

CANAWLERS AT REST

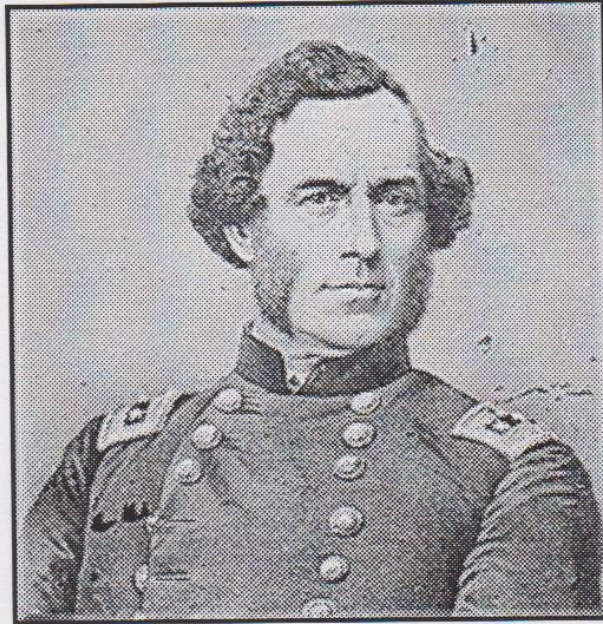
MAJOR GENERAL JAMES BLAIR STEEDMAN

b. July 29, 1817

d. October 8, 1883

By Carolyn Schmidt

Photo courtesy Hist. Of the City of Toledo and Lucas Co.



James Blair Steedman was born on July 29, 1817, in Chillisquaque Township, Northumberland County, Pennsylvania. He was the eldest of three children born to parents from Scotland. They died when he was 13 years old from a scarlet fever epidemic. Finding himself in charge of his sister and brother he had little time for formal education. He found work and by age 15 was apprenticed in the office of the **Lewisburg Democrat** in Pennsylvania as a type setter. After two years he moved to Louisville, KY, where he worked at printing for awhile on the **Louisville Journal**. Fairly soon he became caught up in the independence movement in Texas and joined General Sam. Houston's campaign.

When James returned to Pennsylvania, he was employed on the Public Works and ran a gang of canal workers. He followed the canal boom west to Napoleon, OH, in 1838. After failing to obtain a canal contract, he once again became involved with the newspaper business and established the **Northwestern Democrat** at age 21.

James married Miranda Stiles in 1838 in Napoleon, OH. She was from New Jersey. Her sister Malvina Stiles was married to Elijah Dodd. The two men applied for and were awarded contracts to build a section of the (Miami) Wabash & Erie Canal near Waterville, OH. James later helped build the Toledo, Wabash and Western Railroad while publishing his newspaper.

At age 24 James ran as Representative to the Ohio State Legislature but was defeated. He then served as Supervisor in Waterville Township road district #4.

In 1847-48 James served two terms in the Ohio House of Representatives. But he caught "gold fever" and was diverted from politics. In 1849 he and a party of Ohioans traveled overland to California in search of it. Elijah Dodd protected his family while he was away. He stayed a year and then returned to Ohio. In 1850 Dodd sold River Tract #39 (Roche de Boeuf farm) to James, who made it his home.

In 1852 James was elected a member of the Board of Public Works and re-elected to that position again in 1855. Most of the time he served as President of the Board. He was chosen to be the Congressional Printer in December of 1857.

In 1857 James was elected to the office of Major-General of the Fifth Division, Ohio, Militia. He still held that position when the Civil War broke out. That same year and until 1861 he was the Editor of the **Toledo Times**. In 1859 he was admitted to the Bar and practiced as an Attorney-at-law in Toledo.

James was a member of the Democratic National Convention held at Charleston, S.C., in 1860. There he began working with friends of Stephen A. Douglas. At a later Convention held in Baltimore that year, he took part in the independent nomination of Douglas for President of the United States. The same year James ran against James M. Ashley (Republican) in the Toledo District as a Democratic candidate for Congress. Ashley probably won because of James' hands-off view of slavery.

At the opening of the Civil War at Fort Sumter, James was said to have stood on the hay scales on the

Public Square in Waterville telling everyone to support the government. James enlisted on April 25, 1861. He co-operated with the government by raising and organizing the 14th Ohio Volunteer Infantry in 9 days. It was composed of men from Toledo and other northwest Ohio towns. He was chosen Colonel. He and his men were some of the earliest troops to move into Confederate territory and occupied Parkersburg. On May 27 they moved out and covered the distance of 80 miles to Clarksburg in four days and three nights. They repaired a bridge. The first land battle they fought was at Phillippi, in western Virginia. Early that June they routed 2,000 Confederates and were the first Ohio regiment to unfurl its colors in battle.

