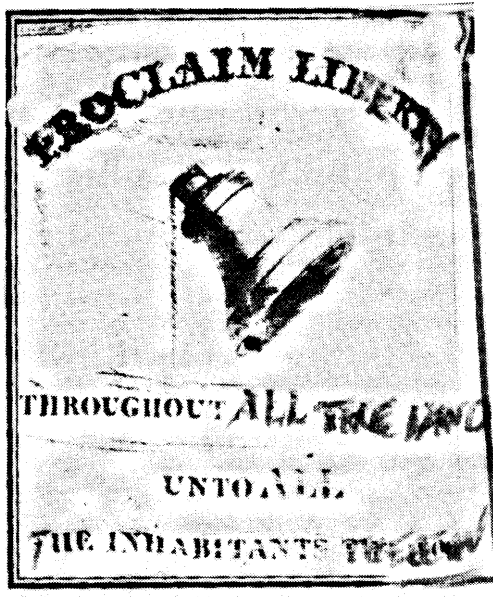


History and Truth – and Garrison

By Sterling A. Rachootin

History does have to be faithful to the facts, but history can be difficult to pin down. Propagandists have always known this; it's the reason they can manipulate and exploit history's elusive truths. Reshaping the past to serve various agendas- political, dramatic, aesthetic, or pious, is a time honored strategy. It was done by Homer; Shakespeare; most dramatically, Hollywood films in the 20th century; and politicians in the past, and right up into the present. David Irving, debunked historian (?), in 2000, maintained that genocide was not committed by the Nazis against the Jews, and it took a court in England to seek the truth and settle the matter.

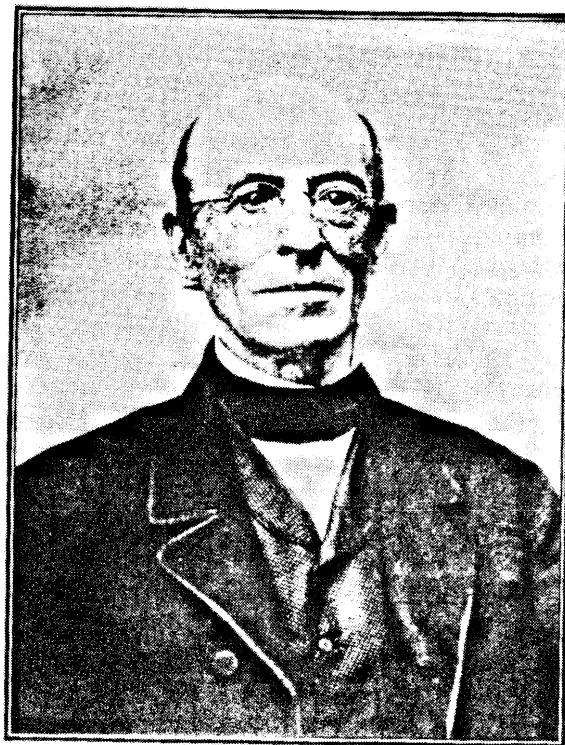


Anti-slavery banner that decorated the walls of many abolitionist meetings
which also found its way on to patriotic tokens.

Recently, I had the good fortune to hear the author, Henry Mayer, speak about his excellent book "All on Fire", at a local meeting of the Civil War Warriors in Los Angeles. This is an excellent biography of William Lloyd Garrison, one of the most able and outspoken abolitionists of the 19th century. Garrison epitomized the moral conscience of the early 19th century America dealing with the sin of slavery, just as Martin Luther King was the torch bearer for the Blacks in the 20th century. Garrison received a bad rap by most historians up till the present, being termed a radical, inflexible, rabble

rouser, extremist, and agitator abolitionist, who was responsible for slave uprisings, arson fires, and other crimes against the South.

In the American Heritage Picture History of the Civil War, 1960, page 10, we find this typical anti-Garrison quote, "...in the North, where a man who demands the abolition of slavery could comfort himself with the reflection that the financial loss which abolition would entail would, after all, be borne by somebody else - his neighbor to the South. In New England the fanatic William Lloyd Garrison opened a crusade denouncing slavery as a sin and slave owners as sinners." Southerners spoke of slavery as "The peculiar institution", this did not mean that it was strange, but that it was a local situation, and was not the business of outsiders. This concept goes hand in glove with the states' rights philosophy, that brought about secession and ushered in the U.S. Civil War.



Mathew Brady photo of William Lloyd Garrison – 1865

Garrison's weekly paper, "The Liberator", began in 1831 and continued weekly until December 1865, when the Civil War finally ended and with slavery finally outlawed by the inclusion in our Constitution of the 13th and 14th amendments. Andrew Jackson's Postmaster General Amos Kendall permitted abolitionist literature to be removed from the mails and burned. Garrison was a pacifist, believed in non violence, desired immediate abolishment of slavery with no payment to slave owners,

but instead payment to the slaves for the misery they endured as slaves. He desired full acceptance of Blacks into American society and violently opposed repatriation back to Africa, even though earlier he had favored repatriation as expressed by the American Colonization Society. He also was in favor of women's suffrage.

