Dark Fields of the Republic: Alexander Gardner Photographs, 1859–1872

His photographs have “a terrible distinctness.” So wrote the *New York Times* about the work of trailblazing photographer Alexander Gardner (1821–1882). In a career spanning the critical years of the nineteenth century, Gardner created images that documented the crisis of the Union, the Civil War, the United States’ expansion into the western territories, and the beginnings of the Indian Wars.

As one of a pioneering generation of American photographers, Gardner helped revolutionize photography, both in his mastery of techniques and by recognizing that the camera’s eye could be fluid and mobile. In addition to creating portraits of leaders and generals—he was Abraham Lincoln’s favorite photographer—Gardner followed the Union army, taking indelible images of battlefields and military campaigning. His battlefield photographs—including those of the newly dead—created a public sensation, contributing to the change under way in American culture from romanticism to realism, a realism that was the hallmark of his work.

At war’s end, Gardner went west. Fascinated, like many artists, by American Indians, he took a series of stunning images of the western tribes, setting set these figures in their native grounds: these photographs are the pictorial evocation of the seemingly limitless western land and sky. He also took photographs of the Indians in Washington, D.C., where they traveled to negotiate preservation of their way of life. Gardner’s portraits of Native Americans are dignified likenesses of a resistant people.

In their documentary clarity and startling precision, Alexander Gardner’s photographs—taken in the studio, on battlefields, and in the western territories—are a summons back into a darkly turbulent period in American history.
Unless otherwise noted, all photographs are by Alexander Gardner.
This exhibition has been made possible through the generous support of the leadership committee for “Dark Fields of the Republic: Alexander Gardner Photographs, 1859–1872.”

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Section 1

“And the War Came”: 1859–62

The beginnings of American photography are indelibly associated with the name of Mathew Brady. Yet even as Brady developed his own business with a stable of photographers, including Alexander Gardner, others were also contributing to the development of photography as both an art form and a viable business. The nation’s capital attracted photographers such as John Plumbe who made a living taking images of the “good and the great” and landmarks of the national government. If the 1840s were the take-off stage of American photography, in which alliances were formed and the new media was refined, the Civil War galvanized photography, as it did all of American culture. Not only were portraits of the nation’s leaders in demand, but photographers went out into the field to document the campaigns and battle sites of the war. It was in this context, first as an employee of Brady and then splitting off on his own after the success of his Antietam images, that the Scots-born Alexander Gardner began his American career.
Gardner's Photographic Art Gallery

Unidentified artist

Engraving, c. 1860–70

National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution; gift of George S. Whiteley IV
James Duncan Graham 1799–1865

James Duncan Graham was a Virginia-born army officer who had graduated from West Point in 1817 and served on several surveying and scientific expeditions to the American West. He later became one of the founders of the army’s topographical section and was valued for his mapmaking skills.

Welsh-born photographer John Plumbe Jr. helped demonstrate the commercial viability of photography by establishing a network of daguerreian galleries throughout the country, including one in Washington, D.C. (1844). He specialized in portraits of government officials, such as this one of Graham, and landmarks, taking the first image of the U.S. Capitol. Plumbe was fascinated by the American West, which may have been another connection between him and Graham.

Attributed to John Plumbe Jr. (1809–1857)

Three-quarter-plate daguerreotype, c. 1845

National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution
Mathew Brady 1823(?)–1896

Juliet (“Julia”) Handy Brady 1822–1887

Mrs. Haggerty lifedates unknown

This portrait of Mathew Brady, his wife Juliet, and Brady’s sister Mrs. Haggerty was probably taken about the time of Brady’s marriage. Brady’s name has become synonymous in America with the daguerreotype and early American photography, to the point that early photographic images are almost automatically assumed to be by Brady. In the 1850s, he was at the midpoint of his career, having established himself both artistically and commercially as a photographer. By 1858 he would open a studio in Washington, to be managed by Alexander Gardner, possibly with money provided by Brady’s wife’s family.

Unidentified artist at the Mathew Brady Studio (active 1844–94)

Quarter-plate daguerreotype, c. 1851

National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution
Robert Mills 1781–1855

Eliza Barnwell Smith Mills 1784–1862

One of the first great American architects, Robert Mills counted among his buildings the one you are now standing in, constructed to house the Patent Office. Born in South Carolina, Mills was trained in Philadelphia by Benjamin Henry Latrobe and soon established a thriving practice in cities on the East Coast, especially Philadelphia, Charleston, and Washington. He married Eliza Barnwell Smith in 1808. By 1851 he was serving as the federal government’s de facto architect of federal buildings.

Jesse H. Whitehurst was one of the South’s most successful daguerreotypists, opening his first gallery in Norfolk, Virginia, in 1843.

Jesse H. Whitehurst (1819–1875)

Half-plate daguerreotype, c. 1851

National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution; gift of Richard Evans
John C. Calhoun  1782–1850

This lithograph was part of a series published by Charles Lester titled the *Gallery of Illustrious Americans*. Containing twenty-four lithographs based on photographs by Mathew Brady, the series was sold via subscription. The subjects were all men of note, such as President Zachary Taylor and other leading politicians, including the fire-eating South Carolinian John C. Calhoun. Calhoun’s career had traversed the spectrum of antebellum American politics, from his fervent nationalism during the War of 1812 to his full-throated advocacy of nullification and states’ rights in the 1830s and 1840s. By 1849 he was laying the theoretical and political justification for southern secession over what he called the conspiracy to abolish slavery. He died during the negotiations over the Compromise of 1850, in which he held the position that there could be no interference in southern institutions.

Mathew Brady made the original photograph in 1848–49, but Calhoun had probably passed away before this lithograph was made.

Francis D’Avignon (1814–c. 1871), after Mathew Brady

Lithograph, 1850

National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution
AG006

Billy Bowlegs  1810–1864

This portrait of Seminole Indian chief Billy Bowlegs (also known as Holata Micco) shows the American fascination with portraying American Indians. Bowlegs was one of the last, most resistant Seminole War leaders, fighting in both the Second and Third Seminole Wars. Hostilities concluded in 1842 but broke out again in 1855 when the U.S. Army moved into Bowlegs’s territory in Florida. He responded by waging guerrilla warfare. Subdued by 1858, he and his followers were removed west of Arkansas, where he became a prominent landowner. In moving west, Bowlegs passed through New Orleans, where John Hawley Clarke took the original version of this portrait. Clarke had established a studio in that city by 1856.

McClees and Vannerson Studio (active 1857–60), after John Hawley Clarke

Salted paper print, 1858

National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution
James Buchanan is considered one of the least successful U.S. presidents because of his passive and hapless handling of the sectional crisis at the end of the 1850s. A Pennsylvanian, he was nonetheless pro-southern, and his candidacy for the presidency in 1856 contributed to the breakdown of the existing national parties into sectional entities. Elected with strong southern support, Buchanan could not defuse the growing crisis over slavery in the territories, especially in “Bleeding” Kansas, as he took an overly legalistic approach to a problem that had inflamed the populace. At its 1860 convention, the Democratic Party broke into northern and southern wings on the slavery question, with Stephen Douglas defeating Buchanan for the nomination. During the secession winter following Abraham Lincoln’s election, Buchanan dithered as both sections prepared for war.

McClees and Vannerson Studio (active 1857–60)
Salted paper print, c. 1859
National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution; gift of Roger F. Shultis
Born in Maryland, Roger Taney was a lawyer, politician, and the fifth chief justice of the U.S. Supreme Court. During the Court’s hearing of *Dred Scott v. Sandford* (1857) he described African Americans “as so far inferior, that they had no rights which the white man was bound to respect.” The Court, in a seven-to-two majority, rejected the slave Dred Scott’s appeal for freedom because blacks, free or slave, were “not included, and were not intended to be included, under the word ‘citizens’ in the Constitution.” The Court also rejected Congress’ right to restrict the expansion of slavery into new territories. This made slavery constitutional by supporting the southern opinion that slaves were property and thus beyond the control of Congress. It also nullified the Missouri Compromise, polarized opinions in the North and South, divided the Democratic Party, and radicalized the Republican Party.

Jesse H. Whitehurst (1819–1875)

Salted paper print, c. 1857

National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution
When Mathew Brady launched his career as a photographer in 1844, it was as a maker of daguerreotypes—the first commercially viable form of photography. Although Brady and other American photographers remained devoted practitioners of this direct-positive process until the mid-1850s, their European counterparts were focusing on advancements in the field of negative/positive photography. A breakthrough came in 1851 when Englishman Frederick Scott Archer produced a glass-plate negative with a light-sensitive collodion emulsion. Within a few years, photographers in Britain and Europe were creating large-scale glass-plate negatives capable of yielding seemingly infinite quantities of photographic prints. Eager to acquire this capability for his own studio, Brady secured the services of an emerging master of the technique, Scottish émigré Alexander Gardner. The impact was immediate, and before the close of 1856 Brady was offering large-format “imperial” photographs to his clientele.

This image of the Hecksher family is an early example of the “imperial” portraiture that became a hallmark of Brady’s studio after Gardner joined the enterprise.

Mathew Brady Studio (active 1844–94)
Salted paper print, c. 1857
Special Collections, Fine Arts Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts
On July 1, 1863, at the Battle of Gettysburg, nineteen-year-old Lieutenant Bayard Wilkeson and his men attempted to slow the Confederate forces. A shell mangled the lieutenant’s right knee as his unit, Battery G of the Fourth U.S. Artillery, drew the attention of Confederate cannons. After amputating his leg with a pocket knife and being carried to an almshouse, Wilkeson ordered his men to return to battle. A few days later, his father, Samuel Wilkeson, a journalist, wrote home to say he had found Bayard dead “from neglect and bleeding.” On the front page of the July 6 New York Times, Samuel wrote a moving, influential, and widely circulated account of the battle. Bayard’s story and his father’s grief became symbolic of the North’s suffering, sacrifice, and righteousness. The article concludes, “oh, you dead, who at Gettysburg have baptized with your blood the second birth of Freedom in America, how you are to be envied!”

Salted paper print, c. 1859

Smithsonian American Art Museum; Museum purchase from the Charles Isaacs Collection, made possible in part by the Luisita L. and Franz H. Denghausen Endowment
AG012s

*Five Japanese Visitors*

After Commodore Matthew Perry forced Japan to open to the West in 1854, there were hesitant beginnings in establishing formal diplomatic ties. In 1860, Japan sent a delegation to solidify the relationship and ratify the terms of the treaty that had been established after Perry’s initial intervention—“The Treaty of Amity and Commerce,” negotiated in 1858. The diplomats, accompanied by a large group of assistants, stopped first in San Francisco and then traveled to the East Coast via the Isthmus of Panama. They were received officially in Washington and visited Philadelphia and New York City. Alexander Gardner, in Mathew Brady’s employ, photographed the leaders of the delegation on their visit to the Capitol. The mission was an important cultural and historical moment, but the Japanese had little success in modifying the onerous terms of the treaty. News of its ratification caused political unrest, including the assassination of a Japanese official.

Albumen silver print, c. 1860 (printed later)

National Archives, Washington, D.C.
George N. Barnard 1819–1902

George N. Barnard was one of Mathew Brady’s photographers who, like Alexander Gardner, would split from his employer to further his own career. Barnard had opened a daguerreotype studio in Oswego, New York, in 1846 and was a pioneer in the field of documentary photography, capturing dramatic views of a huge mill fire in 1853. He later worked for other photographers, including Brady, who hired him in the late 1850s. While Brady and Gardner concentrated on the eastern theaters, Barnard went south and west, following William T. Sherman’s army—most noticeably on its famous “March to the Sea” in 1864. Barnard traveled back to the South after the war, documenting the cost of war in his 1866 publication

*Photographic Views of Sherman’s Campaign.*

Mathew Brady (1823?–1896)

Albumen silver print, c. 1865

National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution; gift of Larry J. West
AG014

Washington’s Tomb, Mt. Vernon

As photographers moved from studio portraiture out into public spaces, a market developed for sites that evoked the history and personages of America. The process of creating historical memory was an active one, assisted by artists, including photographers. George Washington and his life continued to be a subject of fascination, not least because during the Civil War references to the founding of the United States appeared as a counterpoint to the dissolution of the Union after southern secession. Abraham Lincoln would refer to the “chords of memory” that connected his contemporaries to the “patriot graves” of the country’s founders in a powerful argument for union in his first inaugural address. Here, Alexander Gardner and James Gibson depict the tomb that stood foremost among those “patriot graves”: the modest and rough crypt of George Washington, the Patriae Pater, on the grounds of his Mount Vernon estate.

Alexander Gardner and James F. Gibson (1828–?)

Albumen silver print, 1862

DeGolyer Library, Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Texas
This portrait of Abraham Lincoln was taken on February 24, 1861, just before his inauguration on March 4. It has been conjectured that Lincoln is hiding his right hand in his lap because it was swollen from shaking so many hands during his travel from Illinois to Washington. This is also the first studio image depicting Lincoln with a full beard, which he had famously grown between the election and inauguration, purportedly at the behest of a little girl who wrote him from New York that it would improve his appearance. Lincoln was early to recognize the power of the relatively new medium of photography to mold and shape a public persona. He credited a photograph by Mathew Brady, taken when he came to New York City to present himself to Republican Party power brokers, as helping to confirm his suitability for the presidency by showing him well-dressed and dignified. Interestingly, the Brady photograph shows Lincoln standing; in this portrait he is seated, as if ready to begin work as president.