After serving for three months James and his men returned to Toledo where they received a hero's welcome. This was short lived as they were mustered once more on August 16, 1861, to serve a three year term this time. By October they were fighting again. In 1862 James took part in the Battle of Mill Springs and marched on Corinth, Mississippi. He remained with the regiment until he was promoted and made Brigadier-General on July 16-17, 1862. (sources vary on date)

On October 9, 1862, James led his brigade in the Battle of Perryville, KY. For this he received special recognition from General Buell. He also took part in the battle at Stone River. He commanded a Division in the Tullahoma campaign, where he was complimented by General Thomas.

James was assigned to command the First Division of the Reserve Corps under Major-General Gordon Granger in July 1863. The division moved to Chattanooga where it was in charge of Red House Bridge. On September 20, the second day of Battle at Chickamauga, James' division under the command of General Granger made a successful march to support General Thomas against the South's Generals Bragg and Longstreet. During this march General James Steedman played a conspicuous and effective part in the wise judgment and prompt action of General Granger. James' activity and courage and the heroic service of his command led to his promotion to the rank of Major-General on April 20, 1864. He was nicknamed "Old Chickamauga" by his troops.

It is said that when Granger saw Steedman about to go into battle he asked, "...if anything should happen to you, is there anything you would like to have me do in case of death?" James answered, "If I fail in the fight, please see that I get a decent burial, and that my name is spelled correctly in the newspapers." This request is not as unusual as it may seem. Steedman was actually pronounced Steadman and many times was spelled that way.

Under James' leadership 5,200 troops were rushed from Chattanooga to Nashville as the Confederates were approaching. Following orders, James drove the Confederates back over half a mile and captured two lines of earthworks. This was a great Union victory. James played a prominent role in the Atlanta Campaign, where he was assigned the commander of the District of Etowah when General Sherman started his "March to the Sea."

At the end of the Civil War in April 1865, James was assigned the Military Commander (governor) of the State of Georgia. Only one other non-West Pointer was named to this position. He also took part in other postwar administrative duties. He resigned his volunteer commission on either July 19 or August 18, 1866 according to different sources.

One historian notes the James was on specially favorable terms with President Johnson through their associations during the Civil War in Kentucky and Tennessee. If Johnson had had the ability to vacate the office then held by Edwin M. Stanton, James would probably have become Secretary of War. Instead James was appointed the Collector of Internal Revenue for the New Orleans District during reconstruction. In January 1869 he resigned that office.

James returned to Toledo and lived at the corner of Superior St. and Jefferson Ave. Acting as Editor of the **Northern Ohio Democrat**, he continued in this position until his death. After he moved from the house sometime around 1872-73 it was used commercially. Later it was moved to 424 Eleventh Street and the Commodore Perry Hotel built at its old site.

In 1872 his wife of 34 years, Miranda Stiles Steedman, passed away. She, their only son Lewis Cass Steedman (1849-1876) and his wife Edith K. Steedman (1852-1877) are all buried in Waterville's Wakeman Cemetery. James was left with two young grandchildren who were made his wards.

