

Guides Gazette

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Joseph Hooker By Julia Bloom

In front of the State House is a large equestrian statue of General Joseph Hooker, the only Massachusetts General who led the Army during the Civil War.

While he is erroneously known today as having let prostitutes into Army camps to entertain the soldiers, Hooker is a more complicated and fascinating figure than many know.



Joseph Hooker was born on November 14th, 1814, in Hadley, Massachusetts. He was the descendent of an English family that had lived in New England since the 1600's, and the grandson of a Captain who served in the Continental Army during the Revolutionary War. He studied at Hopkins Academy, and in 1833 entered West Point Military Academy, where he did well in his studies, but was hindered by his outspoken and impulsive manner. After graduating in 1837, Hooker served with the 1st Artillery in the Seminole Wars in Florida, on the Canadian border, and in northern Maine when tensions arose between the United States and Canada.

When the Mexican-American War began on May 13th, 1846, Hooker was eager to gain a staff appointment under a General fighting in the conflict, with an eye toward winning military glory and a higher position. In July 1846 Hooker was appointed to the staff of General Persifor F. Smith, who led a brigade in Texas. During the war Hooker worked as a staff member for many Generals while winning praise for his bravery and relentlessness in battle, but was irritated to work for superiors who were political appointments with little military experience. By the end of the war in January 1847 Hooker had been brevetted three times for bravery, earning him the rank of lieutenant colonel,

and had gained significant experience with managing armies in combat. In November 1848 he was appointed adjutant general of the Pacific Division, and moved to Sonoma, California.

Hooker found his peacetime position in the west unsatisfying, with few threats to public safety and poor wages. He eased his boredom by drinking and gambling in local taverns, and buying land for a farm that was largely unproductive. In February 1853 he resigned from the Army and went into politics, winning small offices like Superintendent of Roads, and supporting Stephen Douglas in the 1860 Presidential Elections. With the start of the Civil War in April 1861, Hooker organized a volunteer California regiment, eager to return to military life, but found it would not be sent east to the heat of the fighting. After acquiring a loan of \$1000 from a friend, Hooker left California on May 21st, 1861, to try to win a military position in Washington DC.

In Washington, Hooker initially ran into problems gaining a commission, as enemies he'd made in the Army sidelined his promotion. After speaking directly with President Abraham Lincoln, Hooker was commissioned a Brigadier General on August 6th, 1861, and was assigned to command four brigades under General George McClellan. That fall Hooker was sent to southern Maryland to guard the Potomac River, but he was irritated by the uneventful post and McClellan's cautious attitude. In April 1862 Hooker and his men were shipped south in the Peninsula Campaign, an effort to take the Confederate capital of Richmond, Virginia via the Virginia Peninsula. Hooker participated in the battle of Williamsburg, where his brigade was involved in the heat of the fighting, and gained the nickname "Fighting Joe Hooker" due to a newspaper headline. Although Hooker disliked this nickname, it stuck with him for the rest of his military career. Hooker also began openly criticising his superior officers for using strategies he thought were flawed, which would hinder him in the future. That summer the Army of the Potomac fought a largely successful campaign in Virginia, but in early August the cautious McClellan ordered the army to

withdraw, enraging Hooker. During the Battle of Antietam Hooker was wounded, and he angled for the position of commanding General during his recovery. In November McClellan was replaced by General Ambrose E. Burnside, but Hooker quickly became frustrated by his badly thought out strategies, especially after the disastrous Battle of Fredericksburg led to heavy Union casualties. Hooker lambasted Burnside, telling a reporter that only if the country was led by a dictator would the army gain victories. On January 25th, 1863, Hooker was appointed commanding General of the Army, with Lincoln telling him in a letter that "what I now ask of you is military success, and I will risk the dictatorship."