Albumen silver print, 1861

National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution
AG016

Alexander Gardner

In this self-portrait taken at Mathew Brady’s Washington studio, Alexander Gardner presents himself wearing the garb of a mountain man or trapper, sporting buckskins and a fur hat; Gardner’s trademark full, ungroomed beard only adds to the frontiersman image. Gardner holds a bow and arrow while standing on Indian rugs. The image captures America’s enduring fascination with the West and adopting the garb of Native peoples. It also shows Gardner, a man about whom we know little, in disguise, hiding himself in a fictional frontier persona. Although he is acting a role, Gardner, whose family had bought land in Iowa in the antebellum period, was genuinely interested in the western lands and the fate of the Indians. In the 1860s he began his project of photographing the western tribal delegations when they came to Washington. After the Civil War he went west to photograph Indians on their native grounds.

Albumen silver print, c. 1861

National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution
Abraham Lincoln’s first inaugural took place in an atmosphere of crisis and foreboding, heightened by the armed troops that patrolled the streets and the Capitol grounds. South Carolina seceded from the Union the month after Lincoln’s November 1860 election, followed by six other states from the Deep South. The Confederate States of America would be declared a week after Lincoln’s inaugural. The long gap between the election and the March 4 inauguration did nothing to slow down the momentum toward disunion. In Lincoln’s inaugural address, he attempted a final plea for reconciliation, rehearsing the issues that divided the sections and asking all parties to step back from the brink. In his majestic closing lines he invoked a sense of national history that he would return to in the Gettysburg Address of November 1863.

Albumen silver print, 1861
Smithsonian’s National Museum of American History
The Marshall House was an otherwise nondescript hotel in the town of Alexandria, Virginia, but it attained a degree of national notoriety when it became the site of Elmer Ellsworth’s death on May 24, 1861. A New York lawyer, Ellsworth had actually studied in Illinois with Abraham Lincoln, who came to like and respect the easterner. When war broke out, Ellsworth helped organize the Zouave regiments of volunteers from New York, which were modeled on French colonial units. On May 23, Virginia seceded from the Union, and northern forces moved to occupy Alexandria, just across the river from the nation’s capital. Provoked by a large rebel banner at the Marshall House, Ellsworth was killed while removing it. The death excited the chivalric impulses of the North: Ellsworth lay in state at the White House and was extravagantly mourned by the Lincolns and across the Union. Later, with mass casualties, there would be no time for such Victorian niceties.

Albumen silver print, 1862

Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
The Sixty-Ninth New York was a regiment in the larger unit known familiarly as the Irish Brigade. Created in 1861 and manned by members of New York City’s Irish working class, the regiment was commanded by Colonel Michael Corcoran. The brigade had its own Catholic priests, and even during wartime, sectarian disputes were not unknown; “English” units frequently complained about serving with the Irish. Before Bull Run, the Sixty-Ninth was digging fortifications in and around Washington, D.C. This picture shows them posed at a religious service at Fort Corcoran, on the side of the river opposite Georgetown. The priest, Father Thomas Mooney (?–1877), would be dismissed from service with the unit, apparently for making jocular remarks about the war during the Mass said on the dedication of the fort. This photograph is probably from an earlier occasion.

Alexander Gardner and Mathew Brady (1823?–1896)

Albumen silver print, 1861

Chrysler Museum of Art, Norfolk, Virginia; gift of David L. Hack and Museum purchase, with funds from Walter P. Chrysler Jr. by exchange
Rose Greenhow  c. 1854–?

Rose O’Neal Greenhow  c. 1815–1864

One of the Confederacy’s most successful female spies, Rose O’Neal Greenhow was a prominent Washington widow and a staunch southern sympathizer. The Confederacy recruited her as a spy after war erupted in 1861. Most notably, Greenhow is credited with passing along intelligence prior to the First Battle of Manassas, insuring a southern victory. Soon after, her covert activities were uncovered and she was placed under house arrest. Gardner took this photograph after “Rebel Rose” and her daughter, Little Rose, were transferred to the Old Capitol Prison in 1862. Greenhow served five months before being exiled to the South. She then traveled to Europe to promote the Confederate cause. Returning in September 1864, Greenhow drowned attempting to run the federal blockade of Wilmington, N.C. The Confederacy buried her with military honors.

Albumen silver print, 1862

National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution
Section 2

“A Terrible Distinctness”: Antietam, 1862

The war in the East saw Robert E. Lee’s first invasion of the North checked at the bloody battle of Antietam on September 17, 1862. For Alexander Gardner, the battle was equally momentous since his photographs of its aftermath—especially of the dead—proved a sensation when exhibited at Mathew Brady’s New York gallery. A reviewer wrote that the photographs had brought the casualties and “laid them in our door-yards and along streets,” causing a sober reevaluation of the nature of warfare. It was a sea-change in American culture as reality drove out previously held romantic or chivalric ideas about war. For Gardner, the Antietam photographs made his name, allowing him to leave Brady’s studio and strike out on his own.
Stereographic photographs

As photography evolved, attempts were made to make the images more lifelike. An early solution was the stereograph, which consisted of two nearly identical photographs affixed side by side. Viewed through the lens of a stereoscope, of which this is a modern recreation, the two photographs meld to appear as a single three-dimensional image. Viewing stereographs was a common pastime for middle-class households and was regarded as having both educational and entertainment value. Photographers created thousands of views of historic landmarks, natural wonders, and people from many backgrounds. Gardner’s stereoscopic views of the battlefields heightened their emotional charge, as the viewer seems to be moving through the landscape itself.

Stereoscope by James Armbruster, 2009

National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution

Commissioned with funds from the Smithsonian Women’s Committee
Completely Silenced: Dead Confederate Artillerymen, as they lay around their battery after the Battle of Antietam

The Battle of Antietam (Maryland) occurred on September 17, 1862, and it is still America’s bloodiest day, with more than 25,000 combined casualties (killed and wounded) on both sides. Despite a nearly three-to-one numerical advantage, the Union forces were unable to score a decisive victory. The heavy casualties did force Robert E. Lee to withdraw, however, ending his first invasion of the North. Gardner probably arrived at the battlefield on September 18. He took this image of dead Confederates near the Dunker Church, a focal point of the Union attack, which began shortly after 7:00 a.m. the day before.

Stereograph, albumen silver print, 1862
Collection of Bob Zeller
View in Ditch on the Right Wing after the Battle of Antietam

This photograph, probably taken on September 19, graphically exposes the savagery of the fighting that occurred at the “Sunken Road” during the second, midday phase of the Union assault on Lee’s defensive line. A worn-down cart path provided perfect cover for Confederate troops, who initially blunted the Union attack, inflicting tremendous casualties. However, once the northerners had flanked the road, southern troops were trapped and exposed to a withering fire that choked the road with their corpses; hereinafter, the “Sunken Road” was known as “Bloody Lane.”

Stereograph, albumen silver print, 1862

Collection of Bob Zeller
Gathered Together for Burial after the Battle of Antietam

“These pictures have a terrible distinctness.” So wrote the New York Times, commenting on the exhibition of “The Dead at Antietam” at Brady’s studio. Gardner’s photographs exposed the public to the terrible reality of war, stripping away any lingering ideas of the romance and glamor of combat in the modern age. Gardner’s achievement was to be the first war photographer, taking his camera out into the field and documenting war almost as it occurred. Sensational as documents, his photographs had a profound emotional effect on their audience.

Stereograph, albumen silver print, 1862
Collection of Bob Zeller
Gardner tended to give his photographs generic or descriptive titles that make them difficult to pinpoint on the battlefield itself. Pioneering work by photographic historian William Frassanito, who has exhaustively surveyed the battlefields of Antietam and Gettysburg, allows us to locate the sites of Gardner’s photographs. Frassanito identifies this picture of Union troops looking at Confederate casualties as having been taken in the West Woods. The Union troops that Gardner probably asked to pose were likely members of a burial party; he took this photograph on September 19.

Stereograph, hand-painted albumen silver print, 1862
Collection of Bob Zeller
Gardner’s dating of this photograph excited much interest that he had actually photographed the battle itself; the smoke in the photograph’s middle distance was taken for artillery fire. If true, this would have been a groundbreaking development in war photography. However, Gardner’s claim seems to have been an exaggeration to heighten the impact of the Antietam series. There is no evidence that Gardner arrived in the area of the battlefield before late on September 18. The photograph is, however, an accurate depiction of the vista from General George McClellan’s headquarters at the Pry House.

Stereograph, albumen silver print, 1862
Collection of Bob Zeller
Mathew Brady (1823?–1896) is the best-known photographer of the Civil War era. His reputation casts a large shadow over the history of the medium, obscuring the careers of people like Alexander Gardner or Timothy O’Sullivan. Brady was not only a pioneering photographic artist but he was also an extremely successful entrepreneur, realizing that the new technology of photography would galvanize the public. Brady had several studios, in which he employed multiple photographers; he opened the Washington studio on Pennsylvania Avenue in 1858. His practice was almost exclusively portraiture. When the war broke out, however, Brady rode out to Bull Run with the Union army but failed in his attempt to take documentary views of the action.

This standing profile of Brady was taken the day after the Union defeat at the First Battle of Bull Run on July 22, 1861. Although attributed to Brady, it must have been taken by one of his assistants, possibly Gardner.

Mathew Brady Studio (active 1844–94)

Albumen silver print, 1861

Smithsonian’s National Museum of American History
Mathew Brady had gone out to Manassas in July 1861 but had failed to take any photographs of the Union defeat at Bull Run. (The North named battles after geographic features or landmarks, the South after towns: hence the Battle of Bull Run is known in the South as the Battle of Manassas.) Ten months later two members of his corps of photographers took this view of one of the key spots on the battlefield: the Stone Bridge across Bull Run, which Union troops assaulted as the battle opened. The bridge was destroyed not during the 1861 battle, however, but on March 9, 1862, by the Confederates, who were pulling back from northern Virginia to cover anticipated Union attacks on Richmond itself. This image must have been taken within days of the bridge’s destruction, once the Confederates had left the area and Union forces pushed their defensive line out from Washington. The photograph evidences again the country’s fascination with images of devastation and ruin.

Alexander Gardner and James F. Gibson (1828–?)

Albumen silver print, 1862

National Archives, Washington, D.C.
Manassas Junction, Virginia, March 1862

Alexander Gardner took this shot on his photographic exploration of Manassas after the Confederate withdrawal in early March 1862. The image illustrates why the area was so contested: it was a hub of the Orange and Alexandria Railroad, which ran between Washington and points south. As armies began adapting new technology to warfare, railroads played an increasingly important role in moving troops and supplies. Manassas was also on the route that Robert E. Lee would take on his 1862 and 1863 invasions of the North. Indeed, the Battle of Second Bull Run would be fought several months after Gardner’s photographic reconnaissance, in late August 1862. As a prelude to that battle, Confederate general Thomas “Stonewall” Jackson recaptured Manassas Junction from the U.S. Army, destroying a huge Union supply depot. Confederate control of the railway forced the Army of the Potomac to move north to cover the Confederate threat to Washington. Lee’s victory at Second Bull Run cleared the way for his invasion of Maryland.

Albumen silver print, 1862

National Archives, Washington, D.C.
In the spring of 1862, George B. McClellan, the newly appointed commander of the Army of the Potomac, conceived an elaborate plan to take Richmond by a flank attack along the peninsula formed by the James and York Rivers. On March 17, he began transporting the army by water to the tip of the peninsula, where they disembarked and started moving inland. McClellan’s plans were disrupted by a skillful Confederate holding action at Yorktown that bought valuable time for the rebels. McClellan, moving ponderously, entrenched his siege line and brought up heavy artillery to drive out the Confederates. Sensing that their position was becoming untenable, the Confederates left Yorktown and withdrew up the peninsula on May 3. McClellan followed, and was drawn into a series of battles called “The Seven Days,” which ended in his comprehensive defeat and withdrawal from the peninsula. Alexander Gardner visited soon after and depicted this Union siege battery, rendered useless by the Confederates’ strategic withdrawal.

Albumen silver print, 1862

National Archives, Washington, D.C.
AG032s

Panorama of Camp Winfield Scott, Yorktown, Virginia

Whatever his failings as a combat commander, George McClellan was an expert at handling the organization and logistics of a large army, probably because of his pre-war experience as a railway executive. Beginning with transporting more than 100,000 troops downriver to Fort Monroe and then provisioning an army in the field, the Peninsula Campaign was the kind of organizational challenge that McClellan relished. A huge camp and supply depot was built up near Yorktown to serve as the base of Union operations. The camp was named after the long-serving General of the Army, Winfield Scott; ironically, Scott had been displaced by McClellan himself after the defeat at Bull Run.

This panorama encompasses the scope of Union preparations in a single photograph. The image was created by combining multiple, panning shots of the scene below the photographers’ vantage point. Credited to James Gibson, another Brady operative, this image was the result of cooperative work between Gibson and Alexander Gardner.

Alexander Gardner and James F. Gibson (1828–?)