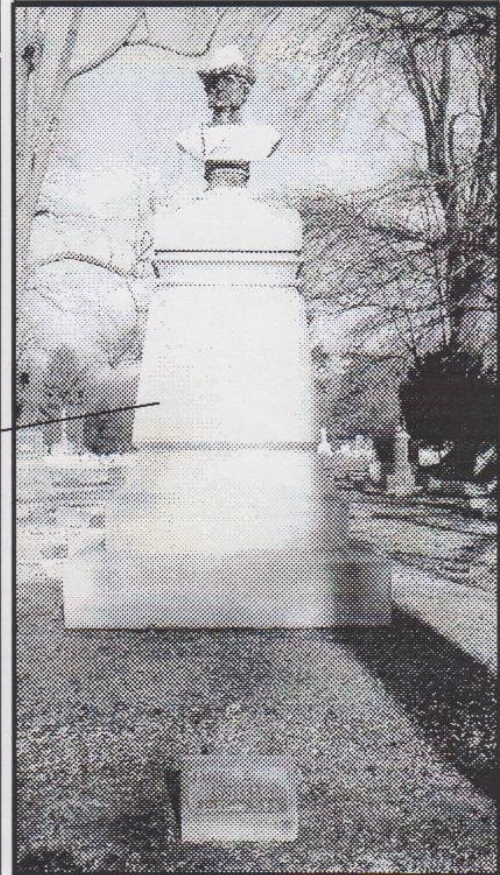
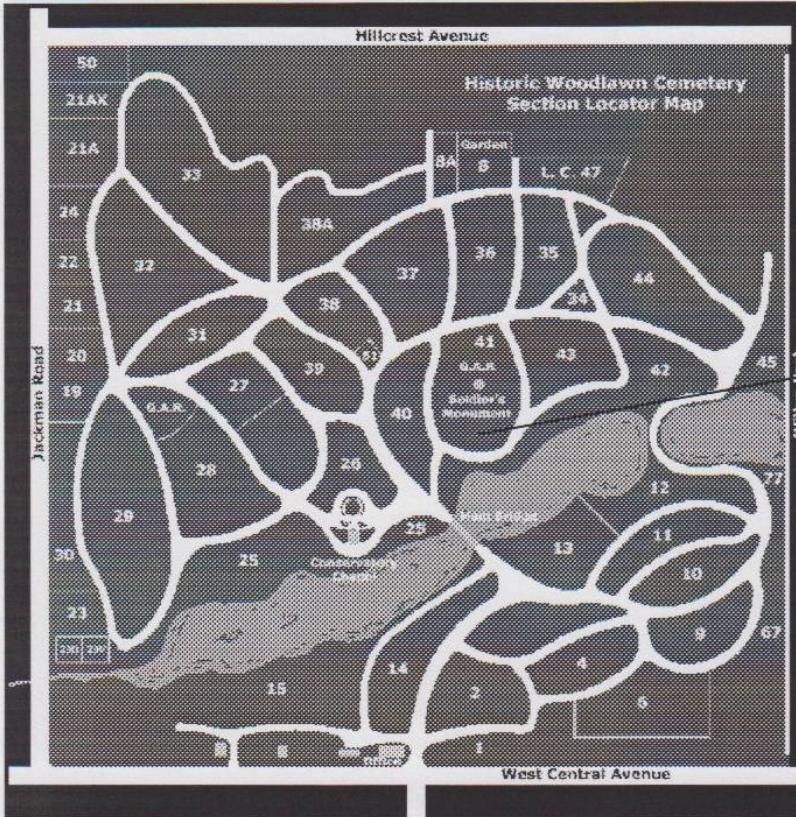
James remarried a lady who had caught his attention by knocking down someone who yelled HURRAY FOR JEFF DAVIS! His second wife was Rosa Barr.

In 1874 James was elected a member of the State Constitutional Convention. In 1876 James tried marriage for the third time. A handsome, dashing-looking man at age 61, he wed 16 year old Margaret Gildea. They had three children: Rebecca Blair, Mary Moore and Samuel J. Tilden Steedman. Margaret died in 1948.

James was a Senator from the Toledo District in

James Blair Steedman's monument and grave stone are in Section 41, Lot 190, Grave 1 of Woodlawn Cemetery in Toledo, OH. This is very near the G. A. R. Soldier's Monument. The cemetery is located at the end of Auburn Avenue at West Central Avenue.

This monument and grave stone for Major-General James Blair Steedman are in Toledo's Woodlawn Cemetery. Photo by Bob Schmidt



1877, a delegate to the Democratic National Convention in 1880 and a candidate for State Senator in 1881, but was not elected. The last public position he held was Chief of Toledo Police to which he was elected in May 1883.

A one time Commander of the Grand Army of the Republic for Ohio, James played a prominent role in public life for about 40 years. He was an exceptional leader in whatever he did.

James B. Steedman died from pneumonia on October 8, 1883 at Toledo. He was 66 years old. He left behind a widow, children and grandchildren. A huge number of people from all walks of life including representatives from the Grand Army of the Republic and City authorities attended his funeral. He was laid to rest in Section 41, Lot 190, Grave 1 of Woodlawn Cemetery in Toledo.

A bronze bust of James B. Steedman perched on top of a seven-foot-high pedestal stands at his gravesite near the Lucas County Civil War monument in

Woodlawn Cemetery. A small stone marks his grave.