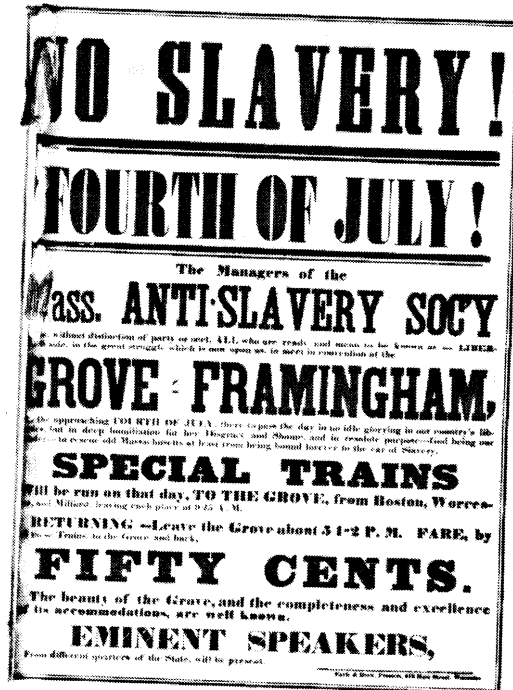
Garrison was so far ahead of his time, it is easy to understand why he was so maligned during his lifetime, but should he still be so considered? We must also understand just how racist America was at the time of the Civil War. Civilians and soldiers of the North were as racist as their counterparts in the South. Only a handful of states allowed Blacks to vote and none afforded them full equality before the law. In 1853, Illinois prohibited Blacks from entering the state. Four other northern states adopted similar measures. In many northern states Blacks could not vote, testify or sue in court, serve in the militia, or attend public schools. What was amazing was that Garrison refused to compromise the principle that the slave was a moral being and deserved full citizenship. The abolitionist emblem—a portrait of a slave in chains coupled with the motto, "Am I not a woman, and a sister?" was designed to shake up American morality. A male counterpart was also in use "Am I not a man and a brother?"



The famous anti-slavery proclamation first used by the British and later the American rendition showing the female figure and the awareness of women's rights.

On one occasion during a 4th of July celebration in Massachusetts, Garrison went so far as to burn a copy of the Constitution before a large audience because he felt, slavery not being addressed in that document was in effect permitting it to exist. Garrison felt that the Constitution did not follow the precepts of our Declaration of Independence, which stated, "All men are created equal...". It is

amazing that any Whites could rise above the pervasive prejudice of the times and so adamantly proclaim liberty for all, but miraculously some did. Even Lincoln did admit to his racism. Garrison opposed Lincoln much of the time, but by the election of 1864, Garrison came around to supporting Lincoln as he finally understood that war was the necessary evil to end slavery in America, even though pacifism was another of his beliefs, anti-slavery was the stronger of the two forces tugging at his conscience.



Abolitionist poster for the 4th of July meeting in 1854 where Garrison burned a copy of the Constitution.

Interestingly, Garrison was invited by Lincoln to attend the ceremony of the recapture of Fort Sumter at the close of the Civil War. I heartily recommend Henry Mayor's book "All on Fire". This book of over 700 pages will provide you with a new and different perspective on abolitionists, Garrison's inspiring quotes, America's religious revival and American racism.

There is a definite connection between Garrison, the abolitionist movement, anti-slavery and some Civil War tokens. Garrison does not appear on any Civil War token, but you can certainly make a case for many patriotic tokens supporting the abolitionist sentiment inspired by Garrison. The most obvious token is die 36, "Liberty and no Slavery". At many anti-slavery meetings were to be found posters and banners which touted the phrase, "Proclaim Liberty throughout all the land and

unto all the inhabitants therein". Dies 406 & 407 contain the first segment of that quote, and they certainly qualify as abolitionist inspired. Civil War patriotic token 190/432 could be another candidate. Die 160 is obviously Garrison inspired as it states, "Liberty for all". Dies 98 & 99 besides displaying the Indian Head devise have the words "Union and Liberty". A case can be made for the Liberty head dies that range from numbers 1 through 29. The liberty cap denotes freedom from slavery going back to the days of old Rome. It should be noted also in the flag series ranging from dies 203 to 214, that a liberty cap adorns the top of each flagpole, not an eagle. Dies 235 & 236 with their one single word "Liberty" are a good bet, as well as dies 294 & 295 with their single word, "Freedom". The anger and hostility that was created by the enforcement of the Fugitive Slave law no doubt resulted in so many of our Civil War tokens taking on the abolitionist point of view. The creation of the Emancipation Proclamation, which in effect finally targeted the slavery issue and gave credence to the abolitionist movement, provided a moral rationale for waging a civil war in America.