Albumen silver prints, 1863

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City; Gilman Collection, Museum Purchase, 2005 (2005.100.1246)
Antietam Bridge (not to be confused with the more famous Burnside Bridge located to the south, which was the site of a confused Union attack during the Battle of Antietam’s third phase) spanned Antietam Creek, roughly in the middle of the battlefield. Before the battle, some Union troops used it to move toward the Confederate lines arrayed just outside the village of Sharpsburg. The bridge was not brought into play during the battle since George McClellan, fearful of overcommitting his troops, kept a large reserve near his headquarters at the Pry House, a reserve that would have used the bridge in its attack if it had been sent against Robert E. Lee’s lines. Unlike Burnside Bridge, the original stone Antietam Bridge, with its three arches, has not survived and has been replaced by a modern span.

Albumen silver print, 1862

National Archives, Washington, D.C.
Despite the revolution that Alexander Gardner’s Antietam photographs would bring about, the older technology of drawings and engravings was still in place. This was especially true for illustrated newspapers and journals, which did not have the technology to reproduce photographs. In this pictorial spread in the October 18, 1862, issue of Harper’s Weekly, timed to appear when “The Dead at Antietam” went on display at Brady’s studio, reproductions were based on eight of Gardner’s photographs. The large central image shows Burnside Bridge; the other images that are on view in the stereoscope on display include View in Ditch (lower right), Gathered Together for Burial (middle left), and View of the Battle Field of Antietam (top right). All of these images differ markedly from the photographs because of the difficulty in translating photographic images into wood engravings; the engravings are cruder and less precise.

Wood engravings after photographs, 1862

David C. Ward
AG035s

Burnside Bridge

In the third phase of the Battle of Antietam, Major General Ambrose Burnside was tasked with assaulting the Confederate right flank by crossing Antietam Creek over a stone bridge. General George McClellan sent attack orders at eight o’clock in the morning, but Burnside claimed not to have received them until “about 10 o’clock.” Burnside’s troops slowly made the crossing, incurring heavy casualties. Disadvantaged by terrain—the enemy held the steep ridge across the creek—they nevertheless drove back the Confederates. However, because of Burnside’s numerous delays, Confederate Major General A. P. Hill’s troops arrived after a forced march to deliver a crushing counterattack. Burnside retreated, and a potential Union victory ended in a tactical draw. Taken in the days following the battle, this image shows the elaborate photographic wagon that served as Gardner’s portable darkroom sitting on the bridge that thereafter bore Burnside’s name.

Albumen silver print, 1862

Collection of Bob Zeller
Field of Antietam

Primarily known for his *Photographie Sketch Book of the War*, a seminal volume of 100 photographs taken during the Civil War and published at the conflict’s close, Gardner issued several other illustrated volumes, including this album of photographs taken on the battlefield of Antietam. Before technological advances made it possible to publish photographic images in the form of photomechanical reproductions, the process of creating a photographically illustrated book required printing each of the original photographs by hand, adhering them to mounts, and binding them into pages of the book.

**Alexander Gardner and James F. Gibson (1828–?)**

**Leatherbound album of albumen silver prints, 1862**

The National Civil War Museum, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania
AG037s

*Signal Tower, Elk Mountain, Overlooking Battle-field of Antietam, September 1862*

The date of this photograph is probably in error, perhaps because Gardner wanted to give the impression that he took it during or immediately after the battle, on September 17, 1862. However, the log signal station was not built until later in the fall, making it likely that Gardner photographed it when he returned to the battlefield with Abraham Lincoln in October. This signal station was on high ground, faced west, and was about two miles from George McClellan’s headquarters in the center of his troops. Command and control on the battlefield was difficult at the best of times, and Gardner photographed both this older method of signaling as well as the activities of the new telegraphic corps.

Alexander Gardner and Timothy O’Sullivan (1840–1882)

Albumen silver print, 1862

Collection of Bob Zeller
More accurately, this photograph should be titled *Abraham Lincoln and George McClellan and Staff*. Dissatisfied with General McClellan’s nonresponsiveness after Antietam—he did not pursue Robert E. Lee’s army, nor did he convey any urgency in getting his own army back into action—Abraham Lincoln went out to Maryland in October to meet with him. (McClellan had a habit of making the commander in chief come to him, which Lincoln tolerated but also noted as a sign of the officer’s arrogance.) In this portrait, McClellan, diminutive and in a forage cap, faces the figure of the president who, complete with trademark stovepipe hat, towers over him and the rest of the officers. Standing at the far right is cavalry captain George A. Custer.

*Albumen silver print, 1862*

*National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution*
Part of Gardner’s Antietam series, this photograph introduces Major General John A. McClernand, one of the “political” generals whom Lincoln had to support to shore up his position on the home front but whose military inexperience (or incompetence) hindered the Union army. McClernand was raised in Illinois and, as a Democrat, knew Lincoln when they were both state representatives. A congressman in 1861, he resigned from the House of Representatives when Lincoln, who was looking for allies among Unionist Democrats, appointed him brigadier general of the Illinois volunteers. He served mostly in the West, where he angered both Ulysses S. Grant and William T. Sherman, not least because of his egotism and ceaseless lobbying for an independent command. In October 1862 he was on leave in Washington to argue his case and accompanied the presidential party on its trip to George McClellan’s headquarters in Maryland. After continuing to perform poorly in command, McClernand left the army in 1864.

Albumen silver print, 1862 (printed c. 1890)

National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution
Known now as the founder of Pinkerton’s Detective Agency, Allan Pinkerton was one of the Civil War’s most controversial figures. Before the war, he had worked as a detective in Chicago and founded his own agency, which largely focused on crimes against the railroads; it was Pinkerton who warned of a possible presidential assassination plot as Abraham Lincoln traveled to Washington for his inauguration. As the armies organized in 1861, General George McClellan brought Pinkerton in as an intelligence officer; he knew the operative from his prewar position as a railroad executive. Pinkerton rose with McClellan and became responsible for military intelligence in the eastern theater. But Pinkerton’s intelligence was completely unreliable, as he vastly overestimated the Union army’s opposition. At Antietam, McClellan hesitated to both attack and then pursue Robert E. Lee’s army because Pinkerton had convinced him that the Confederates outnumbered the Union. In fact, McClellan held a superiority of about three to one.

Pinkerton used the name E. A. Allen on several covert missions, which is why that name appears on this mount.

Albumen silver print, 1862

National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution
With this group portrait, Gardner turned his attention to the medical corps of the Army of the Potomac, spotlighting the importance of Dr. Jonathan Letterman, who was named its medical director, with the rank of major, in June 1862. Letterman is credited with revolutionizing battlefield medicine, and his work as both a physician and manager was essential in bringing care of the wounded up to standard after the early battles exposed the army’s shocking unpreparedness to care for its casualties. Letterman systematized treatment, adopting the triage system for categorizing the severity of wounds. He also made sure that the doctors and medical staff were as close to the battlefield as possible, and he created mobile field hospitals. Letterman’s reforms made a great difference, but the medical staff was always fighting a losing battle against mass casualties on the battlefield and the prevalence of disease in camp.
The results of the bloodletting at Antietam were inconclusive. Robert E. Lee was forced to withdraw to the South, ending his first attempt to take the war to the North. But George B. McClellan, despite overwhelming superiority, was unable to score a knockout blow against the Army of Northern Virginia. The political consequences of Antietam were large, however. Abraham Lincoln used the victory as the occasion to announce his Emancipation Proclamation, effectively making the war for the Union also into a war against slavery. As well as radicalizing the Union’s war aims, the proclamation (which took effect on January 1, 1863), had the diplomatic result of making it impossible for European powers to recognize the Confederacy as a legitimate government. Militarily, Lincoln’s dissatisfaction with McClellan’s performance, including his nonresponsiveness during their October 1862 meeting, led to him being removed from his command in early November.

Albumen silver print, 1862 (printed c. 1890)

National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution
Alexander Gardner opened his Washington, D.C., studio at the corner of Seventh and D Streets, N.W., on August 10, 1863. In the eleven months since Antietam, he had expanded his portrait practice and also replicated his success in taking battlefield photographs after Gettysburg (July 1863). He would become Abraham Lincoln’s preferred photographer; the president favored Gardner with a sitting to inaugurate the new studio and gallery. In November, the president would have his portrait taken just before he went to Gettysburg to speak. Viewing Gardner’s photographs of the battlefield may have influenced the composition of Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address.
After Antietam, General George McClellan left his battlefield headquarters at the Pry House and moved east to an area called Pleasant Valley, near South and Elk Mountains. This was during the period in which McClellan had angered Lincoln with his refusal to move from western Maryland to a more aggressive position closer to Robert E. Lee’s army in Virginia. While McClellan and his staff camped in fields, his visiting wife, Marcy, was lodged in the house of a woman named Lee, and this group of soldiers and civilians posed on the steps of her house. In his Sketchbook, Gardner writes that the general visited frequently and that an air of comfortable domesticity and calm prevailed. Originally, McClellan himself was going to pose with this group, but the sound of cannonading apparently called him away. Pleasant Valley served throughout the war as a Union supply depot, especially for cavalry remounts.

Albumen silver print, October 1862
National Archives, Washington, D.C.
Ulysses Grant wrote a wonderful sentence in his memoirs to describe train travel in the 1840s: “The railway annihilates space.” The course of technology in the nineteenth century was to annihilate both space and time. Steam power revolutionized travel over land and water, although armies still traveled mostly by foot and horseback. Chillingly, improvements in weaponry vastly lengthened the killing range of rifles and artillery; specialized snipers, using rifles with telescopic sights, could drop men at very long distances. The telegraph (invented in 1837) made communication nearly instantaneous. Telegraphy did not replace written orders, especially on the battlefield itself, where it was useless, but it allowed commanders and their political masters in Washington or Richmond greater control over their subordinates. Gardner highlights the importance of the new technology by documenting a detachment of the Union’s signal corps; the man climbing the telegraph pole playfully indicates that a large part of its job was to maintain the system’s lines.

Albumen silver print, 1862

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City; purchase, Florance Waterbury Bequest, 1970 (1970.537.7)
Gardner documented specialized units in the Union army, as with the Telegraphic Corps, and here with the so-called “Scouts and Guides,” who were part of the intelligence service that Allan Pinkerton ran for the Army of the Potomac. Gardner took this group portrait when he returned to the area around Antietam; Berlin (now Brunswick), Maryland, is on the Potomac, just downstream from Harpers Ferry. In his Sketchbook Gardner wrote about the hardship and dangers faced by men who frequently acted as spies and could be executed if caught: “Their faces are indexes of the character required for such hazardous work.” Gardner’s statement exemplifies how connections are drawn between appearance and personality; a photograph was seen as particularly informative psychologically.

Albumen silver print, 1862

National Archives, Washington, D.C.
“What Do I Want, John Henry?” Warrenton, VA., November 1862

This posed scene of an African American servant offering a demijohn of liquor and cake to the Union officers who were his masters was intended to create a comic vignette that would appeal to Gardner’s audience. The African American man was an actual escaped slave—he would have been called “contraband” early in the war to denote his status as captured enemy property—named John Henry. Gardner writes that at the end of a long day in the saddle, the officer would ask the question posed in the title, to which the “affectionate creature” would respond by bringing the jug and sweets. Gardner’s entry goes on to further burlesque John Henry’s personality and attributes, further infantilizing the ex-slave in ways that make for uncomfortable reading for a modern audience.

Albumen silver print, 1862

National Archives, Washington, D.C.
Walt Whitman (1819–1892) came to Washington from New York City in search of his brother George, who had been wounded on December 13, 1862, at the Battle of Fredericksburg. Whitman found his brother, whose wound was not serious, and decided to stay in Washington. Whitman had been in a funk in New York: *Leaves of Grass* was not selling, and he was finding it difficult to write or revise his poetry. In Washington, Whitman assumed the role of a hospital visitor, comforting wounded soldiers, bringing them small treats, and, most important, writing their letters. He observed Abraham Lincoln, whom he idolized, from afar. And he began a relationship with Peter Doyle, a former Confederate soldier, whom he met on a streetcar and lived with for eight years.

The other people in this photograph cannot be identified. The leaves on the trees would indicate that it was taken in late spring or summer of 1863.

*Albumen silver print, c. 1863*

*Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, Ohio*
Photographers and illustrators of the war especially prized evidence of the Union’s military successes, such as the portrayal of prisoners. There are no available details about the Confederate POWs whom Gardner depicted in this photograph, taken about fifteen miles southwest of Washington. June 1863 was a busy month militarily in Virginia, as Robert E. Lee used his victory at Chancellorsville (May 1–5) to launch his second invasion of the North. Lee’s march began at his lines at Fredericksburg and looped to the west of Fairfax Court House, but the whole area was full of men and materiel. Lee started moving on June 3, and the rest of the month was taken up with low-level engagements as well as larger battles at Brandy Station (June 9) and Winchester (June 14–15). These men may have been picked up in one of those engagements and were being shipped back through Union-held territory.

Alexander Gardner and Timothy O’Sullivan (1840–1882)

Albumen silver print, 1863

National Archives, Washington, D.C.
Gardner’s Gallery and colleagues

The nation’s capital was a center for photography during the war, and Alexander Gardner set up his new studio in May 1863 at Seventh and D Streets, just a few blocks from that of his former employer, Mathew Brady. Gardner split with Brady after the success of his Antietam photographs. The signage gives a full range of Gardner’s services, showing how he catered to the market for photographic images; the main sign reads “News of the War.”

