham Lincoln which lit the ignition for secession by southern states. Governor Magoffin called for a special session of the Kentucky General Assembly to decide the fate of the bluegrass state.<sup>36</sup> Before the legislators met in January 1861, suspicions arose regarding Buckner’s loyalties. Kentucky Adjutant General Scott Brown wrote to Captain Edwards Hobson with the request that he bring weapons back to the State Armory and Buckner. Hobson replied with, “Did not send the guns knowing that Genl. Buckner was a Rebel.”<sup>37</sup> Eventually, the Kentucky General Assembly adopted a “Resolution of Neutrality” on May 16, 1861: “That this State and the citizens thereof should take no part in the civil war now being waged, except as mediators and friends to the belligerent parties; and that Kentucky should, during the contest, occupy the position of strict neutrality.”<sup>38</sup> This act placed Kentucky and Buckner in political limbo.

Neutrality became difficult to maintain, particularly for the state’s Inspector General. In June, Buckner met with Union General George B. McClellan in Ohio. This meeting resulted in Union forces staying outside of Kentucky’s borders, but not without

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<sup>35</sup> Quoted from Stickles, 52.

<sup>36</sup> Stickles, 53. By the time the General Assembly met, four states had succeeded from the Union.

<sup>37</sup> “Scott Brown to Edward H. Hobson (19 Dec 1860),” Edward Hobson collection, KHS. KHS will be the abbreviation used for collections found at the Kentucky Historical Society, Frankfort, KY.

<sup>38</sup> Thomas C. Mackey, *A Documentary History of the Civil War Era: Volume 1, Legislative Achievements* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2012), 40.

tensions with Confederates in Tennessee.<sup>39</sup> McClellan and other Unionists felt Buckner pulling towards the South. These suspicions held some truth. During the summer of neutrality, Buckner quietly transferred his assets into his brother-in-law's name in Chicago.<sup>40</sup> Buckner stated that he was looking out for his wife, but he was also not a fool to the devastation war could bring. This transaction proved a key to Buckner's ability to rebound after the war's end and escape the fate of financial desolation that many other ex-Confederates experienced.

On July 20, 1861, Buckner wrote to Governor Magoffin, "Sir: In transmitting my resignation of the commission of Inspector General of Kentucky, I cannot avoid joining it with the expression of my regret at the severance of the official relations which have existed between us."<sup>41</sup> This letter ended Buckner's neutrality. He received several offers from Union friends, including Scott and Burnside. Abraham Lincoln even wrote to him with an offer for a commission with the Union army, but Buckner declined them all.<sup>42</sup> By August 1861, Buckner aligned himself with the Confederacy, but his home state did not follow his lead. With an invasion of Confederate troops at Columbus in September 1861, Kentucky decided to end neutrality and sided with the Union.<sup>43</sup>

Buckner's journey in the Civil War started at Russellville. There he issued an address "To the Freedman of Kentucky" that tried to rally men to the Confederate cause. Buckner stated, "Let us rise, freedmen of Kentucky! ... We make no war upon the Union: We defend the principles of the Constitution against the fanatics who have destroyed the

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<sup>39</sup> Stickles, 59-62.

<sup>40</sup> *ibid*, 65.

<sup>41</sup> *ibid*, 79.

<sup>42</sup> Stickles, 86-87.

<sup>43</sup> Harrison and Klotter, 192.



Union.”<sup>44</sup> He did not mention slavery as a central issue, but Buckner could not have been blind to real cause of the war. After this time, Confederate General Albert Sydney Johnston sent the newly-commissioned Brigadier General Buckner to capture the town of Bowling Green in western Kentucky.<sup>45</sup>

Ordered to Fort Donelson, Tennessee, Buckner’s friendship with Ulysses S. Grant would soon be tested. General John B. Floyd and Gideon J. Pillow commanded of the Confederate forces at the fort when Buckner arrived. Within days, General Grant and his Union troops met the Confederate at the site. Fighting occurred over several days in February 1862. Pillow and Floyd abandoned the losing battle and placed all decisions into the hands of Buckner. Grant demanded unconditional surrender from his West Point friend.<sup>46</sup> In 1897, *Century Magazine*’s Grant memorial issue recounted the story of the surrendered. The article stated that Grant said:

In the course of our conversation, which was very friendly, he [Buckner] said to me that if he had been in command I would not have got up to Donelson as easily as I did. I told him that if he had been in command I should not have tried in the way I did.<sup>47</sup>

These statements confirmed the strength of their relationship and also hinted at late reunification tactics. However, the friendship could not stop the forces of war. Buckner unconditionally surrendered his Confederate forces and Fort Donelson.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> “To the Freemen of Kentucky (14 Sept 1862),” Box 1, Folder 29, 2013 SBB collection, Filson.

<sup>45</sup> *Kentuckians in Grey*, 44.

<sup>46</sup> *Kentuckians in Grey*, 45.

<sup>47</sup> John R. Proctor, “A Blue and Grey Friendship,” *The Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine* (April 1897): 944.

<sup>48</sup> For more information on the Battle of Fort Donelson see James B. Knight, *The Battle of Fort Donelson: No Terms But Unconditional Surrender* (Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2011) and B. Franklin Cooling, *Fort Donelson’s Legacy: War and Society in*

Union forces held Buckner as prisoner. They sent him to Fort Warren in Boston, Massachusetts. He stayed in prison until August 1862 when the two sides arranged an exchange. Buckner's service at Fort Donelson earned him a promotion to major general with Braxton Bragg's Army of Mississippi. Buckner also received this new rank because of the upcoming Kentucky Campaign of 1862. Former executive director of the Perryville Battlefield Preservation Association, Stuart Sanders, reasoned, "Bragg needed a prominent high-ranking Kentuckian for his bluegrass invasion. Confederate authorities wanted Buckner's rank to match his perceived influence."<sup>49</sup> His popularity in the state was already evident. Buckner's first big move came in his hometown of Munfordville. He helped capture Union forces there and provided the Confederacy with a small win in Kentucky. Confederates hoped this nearly bloodless victory would help recruit Kentuckians to fight on their side.<sup>50</sup>

At the beginning of October 1862, Buckner and other Confederates did not make the progress they expected with recruiting. On October 8, 1862, Buckner found himself involved in the largest battle in Kentucky, the Battle of Perryville. Perryville ended with a theoretical Union victory after Confederates retreated, despite a tactical win. The Battle of Perryville stopped Confederate progress in the state and into the Western Theatre. In the following years, Buckner helped build defenses in Mobile and continued to fight on the frontlines, including at the Battle of Chickamauga in 1863. Through his service, Buckner achieved the rank of lieutenant general. On May 26, 1865, Buckner, as one of

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*Kentucky and Tennessee, 1862-1863* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1997).

<sup>49</sup> Stuart Sanders, "A Name Worth a Division," Lawrence L. Hewitt and Arthur W. Bergeron, ed. *Confederate Generals in the Western Theater, Volume 3*, (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2010), 122.

<sup>50</sup> Sanders, 124-126.

Kirby Smith's staff members, surrendered the Trans-Mississippi in New Orleans to the Union.<sup>51</sup> This event concluded Simon Bolivar Buckner's command in the war, but that surrender did not end the Civil War's involvement in his life.

In the summer of 1865, M. J. Miller wrote to Buckner expressing sorrow at the end of the Confederate cause:

How many and what strange developments has a few short weeks brought around friends dispersed, nay the fondest of hope of many a strong and noble soul blasted, almost at the moment, whne [sic] we promised ourselves the early retaliation of our dearest wishes. Such is the life of man in this land of exile.<sup>52</sup>

Buckner's "land of exile" continued to be New Orleans for several years after the war. The Confederate lieutenant general wanted to go back to Kentucky immediately after the war's end. Buckner believed that under his surrender terms a return to his home state would be possible, but the War Department in Washington, D.C. restricted him to the state of Louisiana.<sup>53</sup> One of Buckner's secondary biographers, Jo Ann O'Connor, reasoned that he could not return to the Commonwealth "because of the respect the ex-Confederates had for their former general, it was feared that Buckner had too great an influence on them."<sup>54</sup> With his Kentucky holdings confiscated during the war, Buckner needed to rebuild his life and career in the Louisiana port city.

General Buckner started his postbellum recovery at the *Daily Crescent* newspaper. Between October 1865 and June 1867, he worked intermittently with the

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<sup>51</sup> *ibid*, 142.

<sup>52</sup> "M. J. Miller to Simon Bolivar Buckner, (1865 Jun 26)," Folder 6, Box 1, 2013 SBB collection, Filson.

<sup>53</sup> Stickle, 277.

<sup>54</sup> Jo Ann O'Connor, "Kentucky Biographical Notebook, Simon Bolivar Buckner: Kentucky's Misunderstood Gentleman," *The Filson Club History Quarterly* 52 (1978): 365.

paper by writing editorials. This local New Orleans paper tended to lean with conservative Democrats and sympathized with ex-Confederates' recovery. An unknown tension existed between Buckner and the management. His editorials did not contain controversial statements or beliefs, but, in time, the paper parted ways with Buckner.<sup>55</sup>

The *Daily Crescent* did not constitute Buckner's only means of living. In 1866, he joined the Harlow J. Phelps Company, a mercantile firm in the city. He worked for the group until 1867, when Buckner ventured out to start his own mercantile company. Thriving in the New Orleans business world, the general received notice by a group forming a fire, river, and marine risks insurance company. In 1867, the Commercial Insurance Company elected Simon Bolivar Buckner as its new president. Despite his success, Buckner felt restricted by his parole terms. He asked the War Department to extend his movement area to the larger Mississippi Valley area for business reasons. He received the following reply from Washington, D. C.:

The parole of S. B. Buckner, late of the Confederate Army, is hereby extended so as to permit him to pass to and from all points in the United States, when his business may call him.

By command of Lieut. General Grant  
Headquarters U.S. Army, Feb. 5, 1866<sup>56</sup>

This permission from Buckner's old West Point friends freed him to travel not only around the South, but throughout the entire nation, including Kentucky.

With new parole terms, Buckner began to work with lawyers in Kentucky to regain his holdings in Hart County and Louisville. He hired Robert W. Wooley, a member of his staff at the end of the war, to deal with this issue. On December 28, 1867,

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<sup>55</sup> Stickles, 279.

<sup>56</sup> Letter John T. Pickett to Simon B. Buckner from February 5, 1866; quoted in Stickles, 283.

he won his court case and thus succeeded in getting all his property restored in Kentucky. Arndt Stickles estimated that General Buckner's holdings totaled around \$60,000.<sup>57</sup>

This win provided Buckner with a means to return to his home state the following year.

In 1868, Buckner made his way back to Kentucky. Upon his death in 1914, the *Baltimore Evening Sun* reported that despite fighting against Kentucky and the Union during the war, "when he did get 'back home' he found himself a hero."<sup>58</sup> Buckner confirmed these sentiments in his own words to his wife. On March 2, 1868, he noted in a letter that he will not "let the first evening I have passed at our old home [in Louisville] since 1861 elapse without writing." Buckner continued by describing his travels through Tennessee and Kentucky and the warm hospitality he had received. When back in the Commonwealth, a welcoming party greeted him and it included John Hunt Morgan and other former Confederates.<sup>59</sup> Over the next couple of years, he continued to travel in and out of Kentucky to settle affairs ruffled and complicated by the war years.

Buckner discovered that not everyone felt as happy about his quick recovery from defeat. The physical and emotional wounds of war still plagued many people. In 1868 and 1869, he worked as the southern manager for the Globe Life Insurance Company of New York. Living in Louisville, Buckner managed affairs throughout the South including his city of exile, New Orleans. Previous to Buckner taking over, J. C. Shipley ran the company's affairs in that city. Shipley became outraged because he felt the

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<sup>57</sup> Stickles, 287-289.

<sup>58</sup> "Gen. S. B. Buckner Was Sturdy Fighter," *Baltimore Evening Sun*, Jan. 9, 1914.

<sup>59</sup> "Simon Bolivar Buckner to Mary K. Buckner (2 March 1868)," Box 1, Folder 17, 2013 Buckner, Filson.

company owed him money after letting him go and disliked Buckner for being a rebel.<sup>60</sup> Shipley's anger appeared to not harm Buckner's career with the company, but the general decided to leave the group in 1872 to pursue other business ventures and deal with personal matters.<sup>61</sup>

During the 1870s, Buckner went through a series of highs and lows. First, all pending court cases regarding his assets in Kentucky and his wife's property in Chicago were settled in their favor, but the Chicago fire of 1871 made management of his northern holdings more difficult than expected due to damage. On the other hand, regaining this property helped him weather the financial Panic of 1873.<sup>62</sup> His financial stability set him apart from most Kentuckians, many of whom were small farmers struggling to survive in the new postbellum economy. On January, 5, 1874, a significant personal loss came when his wife, Mary Kingsbury Buckner, passed away at the age of forty-two. She had battled tuberculosis on and off for many years prior to her death.<sup>63</sup> Buckner became a bachelor and his daughter, Lily, grew even more attached to her father. Also in the 1870s, the general sought to reestablish his residency at Glen Lily in Hart County, his birthplace. This confirmed his commitment to Kentucky and established a base for his later political career.

In the first half of Simon Bolivar Buckner's life, he established a strong military career through training at West Point, military service in the Mexican War and the Civil War. During these periods as a plebe and officer, Buckner formed friendships and

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<sup>60</sup> "J.C. Shipley to Brawner (30 Mar 1869)," Box 1, Folder 7, SBB collection, KHS. Other letters of similar nature in the same folder.

<sup>61</sup> Stickles, 312.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Stickles, 313.

connections that benefitted him in the decades to come. His position in American society as a wealthy, white man provided him with a backdrop of power and alignment with the Democratic Party. After 1865, Buckner displayed an ease at finding employment and fortune. These factors showed others that Buckner held influence and potential for widespread popularity in the Commonwealth and the nation.

CHAPTER TWO:  
MULTIFACETED MEMORIES: BUCKNER'S PLACE WITHIN THE LOST CAUSE  
AND REUNION

The hand that laid the sword aside  
Now seeks the conqueror's hand –  
Friends? They are share in one pride  
And lovers of one land.  
-From the poem *A Renewal of True Friendship*<sup>1</sup>

During the first decade after the war, Simon Bolivar Buckner encountered sentiments of the Lost Cause and reunited with Northern acquaintances. Having been a high ranking general in the Confederacy, he became a beacon for those seeking noble memories of the war and an example of post-war success for all Southern gentlemen. Conversely, his antebellum Northern associations provided Buckner with a means of reviving his finances and getting out from under the Confederacy's defeat. Friendships with Union generals situated him as a symbol of reunion. These dual memories and friendships remained with him throughout the nineteenth century and through the end of his life. These connections became tools for Buckner to mold into personal and political power.

The Lost Cause movement provided Confederate and southern sympathizers with a means of reaffirming honor after defeat, romanticizing the antebellum South, and forgiving the Confederacy of its faults. Contemporary historians like Gaines Foster view

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<sup>1</sup> This poem referenced General Ulysses S. Grant and Simon B. Buckner's rekindled friendship. Poem and accompanied image found in Arndt Stickles, *Simon Bolivar Buckner: Borderland Knight* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1940), 328.



these efforts as a coping mechanism during the turbulent late nineteenth century's social, political, economic, and cultural transitions.<sup>2</sup> Southerners hoped that Edward A. Pollard's 1866 statement was true, that "The war has not swallowed up everything."<sup>3</sup> Within Lost Cause literature, Confederate military leaders earned saint-like commemoration after the war's end. This trend most notably appeared with Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson.<sup>4</sup> While Buckner did not equal Lee or Jackson in status or acclaim, Southerners still admired his leadership and gentlemanly qualities. They focused on his honorable individual traits rather than face the reality of fighting for slavery.

After 1865, many Confederate supporters and leaders wrote to Buckner admiring his efforts and asking for favors. Since Buckner survived the war relatively unharmed, physically and socially, he put his good fortunes to use helping others after the war's end. These acts helped him gain popularity and recognition in the South. First in New Orleans, he assisted with the formation of the Southern Hospital Association for Disabled Soldiers. Founded on July 10, 1866, General Buckner served as vice-president of the organization in its first year alongside General President John Bell Hood.<sup>5</sup> The *New York Times* reported that "the chief design is to aid needy Confederate soldiers, from any Southern State and particularly if wounded, to extend to them skillful surgical and

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<sup>2</sup> Gaines Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy: Defeat, the Lost Cause, and the Emergence of the New South, 1865 to 1913* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

<sup>3</sup> Edward A. Pollard, *The Lost Cause: A New Southern History of the War of Confederates* (New York: E. B. Treat and Co. Publishers, 1867), 752.