It is so easy to be duped, as in my own case when I first heard of the Boston Tea Party back in the 1930's, while in the 5th Grade, I marveled how the "brave" colonists, dressed as Indians defied the King of England. How these patriotic colonists boarded British ships in Boston Harbor, threw overboard some 340 chests of tea, bravely defending their rights as freedom loving citizens. Their rallying cry, "No taxation without representation" rang through the New England landscape. As I matured, a new perspective crept into my thought processes. While the French and Indian Wars did protect the colonies from French incursions, it proved to be very costly to the British. It doubled the national debt of England. Taxation was deemed the best way of defraying those expenses. Some colonists thought otherwise, especially those who were in the business of smuggling tea. Vast amounts of tea were being smuggled into Boston Harbor by enterprising New Englanders from the Caribbean. English tea with its tax was still far cheaper in price than the smuggled in tea, and the way to protect the smugglers' investment was to rid the area of competition. Think a moment about the following: Why did the Colonists disguise themselves as Indians? Did Indians drink tea? Was this another instance of casting blame on Redskins? Why didn't they just dress as Colonists? So much for the brave and Patriotic acts of Defiance practiced by the freedom loving New Englanders. What is needed in our high schools is a mandatory course in critical thinking, as well as one in our colleges.

Let us now take a sacred document and try to cast a little doubt in your mind, with The Declaration of Independence. "We hold these truths to be self evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness..." What beautiful words! How inspiring! Following are some takes on this central theme, illustrating distortions, biases, and viewpoints of differing groups.

* 56 traitors, some are fools, but most are shrewdly selfish and evil men. They are rebels against the King who has always protected them - so spoke the Tories, many of whom were forced to flee to Canada.

* 56 hypocrites, most are wealthy and all are White. They will do nothing to challenge the great evil of slavery - so thought many slaves and northern abolitionists.

* 56 patriots, who created the greatest nation the world has ever known. A nation committed to liberty, equality, and the rights of man. So spoke the wealthy, the landowners, and independents, but not the women, nor the Indians, and certainly not the Blacks.

* 56 troublemakers who didn't know enough to leave things as they were and maintain the status quo, so felt about one third of the colonists who were more concerned about eking out a living than involving themselves in politics.

Here we can see the admirers, detractors, the neutrals, and others envisioning the founder's lives to suit their own views of a changing American society. One cannot ignore the time frame in which these events occurred, and it is not fair to judge yesterday's world in terms of today's sophistication. But you must concede that much of what was just stated sounds logical and even plausible.

The Civil War is still a favorite topic for historians today. Robert E. Lee, who just a few years back was considered the greatest hero of the Confederacy, today is marked as the General who lost the Civil War for the South by many. Some maintain that he was a great tactician, but not a strategist. He could win individual battles, but should not have faced the stronger North in showdown battles, but should have used hit and run tactics, guerrilla warfare, against a North with its massive industrial base and much greater population.

Interpretations are continually being written and rewritten as we learn more and more. History is not embedded in concrete. As we uncover new information and facts, history must be reevaluated and rewritten. This is called revisionism. Revisionism is necessary. Revisionism is proper, however, we must remember that one error does not necessarily overturn an entire belief system, it only invalidates the mistake. Piltdown Man was thought to be the missing link to substantiate Darwin's theory of evolution. Piltdown Man was proved to be a hoax purposely perpetrated. This single error did not automatically invalidate Darwin's theory as the deniers of evolution desired. Beware the deniers, they are only concerned with having their agenda accepted to the detriment of truth.



DIE 36
"Liberty and
no slavery"



Dies 406 & 407
Proclaim liberty
throughout the land"



Die 190/432
The boldness of
the Liberty cap
is significant



Die 160
"Liberty for
all" minces
no words



Dies 98 & 99
Equates the
Republican call
for Union with Liberty



Dies 1 - 29
The liberty cap
denoting absence
of slavery



Dies 235 & 236
"Liberty" possible
reference to servitude



Dies 294 & 295
"Freedom" stronger
word for abolishing
slavery

Americans come from a long tradition of questioning authority. It is part of our history and the nature of democracy. We must continually revise, update, and permit changes where changes need to be made. Heraclitus, the Greek philosopher, said it best when he said, "You cannot step into the same river twice". Our world is in a constant state of flux, nothing stays the

same. The only constant is change.

The door to history must never be closed, but, must remain slightly ajar, so that new evidence as it is uncovered, may be included in our field of knowledge. It is also true that for some situations we don't have answers at all, and it is even possible that we may never have answers for some items, but that does not mean that history must be invalidated. Searching, investigating, speculation, and reassessment must continue. History is no less important than the process of minting or the die varieties of a particular die for articles in our journal. I find fascination in observing which of our national heroes were honored on our Civil War tokens as well as which of our heroes were not so honored. What purpose was served by quoting some slogans, while other very important ones were ignored? Every Civil War token has a story to tell, which ones are you going to research, and decipher for our edification, so we may appreciate and enjoy our tokens that much more?

This article was taken from “*The Civil War Token Journal*”; Fall 2001, Volume 35, Number 3