Not as flamboyantly costumed as in his first self-portrait, this image of Alexander Gardner shows him as a workingman, which was his family’s heritage back in Scotland. Gardner’s proficiency as a photographer was based in part on his manual dexterity; he was a master at coating the glass-plate negatives with collodion, which formed the plate’s light-sensitive emulsion. By the beginnings of 1863 James Gardner was working with his brother in Washington.

Timothy O’Sullivan (1840–1882) and his brother-in-law, William Pywell (1843–1886), also got their start with Brady. O’Sullivan teamed up with Gardner both at Antietam and Gettysburg and later had a successful career on his own. After the war, Pywell traveled west with Gardner to photograph the plains and the Native Americans living there.

*Gardner’s Gallery:*

Albumen silver print, c. 1863–65

DeGolyer Library, Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Texas
Alexander Gardner:

James Gardner (1832–?)

Albumen silver print, 1863

National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution; gift of Larry J. West

Timothy O’Sullivan:

Albumen silver print, c. 1863

National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution; gift of Larry J. West

William Pywell:

Albumen silver print, c. 1860–65

DeGolyer Library, Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Texas
AG053

Abraham Lincoln 1809–1865

This exhibition provides the rare opportunity to display the means by which a photographic image was produced on paper: the glass-plate negative that was the “film” of early photography. Because of their fragility, surviving glass-plate negatives of this size (the so-called “imperial”) are rare: this is one of two of Lincoln that have survived and dates from his August 9, 1863, sitting at Gardner’s Washington studio. The process Gardner used was relatively new to America and consisted of hand-coating a glass plate with collodion—a syrupy mixture of guncotton dissolved in alcohol and ether to which bromide and iodine salts had been added. The difficulty for the photographer was that the glass plate had to be coated with collodion, sensitized in a bath of silver nitrate, and exposed in the camera immediately, while the emulsion was still damp. Gardner was acknowledged as a master in evenly coating the plate, which resulted in prints of exceptional clarity.

Glass-plate collodion negative, 1863

National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution; gift of the James Smithson Society, CBS Television Network, and James Macatee
AG053-1

Abraham Lincoln  1809–1865

Modern albumen silver print from 1863 wet-collodion negative

National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution
Studying the Art of War, Fairfax Court-House, June 1863

Gardner posed this relaxed scene in the period between the Battle of Chancellorsville (early May 1863) and Robert E. Lee’s second invasion of the North in July. The officers pictured are, left to right: Major Ludlow (lifedates unknown), who holds The Art of War, which gives the photograph its title; Lieutenant Colonel Joseph Dickinson (1830–1904); Count Zeppelin of Prussia (1838–1917), later the inventor of the combat airship; Swedish military observer Lieutenant Colonel Rosencranz (lifedates unknown); and, standing, Ulric Dahlgren (1842–1864). The Art of War was first published in 1838 as Précis de l’Art de la Guerre, with American editions appearing in 1854 and 1862. The book heavily influenced American military doctrine, at least in the initial period of the Civil War, before the practical problems of fighting in the vast terrain of America forced commanders to abandon its precepts, especially the one that urged generals to limit the number of men they engaged in combat.

Albumen silver print, 1863

National Archives, Washington, D.C.
The president had promised to be Gardner’s first sitter when he opened his Washington studio. Lincoln came into the studio on Sunday, August 9, 1863—the day before the official opening—in order to avoid crowds, and Gardner took a series of six portraits of the chief executive. John Hay, Lincoln’s secretary, wrote in his diary, “I went down with the President to have his picture taken at Gardner’s. He was in very good spirits.” Among the images taken at this session was this one, which shows Lincoln seated at a table with a newspaper in his left hand and his eyeglasses in his right.

Albumen silver print, 1863

Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
President Abraham Lincoln employed two private secretaries, John George Nicolay (1832–1901) and John Milton Hay (1838–1905). Nicolay, previously a journalist, became Lincoln’s secretary in 1860 after clerking for the Illinois secretary of state. Post-election, Lincoln drafted Hay, a lawyer and Brown University graduate, as his other secretary. Aside from handling appointments and correspondence, Nicolay and Hay shared a personal, father/sons relationship with the president. After the assassination, Nicolay dedicated himself to Lincoln scholarship, authoring works on his former employer and the overarching Civil War narrative. In 1890, he and Hay published the first authoritative biography of Lincoln, the ten-volume *Abraham Lincoln: A History*. Hay had a prolific career as a diplomat, most notably as secretary of state under Presidents William McKinley and Theodore Roosevelt. He issued the famous “Open Door” notes promoting fair trade in China and facilitated the construction of the Panama Canal.

Albumen silver print, November 8, 1863

Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
Field Where General Reynolds Fell, Gettysburg, July 1863

General John Reynolds (1820–1863) of Pennsylvania was the highest-ranking casualty at Gettysburg. One of the Union’s best generals, Reynolds had been considered a potential replacement for George McClellan. On July 1, commanding the left wing of the Union forces, Reynolds moved his infantry forward to blunt the Confederate advance, bringing on a wholesale engagement of the two armies; his decisiveness bought time for the Union to consolidate its forces at Gettysburg. He was killed leading a charge by the Second Wisconsin just west of the town. Despite its title, it is unlikely that Gardner’s photograph depicted this spot since he did not photograph any of the sites from Gettysburg’s first day. Instead, documentary evidence indicates that it was probably taken near Rose Farm, south of the battlefield. Initially Gardner published the photograph without reference to Reynolds. That was added later when Gardner realized he had missed an opportunity and sought to capitalize on Reynolds’s heroism.

Alexander Gardner and Timothy O’Sullivan (1840–1882)

Albumen silver print, 1863

National Archives, Washington, D.C.
A Sharpshooter’s Last Sleep, Gettysburg, July 1863

Gardner’s manipulation of this Confederate casualty, whom he moved to create a narrative vignette about the soldier’s fate, indicates how unstable the line was between fiction and truth in the creation of photographs. Gardner’s intrusion shows that he thought he had to improve his images so that they would function as a sentimental narrative that could be more easily read by his audience. His actions are unforgivable from both a moral and artistic point of view. But his arrangement of the corpse (see the adjacent Home of a Rebel Sharpshooter) reflects how difficult it was for Gardner and his contemporaries to process the reality of mass casualties in which the dead became anonymous. Caught at a transitional moment, Gardner did not trust the images his camera captured. That this photographic construction would be more marketable to a public still steeped in Victorian sentimentality only adds to Gardner’s malfeasance.

Albumen silver print, 1863

National Archives, Washington, D.C.
Home of a Rebel Sharpshooter

In his Sketchbook Gardner created an elaborate story around his photographs of a dead Confederate “sharpshooter” who apparently had fallen during fighting at the Devil’s Den. Gardner claimed that he took photographs when he returned to the battlefield in the fall of 1863 and “discovered” the corpse, along with the rifle propped against the stone wall, still undisturbed where the soldier had fallen. The story isn’t credible: four months after the battle, the body would have long since decayed, and souvenir hunters would have picked up the rifle. The truth, untangled by photographic historian William Frassanito, is a blot on Gardner’s career: Gardner and his assistants moved a dead soldier from a nearby line of bodies being readied for burial. Shortly after the battle they posed it amid the boulders, including the carefully positioned rifle. The soldier was a regular infantryman, not a sharpshooter or sniper.

Albumen photograph, July 1863

Collection of Ron Perisho
AG060

*Slaughter Pen, Foot of Round Top, Gettysburg, July 1863*

The battlefield at Gettysburg consisted of a wide open plain of rolling farmland (the scene of General George Pickett’s climactic charge) facing the Union lines drawn up on Cemetery Ridge, which is bookended by hills: Culp’s to the north and the wooded Big and Little Round Top to the south. At the feet of the Round Tops was an expansive area of rocks, called the Devil’s Den by local residents because of the rockfall’s crazy-quilt pattern. In between, also rocky, was the Slaughter Pen, an area of savage fighting on Gettysburg’s third day. Because of the terrain, it was a haven for snipers and small unit actions as larger units clashed in the Wheatfield, to the north, and on Little Round Top, to the southeast. Initial Confederate advances were blunted by a stout Union defense, and Lee’s plan to flank the Union’s southern positions finally ended. The evocative landscape provided Gardner with the setting for some of his best-known photographs.

*Albumen silver print, 1863*

*National Archives, Washington, D.C.*
Incidents of the War: Unfit for Service at the Battle of Gettysburg

After the success of his series “The Dead of Antietam,” which he had made while working for Mathew Brady, Gardner paid special attention in his Gettysburg photography to the casualties, both human and animal. He got to the battlefield quickly, probably by July 7, as the process of burying the dead was just under way. In addition to the more than 7,000 soldiers killed, it has been estimated that more than 1,500 artillery horses died during the battle. Disposal of the horses complicated the task of clearing the land; while attempts were made to deal respectfully with human remains, the horses were collected into piles and burned. Gardner’s title for this picture may be taken as ironically low-key: the graphic image needed no rhetorical embellishments.

Albumen silver print, 1863

Chrysler Museum of Art, Norfolk, Virginia; gift of David L. Hack and Museum purchase, with funds from Walter P. Chrysler Jr. by exchange
As president, Abraham Lincoln weighed the power of his words and was careful not to waste them. But he often had his portrait taken by photographers and was a regular visitor to Gardner’s Washington studio. Photography allowed Lincoln to maintain his visibility to the public. His portraits showed that he was on duty during the war but, poignantly, they also reveal how the strain etched itself into ever-deeper lines and grooves in his face. In this portrait he faces the camera with a look of determination and resolve.

Gardner took this image ten days before Lincoln gave his famous Gettysburg Address, which would declare a “new birth of freedom.” It is tantalizing to think he may have seen Gardner’s images of the dead in the studio and used them to construct his powerful refrain—that nothing said at Gettysburg could consecrate the ground more than those “who had given the last full measure of devotion” and that “the dead shall not have died in vain.”

Modern albumen silver print from original negative, November 8, 1863 (printed 1998)
Lincoln’s important November 8 sitting was on a Sunday: the president tried to visit the studio when it was closed to the public to avoid crowds and escape attention. In place of the directness of the other images taken at this sitting, this seated portrait shows Lincoln with a variety of props, ranging from the desk set and papers to the rug and curtain, the tassel of which is distracting to the composition. The image gives some sense of how long Lincoln’s legs were.

Gardner issued this portrait in both a rectangular and (as shown here) “vignetted” format, with the image highlighted in an oval. The oval effect was created by masking the corners of the rectangular glass-plate negative, usually by applying paper, tape, or opaque paint.

Albumen silver print, 1863

Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
Section 4

Consolidation: 1864

The year 1864 saw Alexander Gardner solidify his practice and put his Washington studio on a firm footing. He continued to produce quality portraiture, including images of the “man of the hour,” Ulysses S. Grant, who had come east to command the Union armies. Gardner also made another foray into the field, although his battlescapes of Grant’s opening moves against Robert E. Lee, seen in this section, lack the dramatic power of the Antietam and Gettysburg images. In addition to his images of the “good and the great,” Gardner also documented the photography community, taking portraits of his brother and other Washington-area photographers.
Charles Sumner and Henry Longfellow (The politics and poetry of New England)

As Gardner continued his portrait business during the war, he inflected it with nationalistic and patriotic purpose, as indicated in the subtitle of this joint portrait celebrating two of New England’s leading lights: Massachusetts senator Charles Sumner (1811–1874) and America’s most popular poet, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1811–1874). Sumner, a great advocate of emancipation and civil rights, became a martyr to the cause of liberty when he was badly beaten on the Senate floor by a southern congressman outraged over Sumner’s antislavery speech, “The Crime against Kansas.” He goaded the Lincoln administration to be more radical on racial issues. Longfellow was not as engaged by the war as Walt Whitman. He had offered a warning about disunion in 1861’s “Paul Revere’s Ride,” using the American Revolution as a unifying device, much as Lincoln did in his first inaugural address. Longfellow’s son was wounded at Gettysburg, and the poet made several trips to Washington to locate and then care for him; this portrait was probably taken on one of those visits.

Albumen silver print, 1863

Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
AG065

Ulysses S. Grant  1822–1885

There is a story that when Ulysses S. Grant traveled east in 1864 to take command of all the Union armies, the desk clerk at Washington’s Willard Hotel did not recognize him and assigned him to a mean, nondescript room. (When Grant identified himself, he was upgraded to a suite.) The anecdote points out that likenesses were not yet widely distributed, even after the advent of photography. It was possible for famous people to remain unidentified. But fame meant that one had one’s photograph taken, as Grant did in this image Gardner took after the western general arrived in Washington. Grant was coming off a string of successes in the West, including the successful siege of Vicksburg, which made him the inevitable choice for overall command. In Grant, Lincoln finally found a general who would consistently engage the enemy’s forces.

Indicative of Grant’s stature, Lincoln bestowed on him the rare title of lieutenant general, a rank previously held only by George Washington.

Albumen silver print, c. 1864

National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution
As today, the nineteenth-century public was avid for human interest stories about the heroes who were lionized in print and photographs. In a Victorian society that placed extreme value on the family, it was de rigueur that a public figure be shown with his wife and children. Ulysses Grant had married Julia Dent (1826–1902), sister of a West Point classmate, in 1848. They had four children: Frederick (1850–1912); Ulysses Jr. (1852–1929); Ellen (Nellie) (1855–1922); and Jesse (1858–1939). Grant was devoted to Julia, and their separation in 1852, when he was ordered west, made him lonely, probably exacerbated his tendency to drink, and contributed to his decision to resign from the army in 1854. During the Overland Campaign, Grant attempted to get away from the front to see his family whenever possible. He turned down Lincoln’s invitation to join him at Ford’s Theatre on the night of the assassination because he was traveling to Philadelphia to see Julia and his children.