<sup>4</sup> More information on how the Lost Cause glorified these two figures see Thomas L. Connelly and Barbara L. Bellows, *God and General Longstreet: The Lost Cause and the Southern Mind* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), Michael Fellman, *The Making of Robert E. Lee* (New York: Random House, 2000), and Wallace Hettle, *Inventing Stonewall Jackson: A Civil War Hero in History and Memory* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Press, 2001).

<sup>5</sup> "Certificate from Southern Hospital Association for Disabled Soldier (1866)," Box 2, Folder 3, 2013 SBB collection, Filson.

medical attendance.”<sup>6</sup> The leadership of this organization helped raise funds through charity events and awareness for the needs of ex-Confederates.

In addition, Buckner received numerous letters asking him to help with individual favors of money and employment. In the few years after 1865, Buckner had not yet recovered the majority of his financial holdings tied up with his brother-in-law’s Chicago property, but he still managed to create a comfortable life in New Orleans. His quick recovery after the war differed from the majority of Southerners. Many Confederates lost everything they possessed. Eric Foner’s *Reconstruction* reported that, “The loss of the planters’ slaves and life savings (to the extent they had invested in Confederate bonds) wiped out the inheritance of generations.”<sup>7</sup> In August 1866, Confederate Major General Dabney H. Maury wrote to Buckner from St. Tammany Parish, Louisiana. Maury related his failure to make his fortunes in Paris, France, and asked Buckner for help to regain his financial losses.<sup>8</sup> Only a few months later, Dabney again sought out Buckner for help. He inquired about gaining the position of Superintendent for the National Express Company where Buckner had become a trustee and helped to decide appointments.<sup>9</sup> Evident by Maury’s correspondence, soon after the war ended Confederates viewed Buckner as an emblem of post-war success and sought out his influence.

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<sup>6</sup> “Southern Relief for Disabled Soldiers,” *New York Times*, November, 4, 1866.

<sup>7</sup> Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America’s Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988), 129. More works consulted for the era of Reconstruction include Michael Perman, *The Road to Redemption: Southern Politics, 1869-1879* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1984), Mark Wahlgren Summers, *The Era of Good Stealings* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), and Thomas J. Brown, ed., *Reconstructions: New Perspectives on the Postbellum United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

<sup>8</sup> “Dabney H. Maury to Simon B. Buckner (30 Aug 1866),” Box 2, Folder 4, 2013 SBB collection, Filson.

<sup>9</sup> “Dabney H. Maury to Simon B. Buckner (26 Nov 1866),” Box 2, Folder 4, 2013 SBB collection, Filson.

Brigadier General Birkett D. Fry also wrote to Buckner in the years following the end of the war, but his letters came from Havana, Cuba. While Buckner found work in Louisiana during his exile from Kentucky, a few others needed to venture outside of the geographic borders of the South to restart their lives.<sup>10</sup> Historians Rollin Osterweis noted that, “Five and six thousand ‘unreconstructible’ rebels established Confederate colonies . . . in the Brazilian Empire of Dom Pedro II where slavery still flourished and where cotton might be grown profitably. Still other émigrés from the South filtered into Canada, Nicaragua, Cuba, Venezuela, Chile, and Peru.”<sup>11</sup> From Havana, Fry reported on the influx of Confederates to Mexico<sup>12</sup> and news that General Toombs was relocating to Cuba.<sup>13</sup> In 1867, he wrote again to Buckner, the new president of the Commercial Insurance Company. Fry urged Buckner to establish a branch of the company in Havana and bring his resourcefulness to Cuba.<sup>14</sup> Buckner’s success in New Orleans prevented him from needing to take such drastic steps for recovery. Instead, he remained in New Orleans and helped others out in small ways.

Through his time with the Southern Hospital Association for Disabled Soldiers, Buckner worked with General John Bell Hood, the president of the group. Their friendship led to Hood asking Buckner to be his best man at Hood’s 1868 wedding to

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<sup>10</sup> Another prominent Confederate Kentuckian, John C. Breckinridge, took this path of exile outside of the United States. Breckinridge traveled and lived in England, Canada and several other countries after the war’s end. See Connelly and Bellows, *Longstreet*, 9.

<sup>11</sup> Rollin G. Osterweis, *The Myth of the Lost Cause, 1865-1900* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1973), 8.

<sup>12</sup> “B. D. Fry to Simon B. Buckner (21 Nov 1866),” Box 2, Folder 4, 2013 SBB collection, Filson.

<sup>13</sup> “B. D. Fry to Simon B. Buckner (25 Dec 1866),” Box 2, Folder 4, 2013 SBB collection, Filson.

<sup>14</sup> “B. D. Fry to Simon B. Buckner (28 May 1867),” Box 2, Folder 4, 2013 SBB collection, Filson.

Anna Marie Hennen in New Orleans.<sup>15</sup> Other Confederate officers remained on friendly terms with Buckner in the decades after the war's end. In 1867, William Preston Johnston wrote to Buckner. He told of accepting the position of Chair for History and Literature at Washington College in Virginia.<sup>16</sup> Other generals or their wives sent letters asking for accounts of battles and fallen officers. General Nathan Bedford Forrest, an early member of the Ku Klux Klan, wanted Buckner to send copies of orders pertaining to Fort Donelson for his history of the war.<sup>17</sup> Mrs. Frances Ann Deveraux Polk, General Leonidas Polk's wife, wrote several times to request that Buckner help with a narrative of her husband's service during the Kentucky Campaign.<sup>18</sup> She wrote, "I feel a sacred duty to the dead."<sup>19</sup> Others, like Edmund Kirby Smith, wrote to Buckner often on matters of business.<sup>20</sup> These acquaintances revealed the large net of connections that Buckner had built up throughout the South.

Lieutenant General James Longstreet also exchanged letters with Buckner. They met in New Orleans and Longstreet agreed to try and help with the Southern Hospital Association for Disabled Soldiers.<sup>21</sup> Longstreet did not fare well within the Lost Cause.

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<sup>15</sup> Brian Craig Miller, *John Bell Hood and the Fight for Civil War Memory* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2010), 188.

<sup>16</sup> "William Preston Johnston to Simon B. Buckner (15 Feb 1867)," Box 2, Folder 4, 2013 SBB collection, Filson.

<sup>17</sup> "Nathan Bedford Forrest to Simon B. Buckner (5 Sept 1866)," Box 2, Folder 4, 2013 SBB collection, Filson.

<sup>18</sup> "Frances Ann Deveraux Polk to Simon B. Buckner (21 Sept 1866)," Box 2, Folder 4, 2013 SBB collection, Filson and "Frances Ann Deveraux Polk to Simon B. Buckner (21 Feb 1874)," Folder 14, SBB collection, KHS.

<sup>19</sup> "Frances Ann Deveraux Polk to Simon B. Buckner (24 Sept 1866)," Box 2, Folder 4, 2013 SBB collection, Filson.

<sup>20</sup> "Edmund Kirby Smith to Simon B. Buckner (26 Nov 1866 and 5 Feb 1867), Box 2, Folder 4, 2013 SBB collection, Filson.

<sup>21</sup> "James Longstreet to Simon B. Buckner (12 Oct 1865 and 13 Oct 1866)," Box 2, Folder 2, 2013 SBB collection, Filson

In public, he advocated for cooperation with the Republican Party and even criticized Lee's leadership during the war. These acts led many Southerners to turn on him. They named him the Judas of the Confederacy and blamed him for the loss at Gettysburg.<sup>22</sup> Buckner avoided Longstreet's fate by remaining loyal to the Democrats' agenda. In 1872, Longstreet wrote to Buckner seeking help with obtaining a superintendent position with a new railroad in Alabama. Longstreet must have believed Buckner had not turned against him to ask such a favor.

Additionally, Buckner received a letter from Longstreet from 1902. By the turn of the twentieth century, many officers from the Civil War had died. Longstreet reported that he believed he and Buckner were the only two survivors of "the grand conference on Missionary Ridge, with our late President and General Bragg in 1863,"<sup>23</sup> and asked for Buckner's recollections of the event. Even after Longstreet's death, Buckner did not speak ill of Longstreet or belittle his accomplishments. In 1909, an interviewer tried to trap Buckner into saying negative comments by asking about Longstreet's involvement at Gettysburg. Buckner answered by first stating he had not studied the battle much, but he believed, "Longstreet was a gallant fighter" and did not blame him for the failure there.<sup>24</sup>

Buckner also gained personal connections with the Confederacy's most beloved figure, Robert E. Lee, but ironically not until after Lee's death. Buckner's second wife,

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<sup>22</sup> See Connelly and Bellows, *Longstreet*; Jeffrey D. Wert, *General James Longstreet: The Confederacy's Most Controversial Soldier- A Biography* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993), and William Garret Piston, *Lee's Tarnished Lieutenant: James Longstreet and His Place in Southern History* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1987).

<sup>23</sup> "Longstreet to Simon Bolivar Buckner (1902)," Box 2, Folder 2, 2013 SBB collection, Filson.

<sup>24</sup> Marmaduke B. Morton, "Last Surviving Lieutenant General, Visit to the Home of S. B. Buckner," *Confederate Veteran* 16 (1909): 78.

Delia Herbert Claiborne, was related to several prominent Virginian families that included the Lees. Delia invited both General Lee's oldest child, George Washington Custis Lee, and his youngest, Mildred Lee, to her 1885 wedding.<sup>25</sup> Simon Bolivar Buckner's numerous relations and correspondence with prominent Confederates showed him to be a Southerner of significant influence.

Buckner's popularity among Lost Cause supporters drew letters from regular soldiers and citizens throughout the rest of his life. W. H. Craig from Tennessee sent Buckner two letters in 1889 explaining that he had acquired a trunk that Buckner had surrendered at Fort Donelson. Craig wrote about trying to get this item back into Buckner's possession.<sup>26</sup> John Jacobs of the Confederate Company E of the 5<sup>th</sup> Kentucky regiment wrote a note to Buckner in 1890 relaying his hopes of "prosperity accompany you though life."<sup>27</sup> In 1900, a son of a Confederate veteran wrote to Buckner. The writer, E. D. Brown, addressed the "Hon. Simon B. Buckner" and admired his courage during the Civil War. The letter began, "Pardon a stranger for writing. also pardon my saying I share my fathers admiration of you. Pa named one of his boys Buckner after you." Brown continued to praise the Lieutenant General, "I speak it right from the heart. It takes a man of nerve to stand up as you have done right in the thickest of thick battle [at Fort Donelson] and the good that you have done eternity shall tell."<sup>28</sup> Evidence did

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<sup>25</sup> "Mildred Lee to Delia H. Claiborne (6 Jun 1885)," Box 4, Folder 10, 2013 SBB collection, Filson.

<sup>26</sup> "W. H. Craig to Simon B. Buckner (30 Jul 1889 and 6 Aug 1889)," Box 1, Folder 21, 2013 SBB collection, Filson.

<sup>27</sup> "John W. Jacobs to Simon Bolivar Buckner (2 Sept 1890)," Box 1, Folder 22, 2013 SBB collection, Filson.

<sup>28</sup> "E. D. Brown to Simon Bolivar Buckner (1900)," Box 1, Folder 23, 2013 SBB collection, Filson.

not indicate if Buckner ever replied to these letters but he felt strongly enough about their contents to keep them.

Many of these passionate Southern sympathizers participated in memorial organizations and associations that grew out of the devastation of the war. At first, communities banded together to bury Confederate dead and lend support to survivors. Eventually, these groups came together into formal nationally recognized associations. In 1888, the Confederate Association of Kentucky began in Louisville and in Lexington two years later. These two groups became a part of the larger United Confederate Veterans (UCV) in 1889. Historian Anne Marshall described how they “served both as a social and benevolent function, providing funds or funeral expenses for aged and dying comrades.”<sup>29</sup> In 1897, the leadership of the UCV considered Buckner for the highest position in the organization. Newspapers reported, “The Kentucky ex-Confederates will present the name of Gen. Simon Bolivar Buckner for Commander in Chief of the Confederate Veterans’ Association when it holds its annual meeting in Nashville next week.”<sup>30</sup> He did not get the position, but the consideration spoke to the influence he wielded with Confederate supporters even three decades after the war’s end.

As decades passed, many survivors of the Civil War battles succumbed to injuries received during the war or died of old age. Thus, Buckner became one of the few high-ranking Confederate generals still living at the turn of the twentieth century, as the fervor to compile Civil War history and battle narratives soared. Some people felt that narratives of the war needed validation or corrections from Confederate first-hand

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<sup>29</sup> Anne Marshall, *Creating a Confederate Kentucky: The Lost Cause and Civil War Memory in a Border State* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 157.

<sup>30</sup> “Confederate Veterans,” *New York Times*, Jun. 19, 1897.

sources like Buckner. Archibald Gracie, an amateur historian and son of a Confederate officer, wrote to Buckner in 1905 about inaccuracies in troop movements plotted for the Battle of Chickamauga. He asked Buckner to write his recollections of the battle. The letter concluded with the promise, “When I have finished writing what I have undertaken, for the purpose of showing the errors made by the Chickamauga Park Commission, I will first send to you.” Five year earlier, another son of Confederate soldier had asked Buckner to correct statements Longstreet made about his father, Lieutenant General Daniel H. Hill, in the book *From Manassas to Appomattox*. D. H. Hill Jr. wrote, “I am confident that Gen. Longstreet’s memory has played him a trick.”<sup>31</sup> This new generation needed Buckner to validate their romanticized versions of the war and ensure that their fathers’ names did not become tarnished over time.

The importance of defining an appropriate history for the South and the Confederacy became an important goal not just for sons of Confederate veterans, but for all Lost Cause advocates. In 1869, Buckner found himself on the forefront of this movement through the establishment of the Southern Historical Association. Buckner resided at the first meeting of the group in New Orleans. Buckner’s correspondent, Dabney H. Maury, thought up the idea as a way to help preserve and document the Southern perspective on the Civil War. Eventually, the Southern Historical Society moved to Virginia.<sup>32</sup> There, they published their works in fifty-two volumes starting in 1876 and ending in 1959. For one year, Buckner served as the vice-president for his

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<sup>31</sup> “D. H. Hill to Simon B. Buckner (24 Sept 1900),” Box 1, Folder 23, 2013 SBB collection, Filson.

<sup>32</sup> “Editorial Paragraphs (Jan 1876)” *Southern Historical Society Papers*, accessed February 13, 2014, [http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Southern\\_Historical\\_Society\\_Papers/Volume\\_01/January/Editorial\\_Department](http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Southern_Historical_Society_Papers/Volume_01/January/Editorial_Department).



home state of Kentucky.<sup>33</sup> By publishing articles and documents favorable to the South, the organization helped to perpetuate a romanticized version of the Confederacy built upon honorable causes for war, namely states' rights rather than slavery, which constituted the core of Lost Cause rhetoric.<sup>34</sup>

Many Confederate veterans also wrote their own accounts of the war. Sumner Archibald Cunningham compiled a history on the 1864 Battle of Franklin in Tennessee and got the account published in the *National Review* newspaper of Nashville. Buckner received news of this article in a personal letter from its author in 1887. Cunningham informed Buckner of his appreciation “for having saved my life in surrendering the command [at Fort Donelson].”<sup>35</sup> Cunningham took his passion for writing and developed the *Confederate Veteran* magazine. He became editor and manager of this monthly publication which ran from 1893 until 1932.<sup>36</sup> In the first edition, Cunningham stated the magazine’s purpose as, “The CONFEDERATE VETERAN is intended as an organ of communication between Confederate soldiers and those who are interested in them and their affairs.”<sup>37</sup> The magazine did not hide their demographic intentions. David Blight reported that “the *Confederate Veteran* reached a circulation of over twenty thousand by the end of the 1890s.”<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Stickles, 315.

<sup>34</sup> Foster, 50.