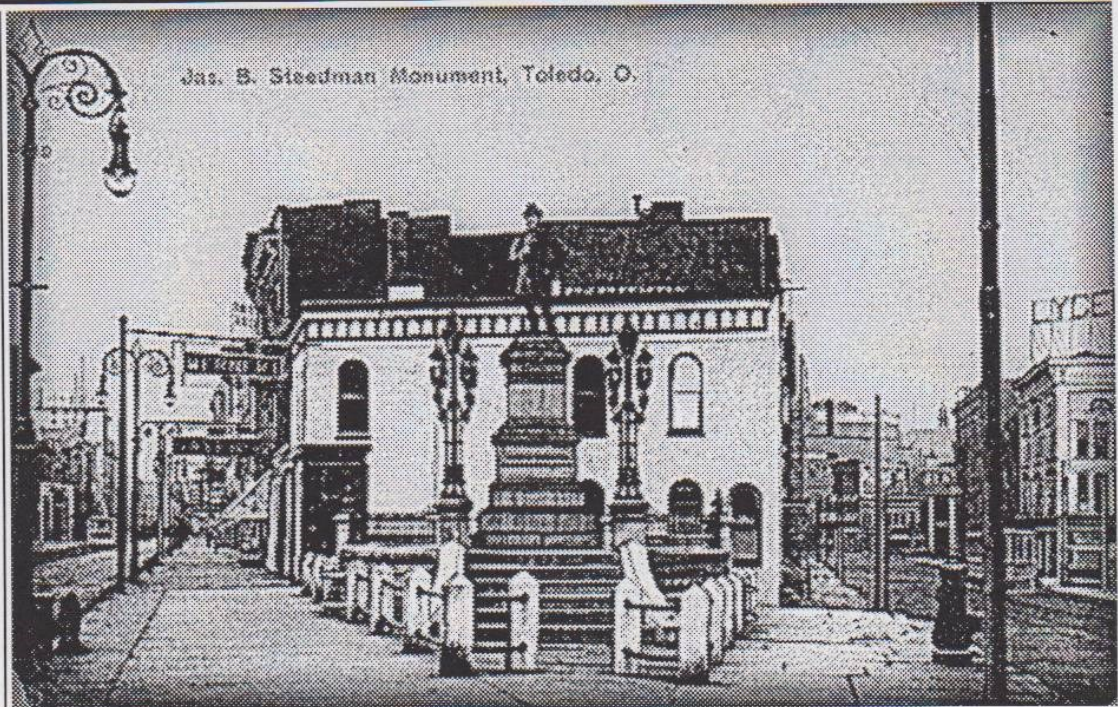
William J. Finlay, a brewer who lived in Toledo and was a close friend, suggested erecting a monument in James' honor at St. Clair Place where Summit and St. Clair Streets joined. The Toledo City Council set aside the land for the statue and changed the site name to Finlay Place. The statue cost around \$25,000.

General Steedman's bronze statue is the work of Alexander Doyle (1857-1922), who was born in Steubenville, OH.; went to live in Italy with his family when he was nine; and studied sculpture in Florence and Rome before returning to the U.S. in 1878.

The pedestal was put in place in August 1886 and topped by the statue in March 1887. Public ceremonies were held on May 26, 1887 to unveil the monument. It is made up of the following four parts:

Base: Vermont marble, 9 feet square, sets in the center of a terrace
Die: Three sides bear these inscriptions: "JAMES B.

Top: Finlay's monument to James Blair Steedman as it appeared on an old postcard from around 1909-1915.



Bottom: The statue now stands in Jamie Farr Park.
Photo by Bob Schmidt

STEEDMAN, Major-General, U.S.V., "Born 1817, Died 1883," and "Erected by W. J. Finlay"

Shaft: Four sides bear the words "Chickamauga," "Carrick's Ford," "Perryville," and "Nashville" referring to battles in which he participated

Statue: A cap is on top of the shaft on which stands the bronze statue of General Steedman having just dismounted with a field-glass in his hand. The monument is 26 feet high.

In 1920 someone proposed building a public restroom beneath the statue. Steedman's widow led an outraged delegation and successfully kept the restroom from being built. The statue was then moved to Riverside Park, but in the late 1970s it was rammed by a speeding motorist, who failed to make the turn. General Steedman was knocked off the base and was damaged extensively. After several years of repairs the statue was put back into place. Today Jamie Farr Park surrounds the monument.

Sources:

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