Albumen silver print, c. 1865–70
Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
AG067

Jericho Mills, North Anna, VA, May 1864

This image and the adjacent two photographs document the terrain on which a series of small, sharp engagements, called the Battle of North Anna, were fought as Ulysses Grant continued his assault on Richmond after he moved south in May 1864. Gardner and his partner, Timothy O’Sullivan, trailed close behind the army. Following the battles of the Wilderness and Spotsylvania, Grant edged southeast, forcing Lee’s Army of Northern Virginia to follow him. Because Lee was unsure where Grant was going, his line was thin, and Union troops were able to force a crossing of the North Anna River. On May 23, Union forces forded the river at Jericho Mills and fought off subsequent Confederate counterattacks as Lee threw forces into the point of attack.

Albumen silver print, 1864

National Archives, Washington, D.C.
The other action at the engagement of Jericho Mills centered on Chesterfield Bridge, which Union forces assaulted and held on May 23. Although the bridge was captured, no attempt was made to continue the attack by sending reinforcements over it and extending the area controlled by the Army of the Potomac. This proved costly because during the night Robert E. Lee moved forward in force, constructing a formidable defensive breastworks that concerted Union attacks were unable to breach.

Albumen silver print, 1864

DeGolyer Library, Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Texas
The engagement at Quarles’ Mills occurred on the second day of the Battle of North Anna. The Union attempted several assaults on Lee’s line; all failed due to the strength of the impromptu fortifications and because the Union attacks were disorganized and ill-commanded. (One of the Union generals got drunk and recklessly launched a premature assault.) The assaults failing, Grant withdrew, forming his own defensive line; the battle ended in an uneasy stasis. After two days of stalemate punctuated by minor skirmishing, Grant disengaged and moved his army further southeast. The Union suffered 2,623 casualties (killed and wounded) and the Confederates 1,552 during the Battle of North Anna. The bucolic landscapes that Gardner and Sullivan depict belie the reality of what happened in this minor but still bloody engagement in Grant’s Richmond campaign.

Albumen silver print, c. 1864

National Archives, Washington, D.C.
Little is known about the life of Alexander Gardner, and even less is known about his younger brother, James, including the date of his death. Like Alexander, James was born in Scotland and immigrated to the United States with the rest of the clan in 1850. They settled initially in Iowa but then moved east to New York City. Both brothers worked for Mathew Brady. James left with Alexander when he split away to found his own firm in 1863.

Albumen silver print, c. 1864

National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution
In place of the wild and woolly frontiersman as Gardner pictured himself in his first, c. 1861, self-portrait, this image shows him nattily attired and posed with the props of Victorian furnishings as the epitome of respectability. Leaning against the chair, with a hand on his hip and legs crossed at the ankle, Gardner is casually masterful. By 1864 he was at the height of his Civil War career, a career founded on his Antietam photographs and solidified by the opening of his Washington studio, the popularity of the Gettysburg images, and a reputation as the president’s favorite photographer.

For reasons that remain mysterious, Gardner retired from photography in 1872 and went into the insurance business; he died a decade later, leaving no records except his photographs themselves.

Albumen silver print, c. 1864

National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution
English-born illustrator Alfred Waud (1828–1891) was one of the Civil War’s most prolific artist/journalists. Joining the *New York Illustrated News* as a staff illustrator in 1860, he became a “special artist” to the Army of the Potomac when war broke out. Hired away by *Harper’s Weekly*, Waud continued his assignment with the army, covering battles from Bull Run in 1861 to Petersburg in 1865. As an eyewitness, Waud perfected the skill of sketching combat scenes and army life quickly yet accurately.

The accompanying War Department pass permitted Waud to travel through military lines to Fortress Monroe, held by the Union throughout the war even though it was deep in enemy territory, at the entrance of southeastern Virginia’s vast harbor.

Alfred Waud:

*Albumen silver print, c. 1863*

*Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.*

War Department pass:

*National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution; gift of Larry J. West*
Committee of the House of Representatives Reading Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation

The public announcement and implementation of Abraham Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation was fraught with political and policy implications. Lincoln had decided to issue the proclamation—effectively making the end of slavery a primary issue of the war—in the summer of 1862, when the war was not going well for the Union and it appeared that European powers would recognize the Confederacy. Lincoln read the proclamation to his cabinet in July and issued it in September, after the Battle of Antietam, when Union military fortunes were on the upswing; it went into effect on January 1, 1863. In Congress, Republicans like Thaddeus Stevens (center), had long criticized the president for being insufficiently radical on the issue of slavery and freedom. Although they welcomed the proclamation, they persisted in their criticism of the administration on issues of civil rights. It is not known why this photograph is dated 1864, since the proclamation had already gone into effect; possibly Gardner staged the scene.

Albumen silver print, 1864

The New-York Historical Library, New York City
Early in the war, the Union suffered a major blow by allowing its naval yard in Norfolk to fall into Confederate hands. Moreover, the Confederates captured the Navy Yard without damage, even though the Union had planned to destroy it before retreating. Not only did the Confederacy gain port facilities, but it obtained a great amount of materiel and supplies, including the semi-destroyed USS Merrimack. Salvaging the hull, the shipyard constructed the CSS Virginia, an ironclad, in 1862. The famous duel between iron ships, the Virginia versus the Union’s USS Monitor, was fought in Hampton Roads harbor on March 8–9, 1862; the engagement was inconclusive, although the Virginia had to be scuttled. The Confederacy abandoned the Navy Yard in May 1862 but successfully destroyed a great deal of its facilities, leaving it in ruins, which Gardner photographed. Pictures of the wreckage of war, like those of casualties and corpses, were attractive on the photographic market.

Alexander Gardner and James Gardner (1832–?)

Albumen silver print, 1864

Collection of Bob Zeller
Gardner’s success as a photographer owed much to his personal relationships and community involvement in Washington, D.C. An abolitionist and philanthropist, Gardner was deeply committed to civic life and public service. As many immigrants did to adjust to their new life, Gardner became affiliated with a number of fraternal societies and social clubs. These connections offered him greater access to prosperous businessmen, political figures, public servants, and intellectual circles through which he garnered higher commissions as well as avenues for expressing his own social and political views. Established in 1854, the Saint Andrew’s Society connected Gardner to wealthy and influential Scots in Washington, among them Gilbert Cameron, builder of the Smithsonian Institution building and Trinity Church. Gardner’s colleagues John Reekie and David Knox (standing, at right) served alongside him in leadership positions; his brother James was also a member. Photographed in November 1865, Gardner, then serving as corresponding secretary, stands (left) among his fellow officers.

Albumen silver print, 1865

The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, New York City (GLC04186)
This portrait of Peter Force, a former mayor of the District of Columbia, illustrates the normal day-to-day photographic work that Alexander Gardner performed at his Washington studio. Although he recorded the dramatic events of the Civil War as well as those who were nationally famous (or notorious), his practice was based on creating images of both local dignitaries and ordinary citizens. Gardner’s, Mathew Brady’s, and the other photographic studios that were popping up in northern cities tried to meet the ceaseless demand for commissions and new images as the public responded to the appeal of this technology.

Albumen silver print, 1865

Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
The title of this portrait of three former mayors of Washington, D.C., has an odd ring to it. “The Olden Time” is archaic and gives a sense of remote distance, even though all three men were relatively recent office-holders and were still alive. What Alexander Gardner meant is that they were mayors before the war came and changed everything: the war was a bright dividing line that separated even recent history from the present. From left to right are Roger Chew Weightman (1787–1876), mayor from 1824 to 1827; William Winston Seaton (1785–1866), mayor from 1840 to 1850; and Peter Force (1790–1868), mayor from 1836 to 1840. All three men were also journalists and publishers at various points in their careers.

Albumen silver print, 1865

National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution
AG079

William Winston Seaton  1785–1866

A fixture in political Washington, William Winston Seaton partnered with his brother-in-law, Joseph Gales, to edit and publish the *National Intelligencer*, the leading paper for the Whig Party. Seaton retired from the paper in 1860. The duo were also the de facto official recorders of congressional debates; their *Annals of Congress* (known familiarly to historians as “Gales and Seaton”) was a record of the national government to 1837. Seaton also served in the local government and was the city’s mayor from 1840 to 1850, a critical period in the growth of Washington’s infrastructure.

Albumen silver print, c. 1865

National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution; gift of Francis A. DiMauro
Rear Admiral David Dixon Porter came from a naval family and became a midshipman in 1829, serving in a variety of theaters, including the Mediterranean. Service in the peacetime military was slow, boring, and devoid of opportunities to make one’s mark. Porter did well in the Mexican American War, obtaining a bigger command and a promotion, but afterward military service resumed its slow pace. Galvanized by the outbreak of the Civil War, Porter devised a plan to resupply the federal forts in Florida and then spearheaded the naval assault on New Orleans. He was also singularly successful in the combined operation—commanded by Ulysses Grant on land—to take Vicksburg. Thereafter, Porter had few opportunities to shine, and combined Union navy-army operations off North Carolina were not distinguished. Porter saw out the end of the war on his flagship anchored in the James River, as Gardner pictured him here.

Albumen silver print, 1864

National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution
Rear Admiral David Dixon Porter (1813–1891) was the commander of the warship USS 
Malvern, the flagship of the North Atlantic Blockading Squadron. Under Porter’s command, the 
Malvern participated in the capture of Fort Fisher, North Carolina, in December 1864/January 
1865. The Malvern was also frequently used as a meeting place for wartime conferences between 
Porter, General Ulysses Grant, and President Abraham Lincoln. Following the fall of Richmond, 
the battleship transported Lincoln on the James River for his visit to the evacuated city. 

Gardner photographed Porter (center front) and members of his staff aboard the ship 
during the final months of the war. The officer at far left is Lieutenant Commander William B. 
Cushing (1842–1874), most famous for his role in sinking the Confederate ironclad Albemarle in 
October 1864.

Albumen silver print, 1864

The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, New York City (GLC05111.01.0208)
Section 5
The “Cracked-Plate” Lincoln and War’s End: 1865

Alexander Gardner began 1865 by capturing photographs of the Smithsonian Institution building on fire in January; again he was expanding the role of documentary and news photography. His portrait practice continued with sittings of the president, including the second inauguration in March. In February he created his accidental masterpiece, the “cracked-plate” portrait of Abraham Lincoln, one of the most iconic images in American photography. He followed views of the defeated South in quick succession with coverage of Lincoln’s assassination and the hunt for and subsequent trial of the conspirators.
Fire in the Smithsonian Castle

On January 24, 1865, a fire destroyed the offices, archives, and many of the collections of the Smithsonian Institution at its building on the National Mall. The fire apparently started from an inadequately ventilated stove used by workmen renovating the structure. The major damage was done to the upper floors of the ornate “Castle”; the building’s iron framework minimized structural damage. Amazingly, teams of soldiers were able to repair the roof within days and begin the task of rebuilding, but the destruction to the Smithsonian’s archives and early holdings was incalculable.

Rushing to the scene from his studio about half a mile away, Alexander Gardner took photographs of the conflagration. Unable to resist, he edited and retouched the photographs to add smoke and flames to an already sufficiently dramatic image.

Albumen silver print, 1865

Smithsonian Institution Archives
Alexander Gardner took this portrait of Abraham Lincoln at the last sitting the president gave him, on Sunday, February 5, 1865. That same sitting produced the accidental masterpiece known as the “cracked-plate” portrait. The other photographs from this session had Gardner’s characteristic sharpness and clarity in the president’s face and expression. However, here, the president’s hands were fidgety, as evidenced by the blurring of the eyeglasses and the pencil that he holds as props. From this original image, Gardner and his assistants cleaned up the blurring during post-production editing or retouching, a nineteenth-century version of Photoshop. They also introduced a subtle variation: in some of the prints, instead of spectacles, Lincoln is holding a penknife, with which he would presumably sharpen the pencil.

Albumen silver print, 1865
National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution
Abraham Lincoln’s family was both a refuge and a trial for him while president. Thomas Lincoln (1853–1871)—nicknamed “Tad” by his father as a short form of “tadpole” because he was a squirmy, hyperactive child—was the youngest of three Lincoln boys. He suffered from a cleft palate, which caused him speech problems. Lincoln indulged Tad’s rambunctious behavior because of the tragedy that befell the family when Tad’s brother William (1850–1862) died of typhus. Numb with grief, his wife inconsolable, Lincoln had to persevere even as his innate melancholia worsened with Willie’s death.

On the night of Lincoln’s assassination, Tad was at another Washington theater when the manager announced to the audience that the president had been shot. Tad became hysterical with grief, shouting “They have killed Papa dead!” Sadly, Tad did not survive long himself, dying of unknown causes at age eighteen; his mother was too grief-stricken to attend his funeral.
At the end of the war, a portrait of Robert E. Lee was highly desirable for photographers. Mathew Brady had “scooped” Gardner by traveling to Richmond just days after Lee’s surrender and taking two emblematic portraits of the Confederate general. Gardner was unable to obtain a portrait of Lee until February 1866; he probably took it when Lee was in Washington testifying before Congress about his status as a rebel. Lee appears visibly older than he did a year earlier. After the war he had been troubled by the question of what he would now do to support his family, who had lost their real property—including the Custis-Lee Mansion in Arlington, Virginia—to confiscation. But in August 1865 he had accepted the presidency of Washington College (now Washington and Lee) in Lexington, Virginia. He served in that position until his death, avoiding politics and staying out of the controversies that swirled among his former commanders over who had lost the war.