<sup>35</sup> “S. A. Cunningham to Simon B. Buckner (19 May 1887),” Box 1, Folder 21, 2013 SBB collection, Filson.

<sup>36</sup> The Sons of the Confederacy restarted the publication of a magazine with pro-Confederate sentiment in 1984 under the same name.

<sup>37</sup> S. A. Cunningham, *Confederate Veteran* 1 (1893): 1.

<sup>38</sup> David Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001), 181.

In February 1909, the magazine published an article all about the Simon Bolivar Buckner. The *Confederate Veteran* titled this piece, “Last Surviving Lieutenant General: Visit to the Home of Gen. S. B. Buckner.” The article began with a wordy description:

Forty seven years ago a young Kentuckian in the strength and flower of manhood donned a gray uniform and marched away from home and friends into the heart of Dixie. He sacrificed a handsome estate, left him by a successful father, gave up a life of ease, and went to join the sons of the South to risk his life, as he had already risked and lost his fortune, in a fierce contest for their homes and wives and children for what he and they thought was right.<sup>39</sup>

The magazine continued by talking about his family’s history, his childhood, and his antebellum career. The article then detailed a visit by several men to Buckner’s home, Glen Lily, in Hart County, Kentucky. This visit included an interview where Buckner answered many questions about both the Mexican and Civil Wars. The article showered praise upon Buckner’s character and the gallantry of Confederates.

The *Confederate Veteran* created the Buckner article using extracts from an article published in the *Nashville Banner* newspaper in that same year. The newspaper’s managing editor, Marmaduke B. Morton, wrote both pieces and he was one of the men that traveled to Glen Lily for the interview. The only variation in the *Confederate Veteran* was a note about the hospitality of Kentuckians. Morton was from Kentucky and thus included this extra note.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Marmaduke B. Morton, “Last Surviving Lieutenant General, Visit to the House of Gen. S. B. Buckner,” *Confederate Veteran* 16 (1909): 25.

<sup>40</sup>“Southern hospitality is superb, but Kentucky hospitality has a distinctive flavor and no other is just like it. It is not effusive nor ostentatious, it is not voiced in words, nor yet in deeds, it is intangible something in the atmosphere that surrounds the man. You are as welcome as the sunbeams, you know it, though nobody has told you so. You can get closer to a Kentuckian in half a minute than you can to any other man in a week. That’s Kentucky hospitality.” From Morton, 27.

The *Nashville Banner* version resonated with one Kentuckian Confederate veteran, W. T. Ellis of Owensboro. Ellis typed up a passionate four page letter to General Buckner in December 1909. He stated that, “I read every line and word of what you said, and I frankly confess I have not read anything since I took off my ragged Confederate uniform on the 28<sup>th</sup> of April 1865 that has pleased and instructed me quite so much.” The letter continued by supporting Buckner’s statements about the reasons for certain successes and failures in the war: “On behalf of my old comrades I thank you for having consented to speak even at this late day, so that coming generations may not be mistaken as to why Bragg did not defeat Buell at Perryville.” Throughout the letter, Ellis’ support for the Lost Cause rhetoric rings clear. He wrote, “I know you will let me as your good friend say, that the cause of the South did not fail to succeed because of any lack of courage, fidelity, patriotism and devotion on the part of the men in the ranks.”<sup>41</sup> Buckner became a beacon for Ellis and others to write about their Confederate sentiments and expressions. They could focus on an individual rather than the reasons for the war and their defeat. Personally participating in Confederate associations and his relationships with top ranking officers wove Simon B. Buckner into the fabric of the Lost Cause.

Buckner fought for the South, but that did not prevent him from rekindling antebellum relationships with Union friends and earning Northern acceptance after the war’s end. A Louisville newspaper reported, “He was an earnest supporter of the Confederacy, but there his whole influence at the close of that struggle [his death] to

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<sup>41</sup> “W. T. Ellis to Simon B. Buckner (31 Dec 1909),” Box 1, Folder 23, 2013 SBB collection, Filson.

reuniting the two sections.”<sup>42</sup> During the late nineteenth century and into the twentieth century, notions of reunification spread throughout the United States. These thoughts grew from increasing numbers of shared memorial services, new common enemies, and time passing. Buckner grew to become a symbol of reunion and used that power to reach national prominence. Like the Lost Cause, reunion grew from myths and historical amnesia about the war’s causes and destruction. While he participated in Confederate organizations, the general also sought membership with associations aimed at a collective past that both Northerners and Southerners could share. Surviving into the twentieth century, Simon B. Buckner saw and participated in the nation’s efforts to heal or at least cover up the wounds caused by the Civil War.

A contact from Chicago became one of the first Northerners to extend the hand of friendship after the war. In November 1866, J. L. Alexander tried to reconnect:

Circumstances have caused our paths to diverge widely in the past few years, but I assure you never for an instant during the whole of that time have I failed to watch with anxious solitude every step in your eventful career, nor has my sincere friendship and high esteem for you known for a single moment the shadow of change; my hand has yearned to write you ever since I heard you were in New Orleans but I was fearful you might now receive my embraces in the spirit in which they were intended.<sup>43</sup>

Buckner found himself renewing relationships with important Union officers after the war out of necessity to recover his finances. Before the war, A. E. Burnside worked with Buckner in real estate and business ventures in Chicago. At the outbreak of war, Burnside offered this letter to Buckner: “The times are troubling, ~~but the~~ [stet] and money is hard to get, but I hope to fulfill all my agreements to the end, and certainly that with

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<sup>42</sup> “Gen. Buckner, Soldier, Governor and Statesman, Passes Away at Glen Lily,” *Louisville Post*, Jan. 9, 1914.

<sup>43</sup> “J. L. Alexander to Simon B. Buckner (10 Nov 1866),” Box 2, Folder 4, 2013 SBB collection, Filson.

your estate- With kindest regards to Madame and young lady I am ever your old friend, Burn"<sup>44</sup> This letter referenced Burnside's involvement in the Kingsbury property, and he became even more involved after Henry Kingsbury, Buckner's brother-in-law, died during the war fighting alongside Burnside. As executor of Henry's will, Burnside held the fate of Buckner's finances in his hands. Buckner's biographer described the gravity of the situation, "Very much of the career of General Buckner in future years depended upon the outcome of the suit which involved the recovery of Mrs. Buckner's rightful share to half of the Kingsbury estate in Chicago."<sup>45</sup> Burnside fulfilled his promises as the Kingsbury estate case was settled in favor of General Buckner.

His friendship with Ulysses S. Grant became the most significant Union relationship Buckner rekindled. Grant and Buckner's familiarity dated back to their West Point years. Grant did not forget the kindness Buckner extended to him in 1854 in the instances when his luck and finances were low. After his capture at Fort Donelson in 1862, Grant reportedly offered his purse, but Buckner declined.<sup>46</sup> The two did not meet again for nearly two decades after the war, but Grant did play a significant role in Buckner's return to Kentucky. He signed the extension of Buckner's parole in 1866 to allow Buckner to travel throughout the United State for business matters. This allowance gave Buckner the ability to start regaining parts of his former life in Kentucky.<sup>47</sup> While they did not see each other frequently, Buckner and Grant supported each other in their times of need.

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<sup>44</sup> "A. E. Burnside to Simon B. Buckner (11 May 1861)," Box 2, Folder 1, 2013 SBB collection, Filson.

<sup>45</sup> Stickles, 302-303.

<sup>46</sup> Charles Bracelen Flood, *Grant's Final Victory: Ulysses S. Grant's Heroic Last Year* (Philadelphia: Da Capo Press, 2011), 210-211.

<sup>47</sup> Stickles, 283.

In 1885, Buckner's relationship with Grant made national news. Buckner and his new wife, Delia Claiborne Buckner, traveled to Mount McGregor to visit a terminally ill Grant. Due to Grant's illness, he needed to write down his half of their conversation.<sup>48</sup> At the close of Buckner's visit, Grant wrote down a reflection of the war and his feelings towards reunion now that the war had passed: "I have witnessed since my sickness just what I wished to see ever since the war; harmony and good feeling between sections . . . We may now well look forward to perpetual peace at home, and a national strength that will secure us against any foreign complication. I believe my self that the war was worth all it cost us, fearful as that was."<sup>49</sup>

The press loved this story of a Confederate general visiting a prominent Union general who became President of the United States. By manipulating the event, the media could push forth reunion sentiments. *Puck* magazine published a cartoon "in which Grant and Buckner are shaking hands across the bloody chasm."<sup>50</sup> Others copied this image and it received wide spread popularity. Ulysses S. Grant died on July 23, 1885. On August 8, Buckner took part in the funeral procession as one of Grant's four pallbearers.<sup>51</sup> Their last meeting and Buckner's role in the funeral provided the nation with a perfect symbol of reunion. The power of their friendship for the healing nation would last with Buckner throughout his life.

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<sup>48</sup> These bits of paper are still held in private hands by Buckner's relatives, but their contents have been published. See John A. Proctor, "A Blue and Gray Friendship," *The Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine* (April 1897): 942-949.

<sup>49</sup> Citing *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant*, vol. 31 in Flood, 212.

<sup>50</sup> Stickles, 328.

<sup>51</sup> The others were two Union officers (William T. Sherman and Phillip Sheridan) and one other Confederate officer (Joseph E. Johnson). These three and Buckner were selected by President Grover Cleveland with consultation from the Grant family. Stickles, 329-330.

Buckner never published memoirs and rarely spoke about the war to the public. This reserved nature allowed Buckner to be a continual example of reconciliation. Buckner gave few interviews or spoke harshly of officers from either side of the war. Even after his last visit with Grant, reporters hounded Buckner for what transpired between the two men. Buckner at first told the reporters that it was a private matter, but later provided the press with the writing about Grant's feelings towards reunion.<sup>52</sup> In the 1909 *Confederate Veteran* article, Buckner again was asked about his relationship and feeling towards Grant. Buckner responded with a polite and cordial reply: "When you broke through the reserve which he had with strangers, he talked well. He was not much of a student, but had a good mind."<sup>53</sup> Grant and Buckner's rekindled friendship received mention even in Buckner's obituaries appealing to both Northerners and Southerners.<sup>54</sup>

Some of Buckner's other Northern friendships experienced much more friction due to the war. George B. McClellan also attended West Point at the same time as Buckner<sup>55</sup> and the two fought in the Mexican War together. They maintained a friendship into the 1850s. McClellan even hosted a dinner party to celebrate Buckner's daughter's first birthday at his home in Chicago.<sup>56</sup> However, the tense time during Kentucky's neutrality at the beginning of the Civil War severed their cordiality. The issues surrounding their agreement remained disputed throughout the war. In 1864, the

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<sup>52</sup> *ibid*, 328-329.

<sup>53</sup> Morton, 76.

<sup>54</sup> For more information about Grant's place in reunion and Civil War memory, see Joan Waugh, *U. S. Grant: American Hero, American Myth* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009) and William S. McFeely, *Grant: A Biography* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1981).

<sup>55</sup> McClellan graduated in 1846 and Buckner graduated two years prior in 1844. For more information on McClellan see Stephen W. Sears, *George B. McClellan: The Young Napoleon* (New York: Ticknor and Fields, 1988).

<sup>56</sup> Stickles, 42.

*New York Times* reported a story attempting to understand the nature of the agreement. The newspaper quoted McClellan saying, “My interview [about Kentucky’s neutrality] with Gen. BUCKNER was personal, not official. It was solicited by him more than once. . . . His letter gives his own views, not mine.”<sup>57</sup> McClellan placed blame upon Buckner for the misunderstandings and neutrality talks left bitterness in their friendship. Still, after McClellan’s death in 1881, Buckner had only positive statements to make about the once general-in-chief for the Union army. In 1885, Ellen McClellan, his wife, wrote to Buckner to “thank you for your appreciation of the General” during a recent interview.<sup>58</sup> Then again in 1909, Buckner stated that “McClellan was one of the best they [the Union] had.”<sup>59</sup> The Civil War stunted but did not destroy their relationship.

Additionally, Buckner fostered new relationships with former Union generals after the war’s end, even to unfavorable officers. Like Buckner, General John McCauley Palmer was born in Kentucky. However, the state did not welcome him back with open arms in 1865 as commander of the Department of Kentucky. Palmer supported emancipation and African-American troops in Kentucky during the war. Issuing a statement to his opposition, “To those Kentuckians who petition Gen. PALMER for relief from the burden of a ‘population that will not labor, but simply exist as a nuisance,’ he says there is but one course which can relieve them, and whereby they can have this cooperation, viz: To assure the colored people of their freedom, abandon [sic] the scheme of expelling them from the State, and gain or regain their confidence.”<sup>60</sup> He resigned

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<sup>57</sup> “Gen. McClellan, Gen. Buckner and the Tribune,” *New York Times*, May 21, 1864.

<sup>58</sup> “Mrs. Geo McClellan to Simon Bolivar Buckner (28 Feb 1885),” Box 1, Folder 21, 2013 SBB collection, Filson.

<sup>59</sup> Morton, 27.

<sup>60</sup> “From Kentucky,” *New York Times*, September 13, 1865.



from the position and became a governor in Illinois years later. With this evidence, Buckner and Palmer did not seem like two men ever to align on one side. Times changed and politics moved away from issues of slavery into finance. In 1896, money issues brought together the pair for the presidential ticket.

Aside from his relationships with high ranking officers, Buckner also experienced praise and mail from regular Union soldiers. Dallas L. Phelps of New York's 14<sup>th</sup> Heavy Infantry penned a letter to General Buckner in 1909. He said, "I have often thought of writing you to express my kind regard and respect for the course took in remaining with your men at Fort Donelson when Floyd and Pillow ran away," and "Hoping the last surviving Lieut General of the Confederate service may be spared with us yet many years. I am with sentiments of esteem and kind regards."<sup>61</sup> The letter displayed similar sentiments to those written by Confederates. These mirrored feelings showed the influence Buckner held by all, no matter the side fought upon, and how the nation craved figures to distract them from the changing new century.

Another Union soldier wrote to General Buckner from Troy, Ohio, but this man met Buckner when he was enslaved by another Confederate during wartime. Written in 1911, Robert Gordon's letter read as a pleasant greeting to Buckner: "When reading the Enquire I was surprised to find your name and to know that you still living. I remember when I was a slave under Wick Bolin at Clarksville, Tenn." He continues by talking about earning his freedom after running "off from the South as the fall of Fort Donalson" and enlisting with the Union army. In conclusion, Gordon stated simply, "I truly hope

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<sup>61</sup> "D. L. Phelps to Simon Bolivar Buckner (27 Jan 1909)," Box 1, Folder 23, 2013 SBB collection, Filson.

this will be as pleasant for you to receive is as it as for me to write you.”<sup>62</sup> This warm letter amidst the backdrop of slavery followed with the general trend of exclusion, or rather removal, of African Americans from Civil War memory and commemoration. David Blight described that, “Remembering slavery was, thus, a paradoxical memory: it was a world of real experience, one complicated by relationships with whites that were both horrible and endearing and enriched or traumatized by their own family and community relations.”<sup>63</sup>

Buckner received other cordial letters from former slaves. In 1892, Albert Buckner wrote, “I am now living within 2 miles of when I was freed. The gentleman who last-owned me is now dead. I see is sons often. They are very kind to me.”<sup>64</sup> The most endearing letters Buckner received came from Shelburn Matthews. Stickles described Matthews as, “a boyhood playmate of the general’s,”<sup>65</sup> but in truth Matthews was the family’s slave. In 1909, General Buckner and his wife actually invited Shelburn to visit Glen Lily. Matthews wrote back after that, “I can never tell you how much I enjoyed my visit and I want to thank you again for your kindness to me I giving me this opportunity to visit you. Your Old Servant- Shelburn Matthews”<sup>66</sup> This complicated relationship between master and servant, family versus slave occurred elsewhere in the South as well. Fitting African Americans into the puzzle of reunification proved to be complicated for the nation, especially amid relationships like Buckner and Matthews.

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<sup>62</sup> “Robert Gordon to Simon B. Buckner (2 May 1911),” Box 1, Folder 16, 2013 SBB collection, Filson.

<sup>63</sup> Blight, 311.

<sup>64</sup> “Albert Buckner to Simon B. Buckner (15 May 1892),” Box 1, Folder 16, 2013 SBB collection, Filson.

<sup>65</sup> Stickles, 422.