Hooker eagerly took command, ensuring his army was well supplied and trained while creating a system of badges to identify various corps and brigades. That April the army crossed the Potomac river to start Hooker's aggressive campaign against the south. The first fight of the campaign was the Battle of Chancellorsville, but Hooker bungled it by falling into self doubt when the enemy did not act according to his plan, and ordering his troops to pull back from a strategic position. Hooker's miscalculations and doubts during the three day battle allowed the smaller Confederate army to defeat his troops and force them to retreat north. The government and public were disappointed in Hooker after the loss, though he largely placed the blame on other Generals. That summer the Confederate army started an invasion of the North, but when Hooker asked his superior, General Henry Halleck for support in checking the advance, Halleck refused due to an old grudge against Hooker. After many fruitless attempts to get any help from the Army, Hooker resigned from his position in frustration. On June 28th, 1863, Hooker turned over command to General George Meade.

Back in Washington, Hooker angled for any military position he could get, and that September he was put in command of the Eleventh and Twelfth Corps when they were shipped to Tennessee to support the embattled Army of the Cumberland. Although he performed well in his new position, his

commanding Generals disliked his impulsiveness and criticism. General William T. Sherman in particular developed a mutual grudge against Hooker, and disparaged the work of his corps. When Hooker was denied a key promotion during the Atlanta campaign, he again resigned his position, leaving on July 29th, 1864.

Hooker was placed as head of the Army's Northern Department until the end of the war, and was brevetted as Major General that August. On October 3rd, 1865 he married Olivia Grosbeck, but suffered a stroke a month later that left him partially paralyzed. After his wife died due to poor health in 1868, Hooker retired from the army, ending his military career. Hooker died on October 31st, 1879, and is buried next to his wife in Spring Grove Cemetery in Cincinnati. He was a consummate soldier with a mercurial character who is often overlooked in the history of the Civil War, but made an important contribution to Massachusetts military history.



Joseph Hooker Statue

The Year 2021 in Review

By Mary Rinehart



As we continued into the second year of the pandemic, the legislature used extreme caution and kept the

State House closed to the public for the whole of 2021. Secretary Galvin arranged for the State House Tours Division to provide outside tours at the beginning

of April with a grand kickoff press conference at the start of Harborfest in early July. The spring and summer had extreme weather conditions ranging from cool and rainy to excessive heat, but our guides handled the situation in stride. All tours were scheduled in advance and were conducted from Ashburton Park. We were able to have a reduced Junior Volunteer Program that allowed us to have greeters out on Beacon Street every day to advertise and assist visitors to take a tour of the exterior of the state capitol. We had several school groups and by December we even had two concert groups who performed outside and enjoyed the exterior tours with our wonderful staff! When not conducting tours our staff has been busy adding interesting content to our website. During the summer we had visitors from across the country – Illinois, California, Indiana, Arizona, Florida, Alabama, Louisiana, Oregon, Connecticut and New York are a few of the places recorded by the guides. The approximate total visitation for the year was just under 1,500 visitors. We miss the Doric Docents and hope that 2022 will bring us back to a more normal schedule!

Massachusetts Eccentrics

By Julia Bloom

Massachusetts history is full of important figures who shaped the early United States and are well known even today. It also has its share of eccentric figures who broke the mold through their odd traits and behavior, but who made their own unique contributions to the state. Today I will cover two of these eccentric figures: Timothy Dexter and Daniel Pratt Junior.

Timothy Dexter was born in Malden, Massachusetts on January 22nd, 1747. He left school at a young age, and was apprenticed to a leatherworker, moving to Charlestown Massachusetts when he was 21 to start his own business. There he married the wealthy widow Elizabeth Frothingham in 1769, and began a quest to enter the high social circles of his neighbors, future Massachusetts Governor John Hancock and Thomas Russell, the richest man in Boston at the

time. Hoping a political career would improve his status, Dexter repeatedly petitioned the Malden Town Council for a position, until they appointed him the town's "Informer of Deer," despite the fact that no deer had been seen in the area in years. Despite his eccentricities, Dexter was a shrewd businessman, known for pursuing odd and unorthodox schemes that still garnered him huge profits, and allowing him to corner the market on commodities before demand for them spiked. At the end of the Revolutionary War the Continental Dollars that Congress had produced as currency were massively undervalued due to overprinting and speculation. Hancock and Russell began to buy back Continentals to restore popular faith in government, and Dexter emulated them to an extreme, using nearly all his savings to buy up a large supply of the worthless dollars. In a stroke of luck, when the US Constitution was ratified in 1789, Congress offered to trade the Dollars for Treasury Bonds worth 1% of their face value. With his large stockpile of Continentals, Dexter was able to gain an enormous profit for little effort. His other unconventional business dealings, including selling warming pans and stray cats to the Caribbean, also ended in financial success.