Albumen silver print, 1866
Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
Abraham Lincoln delivering his second inaugural address as President of the United States, Washington, D.C.

Abraham Lincoln’s major speeches as president—at both inaugurals and at Gettysburg—focused on large themes, in particular human nature and God’s will, as well as the character of the nation. The hard politics of formulating and implementing the details of, for instance, emancipation, civil rights, and reconstruction, were kept offstage in the day-to-day process of governing. So at his second inaugural on March 4, 1865, Lincoln delivered a moral homily on how neither side, North or South, could know God’s will for mankind, and that the war had unintended consequences. Both parties now had to accept living with those consequences, namely the end of slavery and the beginning of civil equality for African Americans, Lincoln hinted. He ended with his majestic call to move on from war to civic peace: “With malice toward none, with charity for all,” let us “bind up the nation’s wounds” to “achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace.” Flush with victory, many in the North were puzzled or displeased by the president’s conciliatory words.

Albumen silver print, 1865

Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
The pictorial gothic was a major feature of mid-nineteenth century America’s literary and artistic imagination. From the stories of Edgar Allan Poe and Nathaniel Hawthorne to paintings by Thomas Cole, depictions of decrepit ruins and gloomy caverns served as counterpoints to a country obsessed with progress and modernity. There is something of the gothic imagination in Alexander Gardner’s fixation on photographing the dead and dying. Yet the Civil War—and Gardner—undermined the gothic by creating real ruins and devastation. A satisfying chronicle to the North of how badly the South had been beaten, Gardner’s photographs also documented the effects of modern warfare, stripping away the morbid fictions of the gothic for a chilling matter-of-factness.

Albumen silver print, 1865

National Archives, Washington, D.C.
Ironically, destruction of the major Confederate armory occurred not from a Union assault but by an accidental fire that started in Richmond after the government began to evacuate the city on April 1, 1865, leaving it vulnerable. Chaos and confusion reigned as panicked residents faced the prospect of being occupied by the invading northerners; looting and destruction of property occurred as well. In the breakdown of order, fires broke out and quickly spread, destroying as many as fifty city blocks, until Union soldiers acting as firefighters extinguished them in part. Among the major buildings destroyed were the Tredegar Iron Works and the Arsenal. The Arsenal had been built earlier in the century but had fallen into disuse. It was made operative again when the war broke out; among the weapons it housed were those taken from the federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry in 1861.

Albumen silver print, 1865

Bowdoin College Museum of Art, Brunswick, Maine; Museum Purchase, Lloyd O. and Marjorie Strong Coulter Fund
Libby Prison, Richmond, VA, April 1865

The North vilified the South for the way it treated Union prisoners; charges were levied that there was a deliberate policy to mistreat, and even murder, northern prisoners. But conditions for prisoners of war were horrible on both sides. Inadequate facilities and the consequent illness and mortality rates owed more to organizational and logistical failings or incompetence than overt malevolence. Both North and South were simply unprepared to handle the large number of prisoners that they were forced to incarcerate once the initial system of exchange and parole ceased.

Richmond’s Libby Prison was a converted commercial warehouse in operation from 1861 to 1864. The facility was small and chronically overcrowded, medical care was nonexistent, and food supplies were short. But conditions at northern prisons, like the one at Elmira, New York, were only marginally better. The North’s interest in and outrage over Confederate prisons made them popular photographic subjects, however.

Albumen silver print, 1865

National Archives, Washington, D.C.
The “cracked-plate” image of Abraham Lincoln, taken by Alexander Gardner on February 5, 1865, is one of the most important and evocative photographs in American history. In preparing for his second inaugural, Lincoln had a series of photographs taken at Gardner’s studio. During this sitting, Gardner created this portrait by accident: at some point, possibly when the glass-plate negative was heated to receive a coat of varnish, a crack appeared in the upper half of the plate. Gardner pulled a single print and then discarded the plate, so only one such portrait exists.

The portrait represents a radical departure from Gardner’s usual crisp empiricism. The shallow depth of field created when Gardner moved his camera in for a close-up yielded a photograph whose focus is confined to the plane of Lincoln’s cheeks, while the remainder of the image appears diffused and even out of focus. Lincoln is careworn and tired, his face grooved by the emotional shocks of war. Yet his face also bears a small smile, perhaps as he contemplates the successful conclusion of hostilities and the restoration of the Union. This is Lincoln between life and death, between his role as a historical actor and the mystical figure that he would become with his assassination. Although Lincoln looked forward to his second term, we know, as he could not, that he will soon be assassinated. This image inextricably links history and myth, creating one of the most powerful American portraits.

Albumen silver print, 1865

National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution
Planning the Capture of Booth and Herold

This carefully posed photograph of three of the Union officers instrumental in cornering John Wilkes Booth and David Herold gives an illusion of control and order to the pursuit of Lincoln’s assassins. Taken in May 1865, the photograph shows (left to right) Lieutenant Luther Baker (1830–1896), Colonel Lafayette Baker (1826–1868)—who ran the Union’s intelligence operations—and cavalry officer Lieutenant Everton Conger (1834–1918). (The two Bakers were cousins.) They are shown after the fact, apparently examining intelligence reports and maps tracking the fugitives as they fled Washington. The pursuit was actually unplanned and chaotic, depending not on systematic intelligence but on fragmentary reports of chance encounters with the conspirators. The most important lead came after Booth had his broken leg treated by Dr. Samuel Mudd and was spotted crossing the Rappahannock River. Colonel Baker and his men tracked Booth to Garrett’s Farm near Port Royal, Virginia, where the actor was killed by a trooper named Boston Corbett, who enjoyed a certain amount of celebrity thereafter.

Albumen silver print, 1865

The New-York Historical Library, New York City
$100,000 Reward

Abraham Lincoln’s assassination caused confusion, widespread panic, and anger in the North as well as foreboding in the South, as it anticipated a violent reaction if it turned out that John Wilkes Booth (1838–1865) had been acting on orders from the Confederacy. Wholesale roundups of suspected conspirators and sympathizers occurred in the weeks after the assassination. Union authorities identified the conspirators fairly quickly, however. It is evidence of the ongoing nature of the investigation that this “Wanted” poster correctly identifies John Wilkes Booth as the conspiracy’s prime mover. It flanks him with two of the lesser actors in the plot. David E. Herold (c. 1842–1865)—misspelled “Harold” here—who had failed to assist another conspirator, Lewis Powell, escaped from the city with Booth. Both men eluded pursuit until April 26, when Union troops cornered them in a Virginia farmhouse. Herold surrendered, but Booth resisted and was shot and killed. John Surratt (1844–1919) successfully escaped the country but was captured and returned to the United States in 1867. He was tried for his part in the conspiracy and freed after a mistrial.

Unidentified artist

Printed broadside with albumen silver prints, 1865

National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution
The issue of whether the eight Booth conspirators who had been captured should be tried before a military tribunal or a civilian court was a point of controversy before President Andrew Johnson decided on a military commission. General David Hunter (1802–1886; center, with sword) headed the nine-man panel, which also included General Lew Wallace (1827–1905; standing to Hunter’s right), later to become famous as the author of *Ben Hur* (1880). The trial was not a model of fairness; much effort was made to argue the criminality of Confederate military and political leadership, and the defendants were inadequately represented. A guilty verdict was preordained: four conspirators were sentenced to hang and were executed the day after sentence was passed; three received terms of hard labor for life (including Dr. Samuel Mudd, who treated Booth during his escape and whose descendants still argue for his innocence); and one received a six-year prison term.

Albumen silver print, 1865

Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
AG095s

John C. Howard’s Livery & Sale Stables

As Abraham Lincoln’s favorite photographer, Alexander Gardner was a fitting choice to document the aftermath of Lincoln’s assassination. Gardner was given exclusive privileges to record the conspirators’ executions, but he also chose to photograph some of the locations that played key roles in the events of April 14 and 15. He photographed the interior and exterior of Ford’s Theatre, including the box where Lincoln sat and the chair in which he was shot; the telegraph office that first announced the news of the president’s death to the world; John Wilkes Booth’s body on the occasion of the postmortem examination; and the livery stable where Booth kept his horse. John C. Howard’s Livery & Sale Stables was located on G Street between Sixth and Seventh Streets, N.W., around the corner from the National Hotel, where Booth stayed, and a few short blocks from Ford’s Theatre.

Albumen silver print, c. 1865

The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, New York City (GLC07736)
Ex-Confederate soldier Lewis Powell (alias Lewis Payne/Paine) was one of the conspirators in John Wilkes Booth’s plot to incapacitate the government by assassinating Abraham Lincoln and other high-ranking officials. As the largely improvised plot evolved, Booth tasked Powell to kill Secretary of State William Seward. The night of April 14, as Booth went to Ford’s Theatre, Powell gained entry to Seward’s Washington home by saying he had medicine for the secretary, who had been injured in a carriage accident. Powell forced his way into Seward’s bedroom and stabbed him repeatedly, although not fatally. Rushing from the house, Powell discovered he had been abandoned by two other conspirators who were to help with his getaway. Powell returned to his residence at Mary Surratt’s boardinghouse, where he hid until his arrest on April 17. The trial began in May; Powell was sentenced to death and was hanged on July 7. Powell is seen here in manacles on the ironclad Saugus; the prisoners were held on ships for security reasons.

Albumen silver print, 1865
National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution; gift of John Wilmerding
Section 6

“To Bind Up the Nation’s Wounds”: 1865

The nearly simultaneous surrender of Robert E. Lee and assassination of Abraham Lincoln shocked the North, transforming joy into grief and leaving both the governing classes and private citizens angry and bewildered. Lincoln’s death created tremendous uncertainty about the course of Reconstruction. Alexander Gardner continued his coverage of the assassination’s aftermath with a stunning series on the execution of four of John Wilkes Booth’s conspirators; he also documented the hanging of Henry Wirz, convicted of war crimes. In the midst of this tumult, Gardner also memorialized the end of the war with a series of group portraits of the commanding generals of the Union’s eastern armies and their staffs. Among these is a photograph of Generals Philip Sheridan, George A. Custer, and three other cavalry officers looking at a map. The future leaders of the Indian Wars appear to be planning the army’s next campaign: conquering the West.
The postwar period saw a sustained effort by both the North and South to commemorate and honor the troops. Despite Lincoln’s words at Gettysburg that nothing would hallow the ground more than remembering the lives that had been lost there, memorials—from simple plaques to elaborate sculptural installations—were installed on the battlefields, usually in rough proximity to where a unit had fought. The impulse to memorialize came from a profound national sense of loss, mourning, and sacrifice. The monument on Henry Hill, commemorating the First Battle of Bull Run, was one of the first such markers: a twenty-seven-foot-tall obelisk made out of sandstone, it is topped by a hundred-pound shell with a similar shell at each corner of its base. Its plaque reads that it is “Dedicated to the patriots” who fell at First Bull Run; it also memorializes the fallen at Groveton (August 29, 1862), part of the Battle of Second Bull Run.

Albumen silver print, 1865

Collection of Bob Zeller
Of the eight Booth conspirators tried for their role in the assassination plot, four were sentenced to death: Mary Surratt, David Herold, Lewis Powell, and George Atzerodt. While the men had been major participants in the plot (even if Herold and Atzerodt had failed at their assignments), Mary Surratt was more controversial, as it was argued that her boardinghouse was simply where the conspirators had met; that her son John was part of the conspiracy did not help her cause. The jury was also uneasy about the federal government executing a woman for the first time.

Convicted and sentenced on June 30, the conspirators were executed on July 7 at Washington’s Old Arsenal Prison, out of public view. In a macabre display of chivalry, a man holding an umbrella shielded Mary Surratt from the sun before the traps were sprung.

Gardner was the only photographer allowed to document the executions, a recognition of his prominence as a documentarian. His camera position on the wall of the prison allowed him a panoramic view.

Albumen silver prints, 1865

Indiana Historical Society, Indianapolis; Daniel R. Weinberg Lincoln Conspirators Collection
AG101s

The White House, looking much as it does today, was the site of popular demonstrations of support for the Union and for Abraham Lincoln, especially after the war ended on April 9, 1865. Lincoln was serenaded and asked to speak by the crowds, which he did from a window on the north front of the mansion. On that day, he only made remarks and famously asked assembled musicians to play “Dixie,” reclaiming that song from the South. On April 11, he delivered his last prepared speech, thanking God “from Whom all blessings flow,” General Ulysses Grant “and his brave men,” and making an argument for limited African American suffrage. In the crowd was John Wilkes Booth, who told his fellow conspirator Lewis Powell, “That is the last speech he will ever give.”

Albumen silver print, c. 1865

Special Collections, Fine Arts Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts
Andrew Johnson was inaugurated as the seventeenth president of the United States on April 15, 1865, following Abraham Lincoln’s assassination. From Tennessee, he was a Democrat who had held virtually all political offices, from mayor to governor. A United States senator, he remained in the Senate after Tennessee seceded in 1861. He argued, “it is treason, nothing but treason and if one state can go out of this [Union] . . . what is your government worth?” His position as a border-state Unionist made Lincoln choose him as vice president.