<sup>66</sup> “Shelborn Matthews to Simon B. Buckner (21 Sept 1908)” Box 1, Folder 25, 2013 SBB collection, Filson.

Buckner's family also became tied as a symbol of reunion through marriage. On June 14, 1883, the general's daughter, Lily Buckner, married Morris B. Belknap. As a wealthy Louisville family, the Belknap's held prestige in the state, making the match advantageous for both families. However, the Belknaps held ties with the Union during the Civil War. In 1861, Morris' father, William B. Belknap, voiced his opposition when Buckner resigned from the State Guard to join the Confederacy. Thus, the union of a Confederate and Union family felt like reconciliation within Kentucky: "In a way the romance of these young people was typical of what had been and was going on in the state, representing as they did the scions of two prominent families in opposition to each other in war days now forgetting hatred and looking forward to a better day in Kentucky."<sup>67</sup>

This new familial tie also brought on more Northern correspondence and praise to General Buckner regarding the war. L. A. Wait at Cornell University's Department of Mathematics wrote, "I had the pleasure of meeting Colonel Morris B. Belknap and wife, and you grandson, Walter." The letter inquired about a meeting with Union General Wilder at Munfordville. During the event, Wilder came to Buckner for advice before finally surrendering. Wait included his praise of the Confederate, "I wish it were possible to persuade you to write reminiscences of your long and eventful life. Please accept my assurances of my highest esteem and respect."<sup>68</sup> These types of letters showed that even strangers retained feelings for reunion and respect for Confederate officers.

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<sup>67</sup> Stickles, 321.

<sup>68</sup> "L.A. Wait to Simon B. Buckner (20 Jul 1908)," Box 1, Folder 23, 2013 SBB collection, Filson.

General Buckner received invitations for reunion events in the late nineteenth century. In 1889, Sam Ireland sent Buckner an invitation to speak at the Law Department of the University of Michigan for George Washington's birthday. He wanted Buckner due to his power to relate with people on both sides of the Mason Dixon line. Ireland described that, "Your presence is desired by our committee, as an earnest of the deepening feeling of sectional affiliation that pervades our country, and yours coming from the South land to address us in the North, in memory of him [Washington] whose name is our common heritage."<sup>69</sup> This letter revealed how not all wounds had been healed from the war and conflict continued to persist. At times, northerners and southerners alike romanticized reunion in a similar way to the antebellum South in the Lost Cause. Historian Caroline Janney summarized that: "When they came together at Blue-Gray reunions or battlefield dedications, they were willing to embrace Reconciliation and remain silent on the issues of causality and consequence. But when honoring their brethren, they would not be silent."<sup>70</sup>

Ireland's letter also hinted at the use of a shared past for reunification. Reunion efforts used the American Revolution and the founding fathers to unite Northerners and Southerners through history. Grant echoed this idea during Buckner's visit to him. He wrote, "Since it [the war] was over I have visited every state in Europe and a number in the East. I know, as I did not know before, the value of our inheritance."<sup>71</sup> These ideas gained ground with the 1876 centennial of the Declaration of Independence and

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<sup>69</sup> "Sam Ireland to Simon B. Buckner (1 Jan 1889)," Box 1, Folder 21, 2013 SBB collection, Filson.

<sup>70</sup> Caroline E. Janney, "Civil War Veterans and the Limits of Reconciliation," *Common-Place* 14 (Winter 2014).

<sup>71</sup> Citing *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant*, vol. 31 in Flood, 212.

continued thereafter. Buckner jumped aboard this idea and became interested in joining the Sons of the American Revolution (SAR). Officially organized in 1889 and then chartered in 1906, SAR started as a fraternal group celebrating patriotism and heritage.<sup>72</sup> Buckner worked to find his connections to the American Revolution. He succeeded and joined the organization in 1910.

Four years prior, the general also received a letter from G. W. Ripley discussing the re-gathering of another group with ties to the American Revolution, the Society of Cincinnati of the State of Virginia. The letter stated how they became disorganized by the Civil War, and informed Buckner of the discovery of a book which names Buckner and Claiborne descendants, ensuring the men of the family membership.<sup>73</sup> Ripley told Buckner that, "With your son at West Point and destined for the Army it would be peculiarly fitting should we be able to trace out your right to a membership in the Society for him after yourself."<sup>74</sup> These ancestral ties help to gloss over some of the divides from the Civil War.

Others used a different historical tactic, focusing on military service prior to the Civil War. Buckner found himself a perfect match for this method. His Mexican War experience allowed Buckner to be a part of the Aztec Club of 1847. This patriotic organization started for soldiers from the Mexican War and continued through their descendants. In 1899, Buckner received an invitation to the group's annual meeting. The invitation held a personal note from MacRae Sykes. He pleaded with Buckner to come to

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<sup>72</sup> "The Origins of the SAR," *National Society, Sons of the American Revolution* (accessed 25 February 2014) <http://www.sar.org/About/Origins>.

<sup>73</sup> "G. W. Ripley to Simon B. Buckner (25 Mar 1906)," Box 1, Folder 23, 2013 SBB collection, Filson.

<sup>74</sup> "G. W. Ripley to Simon B. Buckner (25 Mar 1906)," Box 1, Folder 23, 2013 SBB collection, Filson.

the gathering since many of the original members passed away and “many of us have been born after our fathers we feel the need of the aid and counsel, likewise the friendship of the men who made history.” The letter concluded with, “Don’t disappoint the youngsters for whom I plead especially, and do not fail to meet your old comrades and that grand Old Army than which a better never enlisted.”<sup>75</sup>

Marmaduke Morton described the influence of Simon Bolivar Buckner in his article for the *Confederate Veteran*. He said that Buckner “has been personally acquainted with more of the prominent men of America during the last three quarter of a century than any many now living.”<sup>76</sup> These prominent men came from both sides of the Civil War battlefields. Buckner used his Southern connections to gain power with the Lost Cause supporters, looking to idealize the white Southern experience. Simultaneously, the Confederate general revived friendships with Union officers after the war and participated in societies focused on a shared American past. These instances of reunion provided the nation with orchestrated examples of how to heal the wounds of war, forget about the real cause of the conflict, and forget racial tension in favor of honorable individual qualities. Buckner did not let this influence from these multifaceted memories go to waste. He harnessed his popularity into a political career that almost reached the east room of the White House.

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<sup>75</sup> “Macrae Skyes to Simon B. Buckner (22 Sept 1899),” Box 1, Folder 22, 2013 SBB collection, Filson.

<sup>76</sup> Morton, 26.

CHAPTER THREE:  
PLAYING ON DUAL POPULARITY, BUCKNER'S POLITICAL CLIMB

The man should never seek the office but that the office  
should always seek the man.

-General Simon B. Buckner's advice to his son at West  
Point in 1907<sup>1</sup>

Simon Bolivar Buckner embodied duality. He fought for the United States during the Mexican War and then against his country during the Civil War. He fostered friendships with officers in both blue and gray. The general drew praise from southerners and northerners alike. His professional career also split in two. Since West Point, Buckner's career relied upon the military, but after the Civil War that career would change. Though he retired from the Army in 1855, Buckner still worked with military affairs in both Illinois and Kentucky until he became a general in the Confederate Army. When the Civil War ended, Buckner needed to find a new path to distinction and a place to channel his political views. His business ventures provided him money but not a political influence or voice. Buckner utilized his positions as a symbol of reunion and facilitator of the Lost Cause to create a second career as a state, regional, and even national politician in the late nineteenth century.

Before the Civil War, Buckner held political views, but he rarely wrote about his position. Just like much of Kentucky, Buckner was a Democrat before the war. After

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<sup>1</sup>“Simon Bolivar Buckner to son, Simon Bolivar Buckner, Jr. (18 Dec 1907),” Box 2, Folder 5, 2013 SBB collection, Filson. Buckner said to be paraphrasing John Allen. This Allen probably was Young John Allen a Methodist minister, missionary in China, and Georgia native.

1865, Buckner's party affiliation did not change. During his exile, Buckner's friends communicated their fears to him about the Republican Party's power. In 1867, Jeff Brown in Louisville wrote to Buckner in New Orleans explaining how they need to take the government back from the radicals.<sup>2</sup> Due to the influence gained from his military career, Buckner sat in a position to fight back against the Republicans.

Particularly in Kentucky, Democrats tried to employ Buckner's popularity for their political gain. As early as 1867, friends wanted him to run for governor in his home state. Buckner heard news of this idea and put a stop to their plans. He wrote to Major S. K. Hayes in Covington, Kentucky explaining his reasons: "I think the consideration of my name might tend to revive asperities which would not contribute to the harmony which should pervade the deliberations of the Convention."<sup>3</sup> The Kentucky Democrats met and did not nominate the general for governor. Instead, they chose John L. Helm for governor and John W. Stevenson for lieutenant governor. Helm and Stevenson won their election thus continuing Kentucky's Democrat leadership in the state's executive branch.<sup>4</sup> Buckner turned away from his state's highest office, but that did not mean he shied away from all politics. In 1868, he attended the Democratic National Convention as a delegate.<sup>5</sup> Instead of fast and furious, Buckner plotted his political climb slowly and steadily.

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<sup>2</sup> "Jeff Brown to Simon Bolivar Buckner (18 May 1867)," Box 1, Folder 7, SBB collection, KHS.

<sup>3</sup> Arndt Stickles, *Borderland Knight: Simon Bolivar Buckner* (Durham: The University of North Carolina Press, 1940), 318-319.

<sup>4</sup> Lowell H. Harrison and James C. Klotter, *A New History of Kentucky* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1997), 241-242. Helm would die shortly after taking office and Stevenson would become governor.

<sup>5</sup> "Current Notes," *New York Times*, March 30, 1870.



Evident in his rejection of the gubernatorial nomination, Buckner viewed Kentucky's confusion after the war as a reason to tread carefully during his political ascent. While the state did not fall under a military district during the Reconstruction era, Kentucky experienced significant political and social changes after the war.<sup>6</sup> These changes occurred for a variety of reasons, including the abolishment of slavery and black men gaining political rights. These developments lead to white backlash and violence throughout the state. Some historians refer to this period in Kentucky's history as not reconstruction, but readjustment.<sup>7</sup> Unlike most of the South, Kentucky politics remained in the hands of Democrats. Inexperienced with politics, holding no previous office, Buckner needed more time to discover his place in the scrambled postbellum Kentucky.

The state did not consider Buckner as a candidate for any political positions during the 1870s, but signs emerged that his political career was getting closer to reality. In 1875, Kentucky elected a former Confederate lieutenant colonel, James B. McCreary, Governor of the Commonwealth. The state showed through this election their full embrace of the Lost Cause and their rejection of the Republican's reconstruction ideas.<sup>8</sup> McCreary did not solve the violence or financial troubles of the state during his term. In addition, farmers struggled through financial hardships and received little aid from their

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<sup>6</sup> For information about Kentucky and border state reconstruction see E. Merton Coulter, *The Civil War and Readjustment in Kentucky* (Chapel Hill: The University Press of North Carolina, 1926) as well as Aaron Astor, *Rebels on the Border: Civil War, Emancipation, and the Reconstruction of Kentucky and Missouri* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2012), Anne Marshall, *Creating a Confederate Kentucky: The Lost Cause and Civil War Memory in a Border State* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010), and Andrew L. Slap, ed., *Reconstructing Appalachia: The Civil War's Aftermath* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2010).

<sup>7</sup> Note Coulter and entry in John Kleber, ed., *The Kentucky Encyclopedia* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1992) for reconstruction that redirects readers to readjustment entry on page 757.

<sup>8</sup> Harrison and Klotter, 257.

government. In this decade, the Grange, Greenback and Labor Reform parties grew trying to bring awareness for farmer and laborers cause.<sup>9</sup> Due to these strains, the Republicans felt confident with a Union veteran, Walter Evans, for the 1879 election, but the state's citizens still did not sway from the Democratic Party. Easily, Democrat Luke Blackburn won the election.<sup>10</sup>

Yet again, Blackburn failed to fix the fiscal and racial problems in the state and his Democrat administration received negative criticism. At the time, Buckner received plenty of praise and his friends urged him to place his name into the candidate pool for the 1883 election. On May 15, 1883, the *Courier-Journal* in Louisville praised its former editor:

On next Wednesday the Democracy of Kentucky will nominate the next Governor of that State. No nobler or worthier name will be presented to the convention than that of her heroic son, Maj. Gen. Simon Bolivar Bucker. I may be pardoned for uttering a few words in behalf of this gentleman, whom Tennessee and the entire South hold in such affectionate regard, not only on account of his brilliant qualities as a soldier, but for his devotion to justice and honor during our memorable struggle.<sup>11</sup>

People from all throughout the state wrote to Buckner to inform him of their support. Many of these letters contained Lost Cause sentiments. H. M. Hoskins penned a letter requesting his brother's support in the campaign, believing that southern men should vote for Buckner because of his service to the Confederate cause.<sup>12</sup> The *New York Times* picked up on this southern support. The newspaper reported that, "The old rebel yell will

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<sup>9</sup> Thomas J. Brown, "The Roots of Bluegrass Insurgency: An Analysis of the Populist Movement in Kentucky," *The Register of the Kentucky Historical Society* 78 (Summer 1980): 226.

<sup>10</sup> *ibid*, 259-260.

<sup>11</sup> "State Politics: The Kentucky Governorship," *Courier-Journal*, May 15, 1883.

<sup>12</sup> "H. M. Hoskins to Mort Hoskins (3 May 1883)," Box 1, Folder 21, 2013 SBB collection, Filson.

be started for Gen. Simon Bolivar Buckner, and that he will be nominated on a wave of enthusiasm raised by eloquent references to his Confederate record.”<sup>13</sup>

Unfortunately, Buckner did not start his campaign soon enough. He only entered the race in March of 1883 and did not campaign aggressively. The Democrats already had strong candidates in the mix two congressmen, John Proctor Knott and Thomas L. Jones. During the Democrats’ state convention, Buckner saw that he could not gain enough votes and withdrew his name. Knott won the Democrat’s nomination. Despite his loss, Buckner gained insight that a gubernatorial run was possible. Many of his supporters wrote to encourage his future aspirations. H. C. Martin stated, “I would say to you that you ought not to have a single regret over the result of your short campaign.”<sup>14</sup> W. H. Brian, a Confederate veteran, wrote, “Gen. I want to say to you that we old Confederates, had a general love fest over you . . . I want to say this to you, should you not be successful in the race, you can count on the boys hereafter.”<sup>15</sup>

In the 1883 state election, Knott went on to beat out another Union veteran, Republican Thomas Z. Morrow, to win the governorship.<sup>16</sup> During the beginning of Knott’s term in office, Buckner retreated from politics. In 1885, Grover Cleveland ran on the Democrat’s presidential ticket. The *Courier-Journal* tried to probe Buckner for insights into the election, but without avail. The article stated, “Gen. Buckner was asked what the New York people thought of Cleveland and his policy, but replied that he was

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<sup>13</sup> “The Kentucky Race for Governor,” *New York Times*, May 16, 1883.

<sup>14</sup> “H.C. Martin and Simon Bolivar Buckner (19 May 1883),” Box 1, Folder 27, 2013 SBB collection, Filson.

<sup>15</sup> “W. H. Brian to Simon Bolivar Buckner (8 May 1883),” Box 1, Folder 21, 2013 SBB collection, Filson.

<sup>16</sup> Lowell and Harrison, 261-262.

devoting very little time to the subject and really knew nothing of politics.”<sup>17</sup> By being reserved with his statements, Buckner avoided being criticized through association with less favorable Democrats like former Governor Blackburn. Buckner’s withdrawal did not deter his supporters in Kentucky. By 1886, Democrats in the state began pushing for his candidacy in the 1887 gubernatorial election. He replied to this idea during an interview. Buckner said, “The masses seem to be for me, but I am not a politician and do not know how to manipulate a conversation. Sometimes shrewd politicians defeat the will of the people. I think that every county south of the Green river will go for me, but I can not tell about the final result.”<sup>18</sup>

But in 1886, his popularity overtook his reluctance and Simon B. Bolivar entered the race for governor. At the start of the race, recent events converged, heightening Buckner’s fame. In 1885, the Confederate general gained national prominence with his visit to Ulysses S. Grant at Mount McGregor and Buckner’s participation as a pallbearer in Grant’s funeral. His friendship with former President brought new followers to his camp.