[Image: Timothy Dexter]

Using his wealth, Dexter built a large mansion in Newburyport surrounded by several wooden statues of famous historical men, including George Washington and Thomas Jefferson. One of these statues was of Dexter himself, with the inscription "I am the first in the East, the first in the West, and the Greatest Philosopher in the known world." He also granted himself the title "Lord Ti-

mothy Dexter,” which he used until his death, and held many wild parties inside the estate. Despite his wealth and desire for social standing, Dexter was mocked and dismissed by influential members of society, and despised for his narcissistic manner, rude behavior, and fierce temper. In 1797, Dexter published the book “A Pickle for the Knowing Ones,” expressing his opinions on multiple subjects with no punctuation, capitalization, and with multiple spelling and grammar errors. Despite his desire to be buried in an elaborate tomb he built on his estate, Dexter was laid to rest in Old Burial Hill Cemetery in Marblehead. He died on October 23rd, 1806, and is remembered as an eccentric New England character who never found the place in high society he sought, and who was propelled by the desire to turn the tables on those who mocked him. His mansion, known today as the Dexter House, became a hotel after his death, and most of the wooden sculptures around it were blown down in a 1815 storm, with those remaining sold off for cheap. In 1984 William Quill, a psychology professor at Northeastern University, purchased the property for restoration. Though the building was heavily damaged in a 1988 fire, Quill and his family have since rebuilt the house, and it stands today as a private residence.

Daniel Pratt Junior was born on April 11th, 1809 in the Prattville neighborhood of Chelsea, Massachusetts. Although he initially trained as a carpenter, he was subject to mental illness and abandoned that trade to become a traveling lecturer, speaking at meeting halls and churches across the country on various topics beginning in 1851. He soon adopted the nickname “The Great American Traveller,” and published his autobiography, “The Autobiography of Daniel Pratt, Jr. A.A.S of Boston” in 1855, and an illustrated newspaper, “The Pictorial Gridiron” in 1854, which discussed political matters of the day in a rambling style. His lectures tended to center around specific topics, including a theory of “Equilibrium,” “The Four Kingdoms,” “The Harmony of the Human Mind,” the solar system, and

“The Vocabulabratory of the World’s History.” Pratt would often discuss politics on a regular basis, a practice that was considered improper at the time, and supported the abolitionist and suffrage movements, speaking to both Black and white audiences. He also was a Presidential candidate every four years from 1852 until his death, as candidates could be declared by public approval at the time, and his listeners sometimes “nominated” him as a joke. Pratt never won an election, and when Lincoln won his second term, he believed the election had been stolen from him by his rivals.



[Image: Daniel Pratt Jr., Courtesy Boston Athenaeum]

Pratt was a popular speaker at New England colleges, with the students seeing him as great entertainment, subjecting him to laughter and pranks. He was also known to attend private meetings of abolitionist, suffrage, and other groups uninvited in order to deliver grandiose and rambling speeches, punctuated by poems and songs he wrote himself. Pratt made his living exclusively off donations from his lecture circuit, but was often subject to abuse and mistreatment from audiences who saw him as an acceptable target or a joke. Towards the end of his life newspapers that had previously praised Pratt’s speeches now saw him as annoying, and he had trouble making ends meet. Pratt died in Boston on June 21st 1887 and is remembered as a charismatic figure who attracted both scorn and admiration. A poem in his honor, likely composed by Pratt himself, goes “There never was nor ever will be/ such a mighty man to stand like thee. I say, most magnificent Daniel Pratt/Above the throne where Plato sat!”