As president during Reconstruction, Johnson argued that the southern states had never left the Union, “therefore reconstruction is not necessary.” He advocated for the speedy restoration of Confederate states’ power, pardoned Confederates, and opposed rights for blacks. In 1868 Radical Republicans impeached him for his controversial decisions, but he was acquitted in a trial.

Albumen silver print, 1866

Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
Members of the Press After the Ceremonies

This photograph was taken following the dedication of the Bull Run battle monument on June 11, 1865. Alexander Gardner is at the far left, and his brother James is lying on the grass to the right (with the hat). Other people in the picture are New York Herald reporters S. M. Carpenter (lifedates unknown), seated second from the left in profile, and L. A. Whiteley (1825–1869), standing ninth from the left. The photograph is attributed to William Morris Smith, an employee of Gardner’s.

Attributed to William Morris Smith (active 1860s)

Albumen silver print, 1865

National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution; gift of Larry J. West
Graduation pictures in a sense, Alexander Gardner took a series of group portraits of the three main Union commanders—George Meade (1815–1872), Philip Sheridan (1831–1888), and William T. Sherman (1820–1891)—and their staffs at the end of the war. He also photographed Ulysses Grant and his staff. Sherman’s men were the most unfamiliar to Washingtonians. They caused a sensation at the Grand Review of the Armies in Washington (May 23–24, 1865) as they paraded down Pennsylvania Avenue and past the reviewing stand that contained President Johnson, Grant, and other dignitaries.

Sherman’s staff included General Jefferson C. Davis (1828–1879)—not to be confused with the Confederacy’s president—who stands directly behind Sherman (seated, center). Also pictured are Henry Slocum (1827–1894; seated to Sherman’s right) and John Logan (1826–1886; standing, second from right).

Albumen silver print, c.1865

The New-York Historical Library, New York City
Like the photographs of the officers who tracked down John Wilkes Booth, this is a carefully posed photograph that gives a false sense of organized planning to the capture of Confederate president Jefferson Davis. Davis, along with other government officials, fled Richmond on April 3, 1865. After Lincoln’s assassination, Davis was thought to be culpable, and a huge reward was offered for his capture. By early May Davis was in Georgia, where he held a final meeting of the cabinet and dissolved the Confederacy on May 5. Michigan cavalrmen captured him on May 10. When caught, Davis was wearing his wife’s overcoat, which he apparently put on in the dark by mistake. This led to a concerted northern propaganda campaign that Davis had disguised himself as a woman to evade pursuit, a commentary on his supposed cowardice.

The officers in the photograph, taken after the fact, are (left to right): Lieutenant Colonel Benjamin D. Pritchard (1835–1907), who commanded the Michigan troops, Captain Charles Hudson (lifedates unknown), and Lieutenant Silas Stauber (lifedates unknown).

Albumen silver print, 1865

The New-York Historical Library, New York City
John Gibbon (1827–1896) was one of the best fighting generals in the Army of the Potomac, serving continually—except for time convalescing from two wounds—from 1861 to Appomattox. He commanded the famous “Iron Brigade,” made up of mostly western troops (Wisconsin and Michigan) who fought in the eastern theater wearing distinctive black hats as a morale booster. Serving under Winfield Scott Hancock, Gibbon commanded the center of the line at Gettysburg, receiving and then repelling Pickett’s charge on July 3, 1863. Gibbon was a West Pointer and an artillerist whose family lived in North Carolina and were Democrats; three of his brothers served in the Confederacy. This photograph of Gibbon (center) and unidentified men holding captured Confederate flags was part of Gardner’s commemoration of the war’s end. Although war was becoming modern, capturing an opponent’s battle flags was still paramount as a sign of victory.

Albumen silver print, 1865

Chrysler Museum of Art, Norfolk, Virginia; gift of David L. Hack and Museum purchase, with funds from Walter P. Chrysler Jr. by exchange
General Meade and His Staff

The victor at Gettysburg, George Meade (1815–1872), seated center, ended the war with a sense that he had been overlooked and dealt with unfairly. Abraham Lincoln’s criticism that he had failed to vigorously pursue Robert E. Lee after Gettysburg still rankled. And while Meade retained command of the Army of the Potomac, Ulysses Grant’s decision to serve in the field meant that Meade would always be overshadowed by the Union’s commanding general, both in day-to-day decision-making and by reputation. Meade served faithfully and punctiliously under Grant, and Grant testified to Meade’s character in his Memoirs.

Meade was only the last of the many commanders of the Army of the Potomac who was bedeviled by the army’s nearness to Washington and the propensity of its officers to play politics. Aware of its history, Meade, who was a superior corps commander, had not desired overall command in 1863 but was unable to turn Lincoln down.

Albumen silver print, 1865

National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution
General Sheridan and His Staff

Another in Alexander Gardner’s valedictory series of the major Union commanders in each theater of the war, this photograph groups four of the figures from the 1864 campaign in the Shenandoah Valley under the command of Philip Sheridan (1831–1888). Sheridan is standing to the left; at the table are cavalry officer Wesley Merritt (1834–1910); George Crook (1830–1890), who had an independent force in western Virginia before joining Sheridan’s army; Sheridan’s chief of staff, James W. Forsyth (1835–1906); and perhaps America’s most famous cavalryman, George A. Custer (1839–1876).

This photograph brings together the men who would be major figures in the settlement of the Great Plains and the Indian Wars—none more emblematic than Custer. As such, it provides the bridge between the first half of Gardner’s career during the Civil War and the images of western land and people on which he focused during the rest of his photographic career. One war had ended; another was beginning.

Albumen silver print, c. 1865

National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution
William Tecumseh Sherman was one of the Union’s best-known generals. Sixth in his class at West Point, Sherman nevertheless had an uncertain military career early in the Civil War, suffering a nervous collapse in 1861. After the capture of Vicksburg, however, he assumed command of the Military Division of the Mississippi in March 1864. Sherman gained infamy in the South for his marches through Georgia and the Carolinas in 1864 and 1865, during which his scorched-earth policy crippled southern morale. When accepting Confederate defeat in April 1865, Sherman offered lenient terms, however, delivering on his philosophy of “hard war, soft peace.” In light of Lincoln’s assassination, Sherman was reprimanded and the surrender renegotiated. When Ulysses Grant became president in 1869, Sherman succeeded him as general in chief, concentrating on the Indian Wars and military education reforms until his retirement in 1884.

Albumen silver print, c. 1865

The New-York Historical Library, New York City
In Abraham Lincoln’s cabinet, the famous “team of rivals,” Secretary of State William Seward stood as first among equals. The former governor and later senator from New York was a national political power, first in the Whig Party and then the Republican, which he joined in 1855 as the Whigs crumbled. He was the leading candidate to be the party’s 1860 presidential nominee but lost out to Lincoln. In the cabinet, Lincoln controlled Seward’s ambitions; he loyally served both the president and the cause of the Union. Seward helped edit Lincoln’s first inaugural address but failed to persuade the president not to resupply Fort Sumter, in the hope that war could still be avoided. Seward skillfully handled the Union’s foreign diplomacy during the war. He remained secretary of state during the Johnson administration, during which he negotiated the purchase of Alaska from Russia.

Salted paper photograph, 1863

The New-York Historical Library, New York City
In March 1865, Abraham Lincoln named Hugh McCulloch secretary of the treasury for his second-term cabinet; this portrait celebrates that appointment. Originally an Indiana banker, McCulloch had been serving in government since 1862. At that time his criticisms of a proposed national banking system brought him to the attention of then-Treasury Secretary Salmon P. Chase, who made him comptroller of the currency. Given his banking background, McCulloch had been a Whig and a follower of Henry Clay’s “national economic system.” With the destruction of the Whig Party he had moved to the Republican Party, where he was pro-Union and moderately antislavery. McCulloch retained his post in the Johnson administration, where he wrestled with the question of settling the national debt incurred during the war. He also ran afoul of the Radical Republicans on the issues of Reconstruction and civil rights. He left government in 1870.

Albumen silver print, 1865

Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
By 1866, the chief justice of the Supreme Court was Salmon P. Chase (1808–1873), pictured in the center, a strong antislavery Republican who had replaced the conservative Roger B. Taney. A former senator from Ohio and secretary of the treasury, Chase was appointed to the Court in 1864. With the end of the war, the Supreme Court began the legal process of reaffirming civilian rule after the wartime measures, particularly the suspension of habeas corpus, which Lincoln had imposed. A key decision in 1866 was *ex parte Milligan*, which held that a civilian could not be tried or sentenced by a military tribunal, a case with civil liberty ramifications to this day. In 1868, Chase would preside over the impeachment trial of President Andrew Johnson.

Albumen silver print, 1867

Collection of the Supreme Court of the United States, Washington, D.C.

EXH.AG.56
The assembled justices of the Supreme Court in 1867 were (from left to right): David Davis (1815–1886), Noah Haynes Swayne (1804–1884), Robert Cooper Grier (1794–1870), James Moore Wayne (1790–1867), Chief Justice Salmon P. Chase (1808–1873), Samuel Nelson (1792–1873), Nathan Clifford (1803–1881), Samuel Freeman Miller (1816–1890), and Stephen Johnson Field (1816–1899).

Albumen silver print, 1867

National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution

S/NPG.78.97
Henry Wirz (1823–1865) was the only Confederate executed for what modern society would call a war crime. The Swiss-born Wirz had lost the use of his arm by 1862 and thereafter left the combat arena for posts in southern prisoner-of-war facilities in Richmond, Virginia; Alabama; and finally, in March 1864, Andersonville, Georgia. As the war had become more bitter, attitudes toward prisoners hardened, and by 1864 there was no longer a system of parole and exchange. The result was tremendous overcrowding; Andersonville became a hell-hole. With completely inadequate facilities in everything from food and housing to drainage and sanitation, thousands of Union POWs died. Wirz was simply overwhelmed—and possibly incompetent. In the vindictive atmosphere at the end of the war, however, he was charged with deliberate murder and sentenced to death after a trial that was notably unfair and biased. He was hanged at Washington’s Old Capitol Prison on November 10, 1865.

Albumen silver print, 1865

Chrysler Museum of Art, Norfolk, Virginia; gift of David L. Hack and Museum purchase, with funds from Walter P. Chrysler Jr. by exchange
AG115

*Execution of Captain Henry Wirz, Springing the trap*

Albumen silver print, 1865

Chrysler Museum of Art, Norfolk, Virginia; gift of David L. Hack and Museum purchase, with funds from Walter P. Chrysler Jr. by exchange
Published in 1866, the Sketchbook was first announced in the Sunday Morning Chronicle as “100 pictures selected from [Gardner’s] immense collection . . . each picture containing brief historical text . . . published in two volumes in magnificent style . . . destined to have an immense sale.”

The Sketchbook was conceived by Gardner as an impressionistic essay of photographs and corresponding narrative, working together to convey meaning and evoke an emotional response. The layout of the book is mainly chronological and includes shots of camp life, battlefields, the dead and wounded, important wartime constructions and personalities, and public buildings. It is telling that Gardner chose to begin and end the book with images relating to death—the first is a view of Marshall House, where Elmer Ellsworth was shot; the last is an image of the monument dedicated to Union soldiers who died during the first Battle of Bull Run.

Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, Ohio
Published and sold as a set of two volumes of fifty images and corresponding descriptive text, the Sketchbook was a handsome and costly product, made to order in a variety of bindings and colors. The exact number of copies made of the Sketchbook is unknown, though those whose provenance has been confirmed indicate that the audience was the wealthy and powerful—members of Congress, Union generals, and libraries and government offices. Many copies have been unbound for the circulation and sale of individual plates. As both a visual historical record informing contemporary and successive generations on the Civil War as well as an evocative piece of literature, the Sketchbook is a powerful testament to the progressive views and skilled artistic craft of its creator.

Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, Ohio
After the war, Alexander Gardner photographed events and people associated with one of the most abiding preoccupations of the nineteenth century: westward expansion. From 1867 to 1872 he made portraits of American Indian leaders who traveled to Washington to negotiate preservation of their traditional lands and lifeways, even as white Americans flooded the frontier.

In 1867, Gardner became the first photographer to document a transcontinental project, making views of the Kansas Pacific Railroad’s construction activities, bustling frontier towns and settlements, Army forts, Indian villages, and magnificent empty landscapes.

The federal government then hired Gardner to photograph the spring 1868 treaty negotiations between the Indian Peace Commission and leaders of the Crow, Northern Cheyenne, Northern Arapaho, and Lakota in the Dakota Territory. (These are the only photographs of treaty negotiations the U.S. government ever commissioned.) The Fort Laramie Treaty established reservations on the northern Plains, marking a watershed moment in the relationship between Native peoples and the government.
In 1867, the Kansas Pacific Railroad commissioned Alexander Gardner to photograph its proposed transcontinental route along the thirty-fifth and thirty-second parallels. Setting out from St. Louis with the railroad’s surveyors, he made hundreds of views in Kansas; the Colorado, New Mexico, and Arizona Territories; and California. The railroad supplemented its survey report with Gardner’s photographs in a bid to secure government bonds and land grants from Congress. In this context, a view like *Mushroom Rock* served as more than a simple record of a fascinating feature of the central Kansas landscape; the photograph was also evidence of the abundant sandstone available to the settlers who would build towns around the proposed route. Moreover, the natural resources surrounding the line would allow the Kansas Pacific to make good use of the “waste and barrenness” characterizing the western landscape.