Also in 1885, the General married a young beautiful woman, Delia Herbert Claiborne. After Buckner’s first wife died in 1874, the General had been a bachelor. His new marriage to a woman over thirty years younger than him brought a youthful ingredient to his gubernatorial campaign. Both of his wives showed an interest in politics and had aligned themselves with the Democratic Party. In 1869, his first wife, Mary Kingsbury Buckner, penned a letter to her husband. She detailed a recent dinner party with former Democrat Governor Beriah Magoffin and discussed Confederate General

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<sup>17</sup> “Gen. Buckner in the City,” *Courier-Journal*, July 18, 1885.

<sup>18</sup> “Gen. Buckner at Home,” *Courier-Journal*, June 22, 1886.

John C. Breckinridge's possible political ambitions to be governor of the Commonwealth.<sup>19</sup> Delia Buckner also showed an interest in politics early during their courtship. In 1884, she wrote to Buckner to tell him about attending the Grand Jubilee of the Democrats and how she considered Hart County's recent Republican vote during the presidential election a disgrace.<sup>20</sup> The General always had family supporting his political party and beliefs.

The Buckner's family grew in 1886 again when Delia gave birth to a baby boy, Simon Bolivar Buckner, Jr. This little addition helped to earned even more campaign supporters. *A New History of Kentucky* reasoned that, "His advocates seemed willing to forget political records and praised instead the family record. . . Ignoring the fact that Buckner's wife's name was Delia, they cried out, 'Hurrah for Bolivar, Betty, and baby!'"<sup>21</sup> His family provided Buckner with youthful flare.

The trajectory of Buckner's gubernatorial campaign looked promising, but his nomination among Democrats did not come without opposition. As in 1883, Buckner retained the support of Confederate sympathizers and veterans. Conversely, many young Democrats also grew tired of the older generation's dominance and ease at winning elections based on their military valor. Buckner's campaign found a way to divert some of these charges. Stickles noted, "It should be stated that the friendly part of the press in the state, in order to forestall and combat the charges that too many soldiers were being

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<sup>19</sup> "Mary Kingsbury Buckner to Simon B. Buckner (11 Dec 1869)," Box 1, Folder 10, 2013 SBB collection, Filson.

<sup>20</sup> "Delia Herbert Claiborne to Simon B. Buckner (24 Nov 1884)," Box 4, Folder 2, 2013 SBB collection, Filson.

<sup>21</sup> Lowell and Harrison, 263.

elected to offices, had written General Buckner as a farmer and business man.”<sup>22</sup> While they cheered his military achievements, his supporters realized not everyone felt as enthusiastic about the past because it opened old emotional war wounds.

Buckner’s Democrat opponents included a judge, T. H. Hines, and two state senators, John S. Harris of Madison County and A. S. Berry of Newport. Highlighting his military failures became one way others tried to lessen Buckner popularity. The fact remained that Buckner surrendered twice during the war, at Fort Donelson and again in New Orleans. Reminiscing about Buckner’s gubernatorial election, William T. Ellis remembered, “Twenty odd years ago when you were a candidate for governor, some ignorant people sought to make capital of the part you played at Fort Donelson.”<sup>23</sup> But Buckner’s supporters came through and defend the general against these attacks. Ellis continued by stating that, “I did write some letters on my own account during your campaign for Governor in which I attempted to show how you had opened a way for General Floyd’s army to escape from Fort Donelson to Nashville along the Winn’s Ferry road.”<sup>24</sup> Buckner earned supporters through his relationship with Grant, his new youthful family, and his Confederate ties. These people succeeded in fighting back the negative criticisms, and General Buckner entered the state’s Democratic convention with a strong lead.

On May 4, 1887, the convention started in Louisville. Opponents read the signs of their demise and thus withdrew their candidacy. Finally, the time came to bring Buckner’s name to the floor. Confederate veteran, William Ellis, brought forth the

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<sup>22</sup> Stickle, 333.

<sup>23</sup> “W. T. Ellis to Simon B. Buckner (31 Dec 1909),” Box 1, Folder 23, 2013 SBB collection, Filson.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

nomination. General Buckner's camp understood the need to highlight his Union support to balance out his Confederate fame and the power the reunion myth gained in recent years. To second the nomination, George M. Adams stepped to the floor. He was a Union veteran, lawyer, congressman from Knox County, and eloquent speaker. Following Ellis and Adams, "storm of prolonged applause" echoed through the hall.<sup>25</sup> Buckner held the Democrats' vote. Stickles reporter that, "George M. (Matt) Adams, a lawyer and once a congressman from Knox County, a former Union soldier and an excellent speaker, in a short, clever speech seconded the nomination."<sup>26</sup>

In the general election of 1887, Buckner faced Republican William O. Bradley from Garrard County, who hoped to use black support to win the election.<sup>27</sup> Two other minor parties joined the gubernatorial race as well. The Prohibition Party brought forth Fontaine T. Fox and the Union Labor Party had A. H. Carden.<sup>28</sup> Election Day came on the first of August. Nearly 15,000 votes went to the third-party candidates, with the Union Labor vote concentrated in northern Kentucky. Buckner squeaked by for the win with fifty-one percent of the votes, 143,466. Bradley received 126,754 votes and lost by the closest margin since the end of the Civil War. This close race foreshadowed a rough road ahead for the Democrats in Kentucky and throughout the nation. The old guard of the white, wealth elite were losing ground, but for the time their "Confederate Dynasty" held.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Stickles, 335.

<sup>26</sup> *ibid*, 335.

<sup>27</sup> Lowell and Harrison, 262.

<sup>28</sup> Stickles, 337.

<sup>29</sup> Lowell and Harrison, 263.

Never having held a political office previously, Simon Bolivar Buckner won his gubernatorial election to become the state's thirtieth governor. His influence and popularity allowed him to reach and achieve the Commonwealth's highest office. The inauguration took place on the clear and sunny day of August 30, 1887. The newspapers reported on that day, "Frankfort was crowded with people from all parts of the State today and all was bustle and excitement, the occasion being the inauguration as Governor of Kentucky of Gen. Simon Bolivar Buckner."<sup>30</sup> The state's newspapers and citizens gave Buckner a warm reception and expressed the hopefulness for his new administration.<sup>31</sup> He would need his optimism to face the violence and financial troubles in Kentucky that grew worse during his term.

First, Governor Buckner needed to deal with the violence rampant throughout the state. In the summer of 1887, a feud in Rowan County reached its peak. Since 1884, the area experienced twenty-three murders largely as a result from the clash between the Tolliver and Martin clans. In June 1887, the leader, Craig Tolliver, was killed putting "an effectual end to crime and criminals in the little town" of Morehead.<sup>32</sup> Once in office, Buckner asked for an investigation into the lawlessness and helped restore order in the area.<sup>33</sup> He stated in his first address to the General Assembly that:

As reputation of a country is often popularly judged by the conduct of its worst elements, so likewise is the law-abiding character of the people of Kentucky estimated by other, in great measure, not from the general

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<sup>30</sup> "Gov. Buckner Inaugurated," *New York Times*, August 31, 1887.

<sup>31</sup> Hambleton Tapp and James C. Klotter, *Kentucky: Decades of Discord, 1865-1900* (Frankfort, KY: The Kentucky Historical Society, 1977), 389. Also see John Ed Pearce, *Days of Darkness: The Feuds of Eastern Kentucky* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1994).

<sup>32</sup> "Retribution," *Courier-Journal*, June 23, 1887.

<sup>33</sup> Stickles, 348-350.



disposition of i[t]s citizens to obey the laws, but from the violent conduct of comparatively a few lawless individuals.<sup>34</sup>

A year later Governor Buckner dealt with a feud that crossed state boundaries.

The Hatfield and McCoy feud started long before Buckner took office, but experienced its greatest height between 1888 and 1890. Legal confusion and murder brought Buckner and the Governor of West Virginia into the dispute to decided issues of extradition over state lines. Ultimately, murder trials played out in Pike County, Kentucky resulting in seven life imprisonments and one hanging. The hanging dampened, but did not end, the feud.<sup>35</sup> These examples only showed a glimpse of the violence Buckner's administration had to deal with during his term.

Feuds only constituted a small portion of the governor's problems. The legislatures in the General Assembly pushed through several property tax reductions to appease the Farmers' Alliance. In addition, other special interest groups, like the Louisville & Nashville railroad, pressured the legislators to produce bills favorable to their needs. These tactics angered Buckner and he became notorious for his heavy use of the veto power. During his four years, Governor Buckner "vetoed more than a hundred bills, issuing more vetoes than his ten predecessors combined."<sup>36</sup> This strong use of executive powers made him unfavorable to legislators and others influential Kentuckians. This aspect of his administration stood out as an outlier to his otherwise typical Democratic platform, which usually favored these large corporations.

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<sup>34</sup> Simon Bolivar Buckner, *Messages of Gov. S. B. Buckner, communicated to the General Assembly of Kentucky, session 1887-8* (Frankfort, KY: John D. Woods Public Printer, 1888), 19. Accessed at KHS (815.3 G721)

<sup>35</sup> For more information on the feud see Altina L. Waller, *Feud: Hatfields, McCoys, and Social Change in Appalachia, 1860-1900* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1988).

<sup>36</sup> Lowell and Harrison, 263.

On the other hand, stopping special interests groups helped him gain popularity with the general public. Fullerton Cooke penned a letter to Buckner in 1890. He summarized the feelings of Kentucky citizens. He praised Buckner's "honest and patriotic endeavors to stand between the great mass of the people, and those seeking to forward their own private interests at the expense of public welfare."<sup>37</sup> Continuing, Cook stated, "I beg to assure you that I heartily approve and enjoyed your two messages vetoing the bills."<sup>38</sup>

Other messages of support came to Buckner from people all around. In the spring of 1888, W. T. Ellis, the man who seconded Buckner's nomination, wrote to the governor about how the Owensboro area's perception. He told that, "It may be pleasant for you to know what the people in the 2<sup>nd</sup> district are saying about your administration. To say that they approve it heartily and enthusiastically is hardly stating it strong enough."<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, Ellis expressed bipartisan praise as well: "Everybody both democrats and republicans endorse you most heartily, and are given to declare without a dissenting voice, that yours is the best administration that state has ever had."<sup>40</sup> General Buckner also continued to receive messages commending his military valor while in office. These notes even came from outside state. Fred Wilder Cross of Massachusetts stated in a letter that, "I am a Northern boy and have been brought up with Northern ideas and principles yet I cannot help but reflect and honor the boys in gray who fought for what they

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<sup>37</sup> "Fullerton Cooke to Simon Bolivar Buckner (24 Mar 1890)," Box 1, Folder 21, SBB collection, KHS.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> "W. T. Ellis to Simon Bolivar Buckner (9 Apr 1888)," Box 1, Folder 20, SBB collection, KHS.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

believed just and right.”<sup>41</sup> Buckner’s executive acts and romanticized military memoirs helped to make his administration popular despite violence and financial difficulties in the state.

The financial troubles of Kentucky increased after a serious scandal in 1888. Since 1867, Kentucky voters elected James W. Tate, known more often as “Honest Dick” Tate, to the position of state treasurer. Previous administrations trusted him and thus did not conduct regular checks on his accounts; the Buckner administration ordered an overdue audit. As a result, on March 14, 1888, Tate disappeared. On March 20, the governor announced that Tate was suspended.<sup>42</sup> After an investigation, Kentucky discovered that the former state treasurer had embezzled over \$247,000 during his tenure. Tate’s financial books were a mess, full of false statements and delayed accounts. Tate loaned out large amounts of money from the state to high officials and legislatures that had yet to be repaid. The General Assembly impeached and removed Tate from office. Then, the courts charged Tate, but it was too late. He never returned to Kentucky and his whereabouts remained a mystery. Kentucky never recovered the lost funds.<sup>43</sup>

This scandal shocked the public and unhinged the Kentucky government. First, the legislatures formed an office of state inspector and examiner to prevent the neglect that had occurred with Tate. Historians Lowell and Harrison observed that “distrust of all public officials increased dramatically, and angry critics charged that a cover-up had occurred.”<sup>44</sup> Since Buckner had never held a political office before being governor, he

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<sup>41</sup> “Fred Wilder Cross to Simon Bolivar Buckner (5 Sept 1888),” Box 1, Folder 20, SBB collection, KHS.

<sup>42</sup> Stickles, 355.

<sup>43</sup> Lowell and Harrison, 263-264.

<sup>44</sup> *ibid*, 264.

came out of the controversy unscathed. In early 1890, John Fulton wrote to Buckner with praise for the governor's recent actions: "I have always thought that when a public official discharged an unpleasant duty bravely and effectively, it was great satisfaction for him to have not only the approval of his own conscious but to know that he has the approval of the people, his constituency at his back."<sup>45</sup>

Governor Buckner earned more public favor and recovered some lost support with legislators by using his personal pocket book. While he vetoed the bill, the General Assembly overrode Buckner to push forward tax cuts. The auditor and governor warned the legislators that this action would result in a deficit. Their prediction came true in June 1890. The state's treasury needed money and the legislature took the blame. The federal government paid Kentucky back for money borrowed during the Civil War, but the sum of \$60,000 did not cover the deficit.<sup>46</sup> Selling his Chicago property combined with his success as a businessman allowed Governor Buckner to reach into his personal funds to fix the state's financial strains. The media hailed Buckner as a savior of the state's honor: "Gov. Buckner intends to supply rather than have the fair name of Kentucky tarnished."<sup>47</sup> Asking for no interest, Buckner loaned out an estimated \$50,000 to cover the state until payments came through in late July and August. This "action [was] probably unprecedented in the history of Kentucky or any other state" and boosted Buckner's reputation to new heights.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> "John A. Fulton to Simon Bolivar Buckner (15 Jan 1890)," Box 1, Folder 21, SBB collection, KHS.

<sup>46</sup> Stickles, 379.

<sup>47</sup> "For the State's Honor," *Courier-Journal*, June, 15, 1890.

<sup>48</sup> *ibid.*

Around the same time as the deficit incident, the state prepared for a state constitutional convention. Kentucky's last state constitution dated from 1850 and badly needed an overhaul. The *Courier-Journal* proclaimed that "the task before the convention is certainly herculean."<sup>49</sup> Unsurprisingly, Hart County chose Governor Buckner to be their delegate.



Ninety-nine other distinguished men representing every corner of the state joined Buckner. Newspapers praised the group: "It may be said beforehand that a finer body of men could not be got together."<sup>51</sup> The press also realized which political party most delegates identified with. "Of course, in a State so strongly Democratic as Kentucky, a very large

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<sup>49</sup> "An Iron-Clad Document: Needs for Revision in Kentucky's Constitution," *Courier-Journal*, September 5, 1890.

<sup>50</sup> Image from "Delegate Simon Bolivar Buckner (1890-91)," Kentucky Constitutional Convention Delegates Photo & Autograph Album, KHS.

<sup>51</sup> "An Iron-Clad Document: Needs For Revision in Kentucky's Constitution," *Courier-Journal*, September 5, 1890.

majority of the men selected would naturally be Democrats, and of the 100 delegates only 19 belong to the Republican Party.”<sup>52</sup>

Possessing a majority of Democrats did not mean that the Constitutional Convention went forward smoothly. The group met in the House of Representatives’ chambers in the state capitol building. The convention started on September 8, 1890, and closed on April 11, 1891. Over 226 days, the men argued with each other without much direction and focused on small matter rather than large overhauls. The men did agree on terms limiting powers due to the recent Tate scandal and deficit incident. During the proceedings regarding railroad corporations, Buckner stated that, “It might be in the power of the Legislature to repeal it, but the very fact that the Legislature has abused this authority shows that we, representing the people of this Convention, should limit the power of the legislature in that respect.”<sup>53</sup> These limitations and restrictions written into the new constitution “reflected the will of a state fearful of power, distrustful of politicians, and careful of prerogatives.”<sup>54</sup> Despite criticism from some, the general public ratified the proposed constitution, and thus secured its adoption.

Governor Buckner did not seek reelection. His four years in office had experienced enough major upheavals and controversies to last several administrations. Despite all the issues, the public still held Buckner in their favor. Fullerton Cooke wrote, “I absolutely shudder for the future of this old Commonwealth when I think of the

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<sup>52</sup> “An Iron-Clad Document: Needs For Revision in Kentucky’s Constitution,” *Courier-Journal*, September 5, 1890.

<sup>53</sup> *Records of Kentucky’s Constitutional Convention*, Vol. 1 (Frankfort, KY: 1890-1891): 1201.

<sup>54</sup> Lowell and Harrison, 265.

expiration of your term of office.”<sup>55</sup> But Buckner’s term did come to an end in September 1891. Kentucky elected another Democrat to fill his spot, John Young Brown. During his last speech at the new governor’s inauguration, Buckner eloquently summarized his last four years, giving special acknowledge to the public’s support of his administration:

The moment has arrived when it becomes my duty to render back to the people Kentucky the trust which, four years ago, they confided to my keeping. . . . I would be insensible to every feeling of gratitude if I failed to render my sincere acknowledgements to the people of Kentucky and to the press which so largely represents to discharge with fidelity the duties of my office. They have given undue praise to acts which they deemed worthy of commendation, and even where I have failed to merit their just expectations they have judged me in a spirit of leniency and kindness. . . . Fellow-citizens, I carry which me, in returning to the home of my boyhood the liveliest appreciation of your generosity. I will endeavor to teach my descendants that, as integrity is the essential to true manhood, so is the faithful discharge of public duty the essence of patriotism and good citizenship.<sup>56</sup>

Leaving the governor’s office did not mean that Buckner left politics behind. For the next decade, the general continued to use his popularity and influence to make a name for himself in state and national politics. Previously, he declined to comment about Grover Cleveland’s presidential race in 1885. By 1891, Buckner no longer feared to make statements about politics. The *New York Times* quoted him saying, “We want Cleveland. The masses of Kentucky are inclined in favor of free coinage of silver, but they are heartily and indefatigably for Cleveland as President . . . The Democrats are in the stream and must keep straight ahead if they are to be successful.”<sup>57</sup> Buckner felt the

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<sup>55</sup> “Fullerton Cooke to Simon Bolivar Buckner (24 Mar 1890),” Box 1, Folder 21, SBB collection, KHS.

<sup>56</sup> “Leaving Office Speech (1891),” Box 2, Folder 18, 2013 SBB collection, Filson.

<sup>57</sup> “Kentucky for Cleveland,” *New York Times*, July 2, 1891.

growing pressure from the masses that demanded solution from Democrats to the financial troubles rampant throughout the nation.

Quickly, people also sought out Buckner to fill vacant political position. Kentucky's fourth congressional district needed a congressman, "One that is capable to take care of its interests and one that will carry the confidence of the whole people of the dist[ri]ct. . . . One that will uphold her interests against all odds and will fight and hold for the right regardless of all influences." The writer, L. Reid, felt that the district "has just such a citizen in Ex. Gov. S. B. Buckner."<sup>58</sup> The general did not take up this offer, but that did not mean he would never run for a political office again.

The 1890s ushered in a decade of turmoil for the Democrat Party throughout the United States. In Kentucky, the splintering of the party occurred during the gubernatorial election of 1891. Democrat John Young Brown won but did not claim a majority of the votes. Developing third-parties, such as the Populists, drew voters away from the Democrats. Governor Brown also did not have the support of former governor Simon B. Buckner. In 1893, the general and the new governor dueled through newspapers and pamphlets over false statements regarding the Foard and Mason Company.<sup>59</sup> Aside from their feud, confusion riddled Brown's administration due to the new constitution and the splintering Democrat Party. The next gubernatorial election in 1895 brought an end the Democrats' domination in Kentucky as the Commonwealth's citizens elected their first Republican, Buckner's old opponent, William O. Bradley.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> "L. Reid to Simon Bolivar Buckner (7 Dec 1891)," Box 1, Folder 22, SBB collection, KHS.

<sup>59</sup> Stickles, 395-398.

<sup>60</sup> Lowell and Harrison, 267.



In 1894, Tom L. Johnson wrote to Buckner about his concern for the Democrats. He declared, “I look on this as a critical time for the party. I must go forward, or be overwhelmed. If the democrat party does not stand for free trade, it does not stand for anything.”<sup>61</sup> Johnson referenced the political party’s widening divide. The Panic of 1893 brought the economy into a depression brought about by over-speculation and issues revolving around questions of currency inflation. Some Democrats began to yield to the populist agenda. They reasoned that allowing inflation by means of the unlimited coinage of silver would help the demanding farmers and workers most affected by the financial recession.<sup>62</sup> Buckner and a small group of other wealthy and influential Democrats opposed this perspective and believed in sound money based upon the traditional gold standard. In the next two years, the general’s stance on this issue catapulted him onto the national stage.

His first opportunity came through a United States senate seat. In 1894, the position that the politicians looked to fill was held by Senator J. C. S. Blackburn, a silver Democrat. His seat would not be available until 1897, but the state’s legislature would make a decision by 1896. Buckner’s home county, Hart County, put his name into the running in September 1894. The general wanted to move into national politics and actively campaigned for the position.<sup>63</sup> Buckner stood firm against free silver, despite most Kentuckians, particularly rural farmers, favoring soft money. In 1895, Robert L. McCabe corresponded with Buckner about his senatorial campaign. He wrote, “Let me

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<sup>61</sup> “Tom L. Johnson to Simon Bolivar Buckner (27 Jan 1894),” Box 1, Folder 22, 2013 SBB collection, Filson.

<sup>62</sup> For more information about the Panic of 1893 see Douglas Steeples and David O. Whitten’s *Democracy in Depression: The Depression of 1893* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1998).

<sup>63</sup> Stickles, 401-402.

take this opportunity to say that throughout your recent fight for sound money I have admired your unequivocal courage and was amazed at your success over such tremendous odds. It was universally believed that Kentucky would be unalterably committed to the unlimited coinage of silver. Your pronounced and unexpected success has sounded the death knell of this policy and I think has made all well-wishers of their country their debtors.”<sup>64</sup> While his words may have been an exaggeration, Buckner’s campaign showed that the free silver Democrats could not just sweep across the state without a fight.

McCabe continued his letter with, “Although my political ties differ from yours, yet when such serious questions are involved I know no politics. I sincerely hope that our legislature will gratify the wishes of your admirers by electing you to the United States Senate.”<sup>65</sup> His statement hinted at the puzzling nature of political parties in the 1890s. Free silver versus sound money blurred the lines between Democrats and Republicans. Democrats no longer showed a united front, and Buckner earned praises from prior political adversaries. After long months of battles against several strong opponents, Buckner grew tired of the race and realized he did not have the support in the legislature to grab the nomination. The general withdrew his name. Eventually, no Democrat won the seat and the result signaled the beginning of the end for the Democrats dominance in the state and for national elections. Instead, Kentucky’s first Republican senator, William J. Deboe, took over Blackburn’s spot in Congress.<sup>66</sup> This loss for

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<sup>64</sup> “Robert L. McCabe to Simon Bolivar Buckner (22 July 1895),” Box 1, Folder 24, SBB collection, KHS.

<sup>65</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> Stickles, 406, and Lowell and Harrison, 268.

Buckner and Democrats reflected that the splintering of the party and its power on a national scale.

This breakdown of the Democrat Party combined with the growing power of reunionist sentiments allowed Buckner's fame to climb even higher. The sound money Democrats increasingly grew unsatisfied with the party's direction, particularly with the presidential election of 1896 on the horizon. Free sliverites' grip upon the Democratic Party tightened. General Buckner saw evidence of this trend in his home state's Democratic convention on June 3, 1896. Kentuckians elected a free sliver man, Charles J. Bronston, to represent them at the nation convention in Chicago.<sup>67</sup> In the windy city, the goldbugs like Buckner lost their fight as the convention elected William Jennings Bryan for their presidential candidate. Bryan represented a more populist agenda grounded on the free sliver. At the convention, he made himself famous for his speech, "You shall not press down upon the brow of labor this crown of thrones; you shall not crucify mankind upon a cross of gold."<sup>68</sup> This statement rallied the Democratic masses to his and the other free sliverites side.

Men such as Buckner realized their current political party no longer served their interests. As a result in September 1896, the "gold" Democrats officially broke away to form a third-party, the National Democratic Party (NDP). More commonly referred to as the Gold Democrats, this group supported the Cleveland administration, limited

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<sup>67</sup> James Klotter and Hambleton Tapp, *Kentucky: Decades of Discord, 1865-1900* (Frankfort, KY: The Kentucky Historical Society, 1977).

<sup>68</sup> Bryan quoted in Mark Wahlgren Summers, *The Gilded Age or, The Hazard of New Functions* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1997), 251.

government, and the gold standard.<sup>69</sup> The NDP needed to put forth their own presidential ticket to go up against Bryan. On August 20, a meeting of the Gold Democrats in Louisville brought up Simon B. Buckner's name for the vice-presidential spot. This group agreed on Buckner and sent their vote onto the larger convention being held in Indianapolis. On September 2, the NDP came together to formalized their ticket.<sup>70</sup> The media reported that, "The nomination of a Vice Presidential candidate was the most enthusiastic one which has been seen in any National convention this year. It was a foregone conclusion that Gen. Simon Bolivar Buckner of Kentucky would be the candidate."<sup>71</sup> The Gold Democrats loved the old Confederate: "Before Gen. Buckner's name was spoken the enthusiasm broke loose. There were shouts and hats were thrown into the air. The band played 'My Old Kentucky Home,' and the delegates stood up waving flags."<sup>72</sup>

Buckner's running mate for president was General John McAuley Palmer of Illinois. Like Buckner, Palmer was born in Kentucky, served as a general during the Civil War and was a former governor. Palmer was Illinois' fifteenth governor from 1869 to 1873. Also, unlike Buckner, Palmer fought for the Union during the war. This presidential ticket ushered in a wave of reunion feelings. The *New York Times* reported that "When the nomination had been made the banners of all the States went into parade

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<sup>69</sup> See James A. Barnes, "The Gold-Standard Democrats and the Party Conflict," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 17 (Dec. 1903): 422-450 and David Beito and Linda Beito, "Gold Democrats and the Decline of Classical Liberalism, 1896-1900," *Independent Review* 4 (Spring 2000): 555-576.

<sup>70</sup> Stickles, 408.

<sup>71</sup> "Buckner for Second Place," *New York Times*, September 4, 1896.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

around the hall, and the band played ‘Dixie’ and ‘Yankee Doodle’.”<sup>73</sup> Two generals, one Union and one Confederate, coming together played to the nation’s desire to put past grievances behind them, forgetting the real causes of the war and focusing on the valor of individuals. Historian Nina Silber in *The Romance of Reunion* argued that, “People sought to pay homage to a culture of healing and unity, largely in response to the troubling fractures and divisions of the Gilded Age.”<sup>74</sup> Buckner understood this reunion power. During the acceptance speeches at the convention, he stated his pleasure in being “associated with a movement which blots all sectional illness forever and makes us one people and one nationality.”<sup>75</sup> The choices for the NDP ticket helped to gloss over the crumbling Democrat Party and illustrate a different type of united front.

The political button of the Gold Democrats featured the profile of Palmer and Buckner uniting under an American flag ribbon.<sup>76</sup>

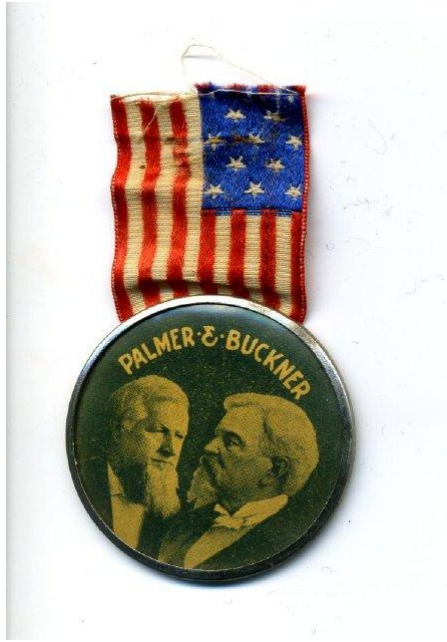
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<sup>73</sup> “Buckner for Second Place,” *New York Times*, September 4, 1896.

<sup>74</sup> Nina Silber, *The Romance of Reunion: Northerners and the South, 1865-1900* (Chapel Hill: The University of South Carolina, 1993), 95.

<sup>75</sup> Simon B. Buckner, *Minutes of proceedings in connection with the public notification ceremonies held at Louisville, Kentucky, September 12, 1896, by the National Democratic Party officially notifying Gen. John M. Palmer, of Illinois and Gen. S.B. Buckner, of Kentucky of their nomination as candidates for the offices of President and Vice-President of the United States* (Chicago: National Democratic Committee, 1896): 15. Found at KHS (329.063 D383m Pamphlet).

<sup>76</sup> Image from “Button, Political (1896),” Museum of the City of New York collection, KHS.



Among sound money Democrats, Buckner’s popularity exploded after Indianapolis. He traveled back to Kentucky, first stopping in Louisville. The citizens met him with great celebration. The newspapers described how, “The party was loudly cheered during the march, and a big crowd soon gathered at the hotel. . . . One man yelled for Bryan and the crowd put him out of the hotel lobby.”<sup>77</sup> Even men in his old political party did not deny their love for the Confederate general. The *Times* stated that, “Many silver Democrats expressed their regrets that the General had been nominated, as they dislike to vote against him.”<sup>78</sup> Buckner’s Lost Cause supporters continued to cheer for him as well. The newspaper article continued with, “The Southern delegates then proceeded to serenade the newspapers.”<sup>79</sup> Praised by reunionists, southerners, and sound money supporters Buckner’s many facets of fame came together during his vice-presidential campaign.

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<sup>77</sup> “Greetings to Buckner,” *New York Times*, September 5, 1896.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

General Palmer also received praise after entering the presidential race for his political and military career. However, the NDP platform could not overcome its late arrival, third-party status, and lack of appeal to the farmers and workers. Bryan supporters felt passionately about this new beacon of hope to dig them out of their financial depression. Buckner along with prominent Democrat John Fellows campaigned in Nashville for the NDP when a group of free silver men interrupted Buckner's speech. The *Nashville Tennessean* reported that,

Before he [Buckner] was half through the Bryan mob in the gallery broke out again and the meeting was interrupted for five minutes. It was stopped when the police seized one of the toughs and took him to jail. Some of the other Bryan men started to his help, but they saw the determination on the faces of the real Democrats present and retreated.<sup>80</sup>

In addition, the NDP lacked youth and appeared outdated to some in the nation. Palmer and Buckner's wizened ages made them the oldest ticket in the country's history. In 1896, Palmer was seventy-nine, and Buckner seventy-three. They were against Bryan who was the youngest presidential candidate in the United States at thirty-six years old.<sup>81</sup> Their ages made the team "far too old to persuade voters to take the campaign seriously."<sup>82</sup>

As the election played out, the Gold Democrats remained confident for a period of time: "Extensive, generally favorable press coverage also fueled the postconvention optimism. Several leading papers endorsed Palmer and Buckner."<sup>83</sup> Unfortunately, the generals' combined popularity did not prevail on Election Day. One of the Gold

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<sup>80</sup> "Buckner Greeted By An Immense Audience at Richmond, in the Old Dominion," *Courier-Journal*, September 24, 1896.

<sup>81</sup> R. Hal Williams, *Realigning America: McKinley, Bryan, and The Remarkable Election of 1896* (Lawrence, KA: University Press of Kansas, 2010), 123.

<sup>82</sup> Beito and Beito, 555-576.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

Democrats principle celebrities President Grover Cleveland did not even believe the party would succeed. Historian, R. Hall Williams, stated Cleveland's strategy, "He preferred McKinley to Bryan and hoped Palmer and Buckner would divert enough votes from Bryan in the border states and Midwest to defeat him."<sup>84</sup> Cleveland's words became a reality in Kentucky. The results of the election in the bluegrass state showed that the votes taken by the Palmer and Buckner team made the difference in deciding the electoral votes. For the first time ever, the historically Democratic stronghold of Kentucky went to the Republican candidate William McKinley. He would go on to win the nation with fifty-one percent of the vote. Bryan and the silver Democrats received forty-six percent of the vote and the NDP almost claimed one percent of the votes.<sup>85</sup> A new era of politics had dawned and Buckner no longer fit into that world.

Buckner retired from active politics after his loss in 1896. The Gold Democrats disappeared into the political backdrop as the gold standard officially won out in 1900. Generally, the presidential election brought praise to Buckner, but breaking away from the national Democratic Party, aligning with a Union general, and standing for sound money produced criticism from some people. In 1897, the United Confederate Veterans organization considered Buckner for their top position, but this idea was met with opposition. The media stated that, "Gen. Buckner's friends say the fight on him is due to politics, he having been the sound-money Democratic nominee for Vice President last year, whereas most of his comrades supported the Chicago ticket."<sup>86</sup> He did not receive the position in the organization and retired to his home of Glen Lily. At the end of his

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<sup>84</sup> R. Hal Williams, *Realigning America: McKinley, Bryan, and The Remarkable Election of 1896* (Lawrence, KA: University Press of Kansas, 2010), 123.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> "Opposed to Gen. Buckner," *New York Times*, June 22, 1897.



career, Buckner's politics mattered more than his military past, but he would have never been able to achieve his political influence without Civil war memories. His two careers, first as a soldier and then as a politician, were indistinguishably linked. These parts of his identity also aligned him with an older generation ill-equipped to meet the new demands of an expanding, industrializing nation.

CHAPTER FOUR:  
BUCKNER'S RETIREMENT, DEATH, AND COMMEMORATION

Dear dreamless sleep, your arms can hold him now.  
-From the poem *Sleeping* by Mrs. J. R. Smith,  
Written in memory of Simon Bolivar Buckner<sup>1</sup>

At the turn of the twentieth century, Simon Bolivar Buckner began to retreat from his public life as a soldier, general, politician, and governor. The last decade and a half of Buckner's life affirmed his nationwide popularity and reinforced his position as a symbol of the Lost Cause and reunion. During this time, he retired to his home, Glen Lily, near Munfordville, Kentucky, with his wife, Delia Claiborne Buckner. The former general no longer served in any capacity with the military; he left that to his son Simon Bolivar Buckner, Jr.<sup>2</sup> While living out his last years, Buckner received correspondence from friends and strangers that honored his service and longevity.

During his retirement, Buckner remained alert to political issues but never again put his name into a political race. He commented on the contested gubernatorial race of 1899 that resulted in William Goebel's assassination in January 1900. The *New York Times* quoted Buckner saying that, "I firmly believe that Kentucky will give its electoral vote to the Republican ticket. There is a very strong feeling among many Democrats that Goebelism deserves a rebuke and Mr. Bryan injured himself with that class of Democrats

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<sup>1</sup> *Confederate Veteran*, March 1914, Vol. 22, No. 3

<sup>2</sup> Simon Bolivar Buckner, Jr. would rise to become a lieutenant general in World War II. He died at the Battle of Okinawa, 1945.

by entering our State and taking an active part in the campaign in the interest of Goebel.”<sup>3</sup> He voiced his strong political opinions with, “I don’t think Goebelites want to catch the real murderer. They have \$100,000 of blood money, and they will use it to convict any politician in high place whom they want to get rid of.”<sup>4</sup>

Primarily, the retirement occurred due to his advancing age. In 1900, Buckner reached the age of 77. His age had already showed itself to be a concern for his political ambitions in 1896. That year saw his unsuccessful run for vice president on the Gold Democrat ticket with his running mate John Palmer, then seventy-nine years old. Their older ages, Buckner being seventy-three at the time, limited support for their ticket.<sup>5</sup> Conversely, Buckner’s age boosted his general popularity, especially among Confederate supporters. This popularity came about due to the deaths of nearly all of high-ranking officers on both sides of the Civil War. By 1908, he became the only surviving Confederate lieutenant general after the deaths of Stephen Lee and Alexander Stewart.<sup>6</sup> One Kentuckian wrote to him in 1909 stating, “You ought now, since every general of your rank has passed to the other side, allow yourself to be interviewed freely. If you will permit me to say so, I think you owe it to your old comrades and to the dear old South which those men so heroically and valiantly defended.”<sup>7</sup> By outliving all others, Buckner became the celebrity recipient of war memories and Confederate praise.

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<sup>3</sup> “Gen. Buckner in the City,” *New York Times*, June 14, 1900.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Beito, David and Linda Beito. “Gold Democrats and the Decline of Liberalism, 1896-1900.” *Independent Review* 4 (Spring 2000): 555-576.

<sup>6</sup> Arndt Stickles, *Borderland Knight: Simon Bolivar Buckner* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1940), 421.

<sup>7</sup> “W. T. Ellis to Simon B. Buckner (31 Dec 1909),” Box 1, Folder 23, 2013 SBB collection, Filson.

The events and troubles of Buckner's retired life appeared normal and expected for an older man. The many invitations he received and his active social life highlighted his sustained popularity. An example of this can be seen in an invitation from a Confederate Veterans 1911 reunion in Arkansas.<sup>8</sup> Between his outings and social events, Buckner dealt with his growing health issues. Buckner's eyesight suffered when cataracts threatened him with blindness. He gambled and won when he opted to undergo radical eye surgery to fix the problem.<sup>9</sup> Intermittently, other short illnesses halted his active lifestyle as well. In 1912 and 1913, Buckner's health began to decline more rapidly, restricting him to Glen Lily more often. Just after New Year's Day in 1914, Buckner suffered extreme weakness. These attacks developed from kidney failure. After two days in coma, Simon Bolivar Buckner died in the evening of January 8, 1914, at the age 90.<sup>10</sup>

Buckner's death brought his fame to new heights as the nation mourned his passing. News of his death spread quickly. Less than 24 hours after Buckner's passing, an abundance of memorializing articles appeared in newspapers across the nation. A family member compiled a scrapbook holding these newspaper clippings. The scrapbook contained clippings from forty-three different states plus newspapers in the District of Columbia as well. Headlines from the January 9, 1914, articles honored and idolized Buckner. The Cincinnati, Ohio *Enquire* printed "Reaper Gathers in Buckner."<sup>11</sup> The *Nashville Banner*, which held a long standing friendship with Buckner, published a

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<sup>8</sup> "W. M. Kavanaugh and George R. Brown to Simon B. Buckner (21 Apr 1911)," Box 1, Folder 25, SBB collection, KHS.

<sup>9</sup> *ibid*, 418.

<sup>10</sup> *ibid*, 423.

<sup>11</sup> "Reaper Gathers in Buckner," *Cincinnati Enquirer*, January 9, 1914.

lengthy article titled, “Grey Eagle of ‘Glen Lily’ Passes Away.”<sup>12</sup> In Baltimore, Maryland, the city’s *Evening Sun* newspaper headed Buckner’s obituary with, “Gen. S. B. Buckner Was Sturdy Fighter.”<sup>13</sup> Papers in cities more than a thousand miles away from Kentucky published news of his death. In Bismarck, North Dakota, the *Tribute* honored Buckner with an article that began, “The death last Thursday of Gen. Simon Bolivar Buckner at his home in Kentucky, recalls a most interesting chapter in his long and interesting history, and one of the most interesting chapters in the country’s political history.”<sup>14</sup> The abundance of articles proclaiming his virtues displayed a respect for his old age and long life.

While Buckner’s passing received national attention, the similarity between these articles revealed a geographical popularity centered from Kentucky sources. California papers cited Lexington and Louisville as their source of information.<sup>15</sup> The Birmingham, Alabama *Ledger* received their news from Buckner’s hometown of Munfordville, Kentucky.<sup>16</sup> In addition, most newspapers did not appear to go out of their way to create original articles on Buckner’s death. Typical of the era, many of the obituaries contained similar wording or printed exact replicas of each other articles. An example of carbon copy printing occurred in Baltimore, Maryland with the *American* and *Star* newspapers

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<sup>12</sup>“Grey Eagle of ‘Glen Lily’ Passes Away,” *Nashville Banner*, January 9, 1914.

<sup>13</sup> “Gen. S. B. Buckner Was Sturdy Fighter: Dead Warrior Last of Lieutenant-Generals of Confederacy,” *Baltimore Evening Sun*, January 9, 1914.

<sup>14</sup> “Simon Bolivar Buckner,” *Bismarck Tribute*, January 13, 1914.

<sup>15</sup> “Gen. Simon B. Buckner Is Dead in Kentucky,” *San Francisco Examiner*, January 9, 1914; “General Buckner Buried,” *San Francisco Call*, January 10, 1914; and “Hero of Two Wars Claimed By Death,” *San Diego Union*, January 9, 1914.

<sup>16</sup> “Gen. S. B. Buckner Called By Death,” *Birmingham Ledger*, January 9, 1914.

identical commemorative stories on Buckner.<sup>17</sup> This lack of originality in cities far from Kentucky borders exposed underlining restrictions to Buckner's celebrity power and the nature of the newspaper business at the time.

One reason for the limitations of his popularity revealed itself through the difficult task of writing a summary of his unique career. Simon Bolivar Buckner accomplished many milestones and held many distinguished positions throughout his life. With his death, newspaper reporters needed to decide which of his life achievements to highlight and which to place into the background. This task became even more difficult due to Buckner's connection with the Confederacy as a lieutenant general. Historian David Blight described that, "Over time, Americans have needed deflections from the deeper meanings of the Civil War. It haunts us still; we feel it . . . but often do not face it."<sup>18</sup> Blight wrote this in reference to contemporary Americans, but this statement could apply to Americans in 1914 as well. Many people in the United States emphasized the sentiment of reunion in decades after the Civil War. Buckner remained an active Confederate Veteran throughout his life, but he also linked himself to President Ulysses S. Grant in friendship and Union General John M. Palmer in politics as a Gold Democrat. In tackling articles about his life, newspapers had to confront and face the side of Buckner's life linked to the Civil War.

Newspapers used a variety of tactics to weave around Buckner Confederate associations. Media did not want to open old wounds of war, indicating sectionalism not completely gone. The first approach was to avoid talking about the Civil War. The *New*

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<sup>17</sup> "Gen. Simon B. Buckner Dead," *Baltimore American*, January 9, 1914; and "Gen. Buckner, Gold Candidate, Is Dead," *Baltimore Star*, January 9, 1914.

<sup>1818</sup> David Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory*, (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001), 4.

*Orleans Picayune* described, “General Simon Bolivar Buckner formerly governor of Kentucky and candidate for vice president on the Gold Democrat national ticket in 1896, died at his home Glenlily, in Hart County, today.”<sup>19</sup> In this opening of their memorial article, the newspaper chose to name his post-war accomplishment over dealing with his Confederate leadership. Similarly, the *New York Times* wrote, “Gen. Buckner was the oldest living graduate of West Point.”<sup>20</sup> They highlighted this statement rather than acknowledging he was the last highest ranking general from either side of the Civil War. Another method connected his multiple military services together, glossing over the Confederacy. The *San Diego Union* newspaper wrote, “General Bucker had a long and distinguished career as a soldier, having served in the Mexican and Civil wars, in both of which he was promoted for bravery.”<sup>21</sup> This tactic moved focus away from Civil War conflict through promotion of his personal courage as a soldier.

Not everyone wanted to forget Buckner’s Confederate connections. W. Stuart Towns remarked in his book, *Enduring Legacy*, “Lost Cause orators consistently lifted high the reputation of Confederate military leaders.”<sup>22</sup> Towns provided examples of commemoration of Robert E. Lee, Stonewall Jackson, and Jefferson Davis.<sup>23</sup> Similarly, Buckner remained one of these beloved Confederate leaders throughout his life. Ex-Confederates and Lost Cause supporters promoted and celebrated Buckner’s identity as a Confederate southern gentleman. An Orphan Brigade reunion group wrote a speech to honor Buckner after his death. The speech idolized how he “gave great help by his wise

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<sup>19</sup> “Simon B. Buckner Dies in Kentucky,” *New Orleans Picayune*, January 9, 1914.

<sup>20</sup> “Gen. Simon Bolivar Buckner Dies,” *New York Times*, January 9, 1914.

<sup>21</sup> “Hero of Two Wars Claimed By Death,” *San Diego Union*, January 9, 1914.

<sup>22</sup> W. Stuart Towns, *Enduring Legacy: Rhetoric and Ritual of the Lost Cause* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2012), 72.

<sup>23</sup> *ibid*, 72-87.

counsel and example; inspiring patience and courage in the stricken people of the South.”<sup>24</sup> His death earned him the cover of *Confederate Veteran* magazine in March 1914 as well. The featured article on Buckner promoted his service to the Confederacy: “He went into four years of battle, sacrificing all that was dear to him as a man. His life and character were always an inspiration to others.”<sup>25</sup> With his death, the Lost Cause lost their last remaining Lieutenant General of the South, but they took the opportunity to show the merit and righteousness of the Confederacy, with Buckner as an example.

The March 1914 *Confederate Veteran* also reported about Buckner’s Hart County home; “Until his failure in health, Glen Lily had been the Mecca of many thousands from all over the country.”<sup>26</sup> Even before his passing, Glen Lily developed into a famed location due to the popularity of its star resident. The *Nashville Banner* reiterated this point about Glen Lily’s notoriety, “The old log structure had been remodeled from time to time and is one of the famous residences in Kentucky.”<sup>27</sup> After Buckner’s death, the log cabin home grew to become a place to remember and honor Buckner. Buckner’s sustained post mortem popularity earned his former home a note of recognition in the 1939 Federal Writer’s Project’s publication *Kentucky: A Guide to the Bluegrass*. The guide described the log cabin structure and detailed important points of Buckner’s life. The entry also indicated that visitors were welcome to visit the historic site.<sup>28</sup> In the next

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<sup>24</sup> “Orphan Brigade Reunion Speech Honoring Buckner (no date [ca. 1914]),” Box 2, Folder 26, 2013 SBB collection, Filson.

<sup>25</sup> “Gen. Simon Bolivar Buckner,” *Confederate Veteran*, 22 (March 1914): 100.

<sup>26</sup> *ibid.*, 102.

<sup>27</sup> “Grey Eagle of ‘Glen Lily’ Passes Away,” *Nashville Banner*, January 9, 1914.

<sup>28</sup> Federal Writer’s Project of the Work Projects Administration for the State of Kentucky, *Kentucky: A Guide to the Bluegrass* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1939): 301-302. Description of structure: “Left on this road to GLEN LILY (*visitors welcome*) 9 m., the birthplace of Simon Bolivar Buckner (1823-1914), standing



year, Glen Lily became a part of the Historic American Buildings Survey. Buckner's home no longer physically exists. In 1961, the log cabin burred to the ground after being abandoned for fifteen years.<sup>29</sup> Glen Lily's fame remains intact through a Kentucky historic highway marker near its former location.



Another site of commemoration for Buckner became his grave at the Frankfort Cemetery. Particularly in Kentucky, honoring him did not end with newspaper articles or a celebration of his home. The mourning for Buckner elsewhere in the nation did not compare to how Kentuckians reacted to his death. In early January 1914, Buckner's funeral and burial manifested into a statewide event. The days following his passing brought about a surge of newspaper responses. The *Louisville Post's* January 9 article

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solitary in the woods alongside Green River. The crude two—story rectangular house is of hewn logs, with a tin roof and a narrow row gallery extending along three sides. The front facade is broken at the center by a clapboarded section—probably a closed-in breezeway, or dog-trot. It stands on what was formerly a farm of 1,000 acres.”

<sup>29</sup> “Glen Lily,” *Walton Advertiser*, April 10, 1975.

<sup>30</sup> Image 3 from the Library of Congress, Washington, DC, <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/ky0153/>

called him “the First Citizen of Kentucky” and considered him “one of the best Governors in the history of the State.”<sup>31</sup> The Louisville based *Courier-Journal* published an extensive tribute titled, “Gen. Simon Bolivar Buckner. Kentucky Soldier and Statesman. Yields in Battle with Death.”<sup>32</sup> These articles sought to show appreciation for the long enduring Kentucky native.

Contrary to most of the articles written outside of Kentucky, the Commonwealth’s newspapers celebrated Buckner’s part in the Civil War. This viewpoint aligns with Kentucky’s adoption of pro-Confederate sympathies in the decades following the end of the war. In addition, Buckner’s life allowed the state to romanticize his life achievements and remember a time before the extreme violence and political turmoil that had plagued Kentucky since the turn of the century. This approach fits with a trend historian Anne Marshall noted in her book, *Creating a Confederate Kentucky*: “Against the backdrop of the state’s misery and shortfalls emerged a mass of literature about Kentucky that looked back nostalgically at purportedly better days. These literary backward glances, moreover, often invoked Confederate characters through whom the graciousness of the past was channeled.”<sup>33</sup> Buckner provided the perfect character to idealize as a successful product of the Commonwealth.

Kentucky’s newspapers printed ex-Confederate’s memories and views of Buckner. The *Louisville Post* published General Basil W. Duke’s reminiscences. The

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<sup>31</sup> “Gen. Buckner, Soldier, and Governor and Statesman, Passes Away at Glen Lily,” *Louisville Post*, January 9, 1914.

<sup>32</sup> “Gen. Simon Bolivar Buckner, Kentucky Soldier and Statesman, Yields in Battle with Death,” *Courier-Journal*, January 9, 1914.

<sup>33</sup> Anne Marshall, *Creating a Confederate Kentucky: The Lost Cause and Civil War Memory in a Border State* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 137.

article stated: “His [Buckner’s] life was in itself a constant lesson and potent incentive to moral and social duty; it was a standard by which the highest integrity and purest purpose could be measured.”<sup>34</sup> The *Courier-Journal* reported the presence of *Confederate Veterans* at Buckner’s burial on the eleventh of January. The same article then recorded memories from ex-Confederate soldier John Murray “who keeps no memory nearer to his heart than that of the sight of Gen. Buckner standing on the veranda at Fort Donelson waving his hand to the ‘boys’ as they passed in review, bidding them to be of good cheer even in defeat.”<sup>35</sup> These inclusions of Buckner’s Confederate days and connections glimpsed Kentucky’s participation in the Lost Cause.

In particular, the people of Louisville felt saddened by Buckner’s death due to his vast social connections there: “The sad news spread rapidly over Louisville, and was everywhere received with expressions of regret for General Buckner’s death and admiration of his character and life.”<sup>36</sup> Mrs. Delia Buckner telephoned their family friend, John W. Green, in Louisville to report the news of her husband’s death. The *Post* reported that, “After learning of General Buckner’s death, Mr. Green communicated at once with President Milton H. Smith, of the Louisville & Nashville road, and the latter announced that a special train will be made up at Munfordville Saturday to bring the funeral party through Louisville to Frankfort.”<sup>37</sup> Here began first event in the exceptional funeral and burial arrangements for Buckner. His powerful and dedicated friends in

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<sup>34</sup> “What is Greatness?,” *Louisville Post*, January 12, 1914.

<sup>35</sup> “Simple Burial Final Tribute,” *Courier-Journal*, January 11, 1914.

<sup>36</sup> “Gen. Buckner, Soldier, and Governor and Statesman, Passes Away at Glen Lily,” *Louisville Post*, January 9, 1914.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

Louisville felt so pulled by his popularity that they altered train schedules to bring his body to their city.

Like Louisville, the city of Frankfort held a strong connection with Buckner and citizens wanted to commemorate his death in a grand manner. He lived in the city as governor and visited Frankfort to attend state ceremonies or meetings. The citizens of the city came together after his death and publically approved the following resolutions:

Resolved, That in the death of General Simon Bolivar Buckner, the city of Frankfort has lost one of its most faithful and illustrious friends, who for four years as Governor of the State, lent the charm of his manly life and dignified bearing as an example to our citizens, as he mingled with them as a friend and advisor. He was always the able champion of the interests of Frankfort and our people will always remember his loyalty with gratitude.

By his death, which closed a life full of years and honor, the State has lost one of its most distinguished Governors and wisest statesman, and the nation one of its most splendid soldiers. Whether as Chief Magistrate of our beloved state, as soldier upon the battle field, as farmer, financier, or brave, honest, faithful and by his model life and noble deeds reflected luster upon the commonwealth.

Resolved, That the Mayor and City Council be and are hereby requested to attend the funeral in a body as a mark of our sorrow and esteem.<sup>38</sup>

These statements proclaimed Buckner's popularity to ensure his enduring legacy. Seated in Frankfort, the state government also became involved in honoring Buckner by closing down all offices by noon on the day of his burial in the Frankfort Cemetery.<sup>39</sup> The city of Frankfort showed every respect to Buckner that it could provide.

On January 11, 1914, Simon Bolivar Bucker's body left Munfordville for the last time around three in the afternoon. A train carried his body that included his mourning family and close friends. As promised, the train traveled from Hart County to Louisville

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<sup>38</sup> "Final Tribute Paid at Buckner's Tomb," *Lexington Herald*, January 11, 1914.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

for a short stop and then to Kentucky's capital. The train reached its destination of Frankfort, and hundreds congregated "at the cemetery to have some small part in the last tribute that it was in their power to offer."<sup>40</sup> Kentucky was not yet done with showing honors to the late general. The *Lexington Herald* reported, "A detail of Kentucky State Guards under command of Major C. W. Longmire and Major Carl Norman, fired a salute of twenty-one guns."<sup>41</sup> Buckner also received the tribute of flags being hung at half mast.<sup>42</sup> While the *Courier-Journal* labeled the day as a "simple burial,"<sup>43</sup> the evidence suggested just the opposite. Buckner's funeral brought about every large, honorific gesture that could be offered for a citizen.

In the days following his burial, some Kentuckians sought further measures to create a means of lasting commemoration. The *Henderson Journal* reported on January 13<sup>th</sup>, "The suggestion came from Representative Ben John that the Kentucky Legislature would do well to place a statue of Lieut. Gen. Simon Bolivar Buckner in [t]he National Hall of Fame [in Washington DC]."<sup>44</sup> The federal governor allotted two spots in the Hall of Fame for the state. Kentucky previously tried to agree on the creation and placement of statues in the nation's capital, but no one could come to a consensus on who to honor.<sup>45</sup> Nothing came of this suggestion and a memorial to Buckner never reached the national level, but in July 1914, another permanent memorial would come for Buckner at the state level. In that month, the Kentucky Historical Society commissioned a portrait of

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<sup>40</sup> "Simple Burial Final Tribute," *Courier-Journal*, January 11, 1914.

<sup>41</sup> "Final Tribute Paid at Buckner's Tomb," *Lexington Herald*, January 11, 1914.

<sup>42</sup> "Simple Burial Final Tribute," *Courier-Journal*, January 11, 1914.

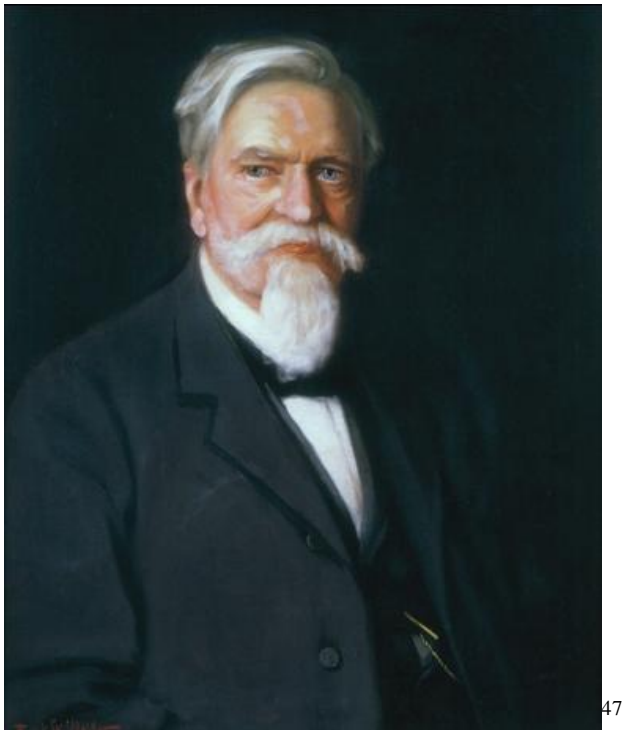
<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> "Would Put Up Statue of Buckner 'N Hall of Fame," *Henderson Journal*, January 13, 1914.

<sup>45</sup> "Would Put Statue of Buckner in Hall of Fame," *Courier-Journal*, January 12, 1914.

Buckner to be painted by Ferdinand G. Walker. The artist received \$100 for his work.<sup>46</sup>

The portrait depicts Buckner dressed in a black suit with grey hair, a goatee, mustache and piercing blue eyes. The artwork presently stands in the Hall of Governors in Frankfort at the Kentucky Historical Society's headquarters.



In 1940, two and a half decades after his death, Arndt Stickles wrote the first and only biography of Buckner, *Borderland Knight*. This book did not just relate dates and facts of Buckner's life. Stickles also idolized Buckner just as Kentucky's cities and newspapers previous had in 1914. Stickles concluded the book with the flourish, "A review of his life convinces one that had there been an Arthurian band about a round table in the borderland in his day, where honor, truth, courtesy, and chivalry were the essence of everyday living, Simon Bolivar Buckner would have been a knight seated near

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<sup>46</sup> PastPerfect database notes from Kentucky Historical Society.

<sup>47</sup> Image from the Ferdinand Walker collection at the Kentucky Historical Society, Frankfort, KY.

the king's throne."<sup>48</sup> Even at the time of publication, Buckner had faded from American memory. This fact combined with the private nature of his letters and correspondence sent Buckner into the attic of Kentucky and American history.

In his death, Kentucky placed Simon Bolivar Buckner on a pedestal so high it appeared no one could ever equal his greatness. Any faults or blemishes on his life became erased when he took his last breath. This romantic view of Buckner mirrors the ending of the Civil War and Kentucky's willingness to forget the faults of the Confederacy and embrace the Lost Cause and the nation's hope for reconciliation. Buckner faded from Kentucky memory as the twentieth century wore on. With the passing of time, new heroes emerged and outright Confederate support waned, but his legacy and symbolism remained waiting to be uncovered again.

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<sup>48</sup> Stickles, 430.

## CONCLUSION

In 1940, F. Garvin Davenport reviewed Arndt Stickles' biography of Simon Bolivar Buckner and noted that, "Over half the book is devoted to the Civil War period. This emphasis may be justified on the grounds that the war years were the most critical in General Buckner's life."<sup>1</sup> This study of Buckner's career suggests that Davenport overemphasized the war years. Buckner's life did not end in 1865, but instead flourished and rebounded to new heights by the end of the century. He cultivated memories from the war to build himself a large following of both northerners and southerners. He died a hero in his home state and his passing garnered mourning throughout the United States. Their praise for Buckner's military merits, personal qualities, and significant friendships allowed Kentucky and the nation a distraction from the realities of the past and struggles with modernity.

At first, Buckner was just a mere soldier recently graduated from West Point in 1844. His career seemed set with the military. While at West Point, Buckner made friends with other cadets like Ulysses S. Grant. These friendships and his life with the army became further cemented by his participation in the Mexican War. Returning from war, Buckner continued to work at various military posts in the west. Eventually, he tried to move away from the army and into business, but the Civil War prevented this new career path from blooming. Kentucky needed Buckner to reform their militia and shape

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<sup>1</sup> F. Garvin Davenport, "Review of *Simon Bolivar Buckner: Borderland Knight* by Arndt Stickles," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 27 (Sept 1940): 296-297.



up the state's army before either the Union or the Confederacy decided the Commonwealth's fate. Events led Buckner to join with the Confederacy. By the end of the war, he received the rank of lieutenant general and fostered praise from many ordinary soldiers and southerners. This first half of Buckner's life as a soldier laid a base of influence based upon his traits as a prosperous, white Democrat, and high-ranking officer.

After 1865, Buckner needed to find a new purpose to life and rebuild from the Confederacy's defeat. Business ventures suited him, but these pursuits did not receive much public notice. Supporters felt he had a higher calling to politics and saw potential power in the memories he fostered as a Civil War veteran. They pushed him into Kentucky politics, and Buckner found more support than he imagined. His popularity in Kentucky drove him to be governor, a delegate for the state's constitutional convention, and run for a United States senate seat for his home state. Jo Ann O'Connor noted this paradox, "Simon Bolivar Buckner was a native Kentuckian who was elected governor of the state approximately twenty years after he had been accused of being a traitor by the state's pro-Union papers."<sup>2</sup> He symbolized stability and valor for a border state facing serious problems of finance and violence.

Buckner did not just rely on his Confederate sympathizers. He also came to realize the power of his connections with the North and Union generals. Ambrose Burnside helped him with his property in Chicago and Buckner visited Ulysses S. Grant during the former president's final days. These connections earned notice by many trying

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<sup>2</sup> Jo Ann O'Connor, "Kentucky Biographical Notebook, Simon Bolivar Buckner: Kentucky's Misunderstood Gentleman," *The Filson Club History Quarterly* 52 (1978): 363.

to believe that the nation could heal from the devastation of the Civil War. Buckner himself recognized the power of reunification. During Confederate Ben Hardin's funeral in 1884, the media reported that, "While the registration was going on some one suggested that a number of Federal veterans were present with a fraternal desire to take part in the ceremonies of the day, whereupon Gen. Simon Bolivar Buckner moved that all Federal soldiers present be invited to enroll their names and join in the funeral and reunion ceremonies."<sup>3</sup> In 1896, Buckner played to reunionist feelings by being the vice-presidential running mate for Union General George M. Palmer on the National Democratic Party ticket. They showed a united front of the Civil War against the backdrop of a Democratic Party splintering over currency issues based around the masses demands of financial reprieve from their government.

For decades, Buckner aligned himself with the Democratic Party. The party's policies favored the wealthy, white men in the United States and fit with Buckner's vision for America. As Kentucky's governor from 1887 to 1891, Buckner fought to maintain an economically stable state. In 1896, his belief in sound currency and fiscal responsibility prompted him to break away from Democrats. Demand from workers and farmers pushed his political party to adopt the currency policy of free silver to alleviate the economic hardships of the masses. Unable to comprehend a populist agenda, Buckner and Palmer sought to maintain the status quo in their new party as Gold Democrats. Buckner's older age and platform could not rally enough support, but his third-party changed the tides of the election to allow the Republicans to come out victorious, ushering in a new era for the national politics.

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<sup>3</sup> "Gen. Ben Hardin Helm: The Remains of the Illustrious Confederate Officer Brought Home to Rest," *Courier-Journal*, September 20, 1884.

Despite retiring from politics by 1900, Buckner retained his popularity into the twentieth century. In early 1914, Buckner's death at the age of ninety brought together all factions of his careers and influence. The media celebrated his accomplishments as both soldier and politician. In particular, Kentucky mourned his passing with grand celebrations. The narrative of his life and death touched on a variety of elements of late nineteenth century scholarship. The symbol of Buckner washed away the sins of the Civil War. He left the nation with an emblem of valor rather than a stain of war and slavery. Buckner cannot be classified into one subject field. He fits into the Commonwealth's politics and history, but also national politics as well.

Simon Bolivar Buckner's life crossed many divides. He managed to gain support from northerners and southerners, Union and Confederate generals, and Lost Cause believers and reunionists. Buckner represented the old guard of the citizens and politicians unprepared to deal with the new nation after Reconstruction. In 1909, Pierre De Pew wrote to Buckner. The general recently retired from the public life to enjoy his rural home Glen Lily in Hart County, Kentucky. De Pew wrote that, "Your long career as a soldier and statesman has been excellent in all respects. I am sorry that you were not longer in public office, because you deserved much more from Kentucky and the Nation."<sup>4</sup> Buckner received considerable praise throughout his life for his many accomplishments, but fell out of favor from historians.

To use De Pew's words, Buckner deserved more from history. He deserves to be remembered and not just for his surrender at Fort Donelson in 1862 or other Civil War battles. The borderland knight must be released from Stickles' cage and become The

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<sup>4</sup> "Pierre De Pew to Simon Bolivar Buckner (Sept 1, 1909)," Box 1, Folder 25, SBB collection, KHS.

Grey Eagle of Glen Lily. With new access to his life's documents, historians, Kentucky, and the nation can uncover Buckner and discover new perspectives on his life's achievements. Buckner's new historical life will help to fulfill the *Courier-Journal's* sentiment that, "He did not live in the past but in the present and future."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> "Gen. Simon Bolivar Buckner, Kentucky Soldier and Statesman, Yields in Battle with Death," *Courier-Journal*, January 9, 1914.

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