Albumen silver print, 1867

From the series *Across the Continent on the Kansas Pacific Railroad*

National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution; William T. Sherman Collection of Alexander Gardner Photographs (P10132)
Alexander Gardner quoted from the final stanza of a 1726 poem by Bishop George Berkeley for the title of this photograph. The Anglo-Irish philosopher had originally offered his verse as a lamentation on the decline of British influence in North America, but after the Civil War, as the United States turned with determination to its expansionist agenda, Americans found particular resonance in Berkeley’s line, “Westward the course of empire takes its way.” Constructing a transcontinental railroad was central to the achievement of these ambitions. Although the company survived into the 1870s, the Kansas Pacific Railroad was unable to rally federal support for a transcontinental route along the southerly thirty-fifth and thirty-second parallels. On May 10, 1869, at Promontory Point in the Utah Territory, the “Golden Spike” ceremony joined the more northern tracks of the Union Pacific Railroad with those of the Central Pacific Railroad, marking the completion of the first railroads to link the East and West coasts of the United States.

Albumen silver print, 1867

From the series Across the Continent on the Kansas Pacific Railroad

National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution; William T. Sherman Collection of Alexander Gardner Photographs (P10134)
AG120

*Group gathered for the Treaty signing, Fort Laramie, Dakota Territory*

Indian Peace Commission staff regularly posed for Alexander Gardner, including its secretary, Ashton S. H. White (seated, second from right), who appears in at least five Laramie views. The commissioners posed as a group only once for an orchestrated photograph, although several had prior experience sitting for Gardner. Gardner’s Civil War acquaintance General William T. Sherman, now commander of the Military Division of the Missouri, was one of three active military appointees to the commission, which Congress convened in July 1867 to negotiate peace and to inaugurate “some plan for the civilization of the Indian.” Sherman initially expressed impatience with his civilian colleagues, who wished for a peaceable solution. Finally deciding there was “little difference whether [the Indians] be coaxed out by Indian commissioners or killed,” he identified common ground with his less hawkish counterparts: the forced concentration of North American Indians on defined reservations.

*Albumen silver print, 1868*

National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution; William T. Sherman Collection of Alexander Gardner Photographs (P15386)
AG121

*United States Overland Stage starting for Denver from Hays City, 289 miles west of Missouri River*

In his final survey report General William J. Palmer posed a series of arguments to convince the government to finance the proposed Kansas Pacific Railroad route. Among the items Palmer listed was the considerable federal expenditure on the military “to fight the Indians, protect settlers and emigrants, guard the boundaries of the nation, transport mails and Indian goods, &c.”

As Alexander Gardner’s photograph suggests, attachments of infantry were regularly called upon for the safe delivery of mail by stagecoach. (In fact, Gardner and the railway’s surveyors enjoyed a military escort as they made their way from St. Louis to San Francisco.) The military personnel pictured here belonged to one of the four African American infantry regiments that the U.S. Army established after the Civil War.

Albumen silver print, 1867

*From the series Across the Continent on the Kansas Pacific Railroad*

National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution; William T. Sherman Collection of Alexander Gardner Photographs (P10133)
Lakota delegates Medicine Bull, Iron Nation, and Yellow Hawk with their Agent-Interpreter, Washington, D.C.

Left to right: Medicine Bull (lifedates unknown), unidentified interpreter, Iron Nation (1815–1894), and Yellow Hawk (lifedates unknown)

Alexander Gardner made three portraits of each American Indian pictured here: a group portrait and two separate portraits of each delegate, one in his Native and one in his Western attire. (A suit was often among the gifts given to Native delegates to the capital.) It is unknown how Medicine Bull (Sicangu Lakota), Iron Nation (Sicangu Lakota), and Yellow Hawk (Itazipacola Lakota) were dressed when they arrived to sit for their portraits, but Gardner’s apparent desire to make two individual portraits of each in many ways anticipates the popular “before and after” photographs of Native people that circulated in the following decades. The photographs were made to document the supposed salutary benefits of the sitter’s exposure to American civilization.

Albumen silver print, 1867

National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution; William T. Sherman Collection of Alexander Gardner Photographs (P10139)
AG123

Sac and Fox Delegates with the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Washington, D.C.

Left to right: Pa-tek-kwa (lifedates unknown), Mo-ko-ho-ko (lifedates unknown), unidentified man, Chief Moses Keokuk (1821–1903), Nathaniel G. Taylor (1819–1887), Uk-wka-ho-ko (lifedates unknown), unidentified man, Che-ko-skuk (lifedates unknown), unidentified man, and possibly Wa-com-mo (lifedates unknown)

On February 18, 1867, in Washington, D.C., the Sac and Fox signed a treaty with the federal government in which they sold their land along the Mississippi River to the United States and agreed to relocate to Indian Territory (now Oklahoma). Several days later, Alexander Gardner photographed the Sac and Fox delegates with Commissioner of Indian Affairs Lewis V. Bogy, who signed the treaty on behalf of the government. After completing their diplomatic business, the delegation spent additional time in the capital city and evidently had occasion to pose a second time for Gardner with yet another commissioner, Nathaniel G. Taylor, whom President Andrew Johnson appointed to the post on March 26, after the Senate failed to confirm Bogy. The two seated unidentified men may be George Powers (interpreter) and Augustus Brosius (Indian agent).

Albumen silver print, 1867

National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution; William T. Sherman Collection of Alexander Gardner Photographs (P10141)
AG124

Medicine Bull  lifedates unknown

Sicangu Lakota

Albumen silver print, 1867

National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution; William T. Sherman

Collection of Alexander Gardner Photographs (P10146)
AG125

Long Foot  lifedates unknown

Ihanktonwan Nakota

Albumen silver print, 1867

National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution; William T. Sherman

Collection of Alexander Gardner Photographs (P10147)
AG126

Little Bird  lifedates unknown

Ihanktonwan Nakota

Albumen silver print, c. 1867–68

National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution; William T. Sherman

Collection of Alexander Gardner Photographs (P10148)
In a letter dated February 20, 1867, Smithsonian Institution Secretary Joseph Henry pressed Commissioner of Indian Affairs Lewis V. Bogy to fund a comprehensive effort to photograph Native delegates to Washington. Henry envisioned a kind of archive, a “trustworthy collection of likenesses of the principal tribes of the United States,” urgently adding that with the passing of “the Indian” only a few years remained to undertake such a project. Bogy apparently passed on the project, but the Smithsonian found an alternative collaborator in Englishman William Blackmore. (Blackmore posed before Alexander Gardner’s camera with Oglala Lakota leader Red Cloud. The portrait of the two men is on display nearby.) Blackmore commissioned local Washington photographers like Gardner to make portraits of visiting delegates such as the Ihanktonwan Nakota delegates Long Foot (lifedates unknown) and Little Bird (lifedates unknown), pictured here. Blackmore made his photographs available to the Smithsonian; they represent the institution’s very first photograph collection and are now housed in the National Anthropological Archives.

Albumen silver print, 1867

National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution; William T. Sherman Collection of Alexander Gardner Photographs (P10149)
Iron Nation 1815–1894

Over the course of several decades, Sicangu Lakota (Brulé Sioux) headman Iron Nation signed several important treaties on behalf of his band, but by 1867 he was having difficulties securing promised treaty annuities from the Indian agent responsible for their distribution. In Washington, where he sat before Alexander Gardner’s camera, he neither negotiated the terms of a new treaty nor did he appeal to Congress for the payments owed to his people. Rather, Iron Nation toured the capital city, taking in such sights as the White House, the Capitol, and the Navy Yard. (He was likely also presented with the pictured pipe tomahawk, manufactured by the federal government as a gift for Native peoples and, incidentally, never smoked by the recipients.)

Arranged by his agent, Iron Nation’s trip reflected a common strategy designed to overwhelm Native people with the power of the United States. With their Native guests so impressed, the government hoped for complete and quiet capitulation to its expansionist policies.

Albumen silver print, 1867

National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution; William T. Sherman Collection of Alexander Gardner Photographs (P10145)
Lakota, Nakota, Sac and Fox, Kaw, and Ojibwe Delegates at the White House, Washington, D.C.

On February 23, 1867, Alexander Gardner was invited to the White House to photograph Native delegates who had traveled to Washington to negotiate with the federal government. President Andrew Johnson stands on the upper central balcony and is flanked by Commissioner of Indian Affairs Lewis V. Bogy (to his right) and Secretary of the Interior Orville H. Browning (to his left). In turn, Bogy and Browning are positioned next to Ojibwe leader Hole in the Day and Kaw leader Allegawaho, respectively. Most of the delegates Gardner photographed in his studio also appear here, including, in the front row, Iron Nation and Medicine Bull (both Sicangu Lakota) and Long Foot and Little Bird (both Ihanktonwan Nakota), and, on the balcony between the rightmost colonnade, Yellow Hawk (Itazipacola Lakota); all of their portraits are on display in this gallery.

Albumen silver print, 1867

National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution; William T. Sherman Collection of Alexander Gardner Photographs (P10142)
Red Dog  lifedates unknown
Oglala Lakota
Red Cloud  1822–1909
William Blackmore 1827–1878

From 1866 to 1868, in an effort to retain control of the important Powder River Basin, Red Cloud (Oglala Lakota) and his Northern Cheyenne and Northern Arapaho allies engaged in a sustained armed conflict with the army. The treaty of 1868 in part sought to end what the military called “Red Cloud’s War.” But while Alexander Gardner was at Fort Laramie for the negotiations, Red Cloud, much to the consternation of the peace commissioners, refused to make an appearance. Indeed, Gardner had to wait to photograph the great Lakota leader until his 1872 diplomatic trip to Washington, D.C.

Albumen silver prints, 1872
National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution; Jackson Album, MS 4420, Volume 9
AG131

Red Cloud 1822–1909

Oglala Lakota

Albumen silver prints, 1872

National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution; Jackson Album, MS 4420, Volume 9
The primary intention of the Fort Laramie Treaty was to establish reservations on the northern Plains. These reservations were intended to abolish traditional, nomadic lifeways, and to encourage farming as a means of assimilating (or “civilizing”) the region’s indigenous peoples. The 1868 treaty set the boundaries of the Crow reservation between the Yellowstone River and the Bighorn Mountains, adjacent to the Powder River Basin. Claimed by the Crow in opposition to the allied Lakota, Northern Cheyenne, and Northern Arapaho, the Powder River Basin lay in the “unceded Indian territory” (which abutted the Great Sioux Reservation), and the treaty permitted all four tribes equal access to the territory so long as there was buffalo to hunt. Before the army formally withdrew from the Powder River Basin, the Lakota resumed their decades-long rivalry with the Crow. In the coming years, the army used this traditional conflict to its advantage, for instance employing Crow scouts in George Armstrong Custer’s military campaigns against the Lakota, Northern Cheyenne, and Northern Arapaho.

Albumen silver print, 1868

National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution; William T. Sherman Collection of Alexander Gardner Photographs (P10112)
AG133

*Officers’ Quarters, Fort David A. Russell, Dakota Territory*

As the United States sought to safeguard migration routes between 1866 and 1868, the number of army forts on the northern Plains proliferated. Among these, for example, was Fort David A. Russell, constructed in 1867 along the newly laid tracks of the Union Pacific Railroad. Situated along the Bozeman Trail, Forts Reno (1865), C. F. Smith (1866), and Phil Kearney (1866) were built in flagrant violation of a prior treaty. The trail provided overland passage to Montana’s gold fields, cutting through the Powder River Basin—territory granted by an earlier treaty to northern Plains Indian tribes. In protest, Lakota, Northern Cheyenne, and Northern Arapaho leaders organized raids—the so-called “Red Cloud’s War” or “Bozeman Trail War”—along the trail and against the forts. During the 1868 negotiations, each tribe, including the Crow, demanded the trail be abandoned and the forts dismantled. To end regional conflict and hasten the signing of the Laramie treaty, the government relented, but not entirely: intentionally vague language in the treaty allowed for Native use of—but not title to—the land.

Albumen silver print, 1868

National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution; William T. Sherman Collection of Alexander Gardner Photographs (P10115)
Originally established as a trading post in the mid-1830s, Laramie was an important place of contact for white Americans and northern Plains Indians. The post was located on the high Plains, in what is now southeastern Wyoming. The fort was in close proximity to buffalo habitat, and Native people traded buffalo robes for Western-made goods there. In 1846, when Congress allocated funds for the army to acquire the trading post, one observer noted that Fort Laramie “would be in the vicinity of the buffalo range, where all the most formidable Indian tribes are fast approaching, and near where there will eventually (as game decreases) be a great struggle for ascendancy.” As white Americans flooded into the region, Native people witnessed the depletion of the buffalo herds and faced dispossession from land allocated to them by the federal government. By 1868 that “great struggle” was reaching a climax but, unforeseen by the 1846 commentator, it had expanded in scope to include not only Indian tribes but also white Americans.

Albumen silver print, 1868

National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution; William T. Sherman Collection of Alexander Gardner Photographs (P10119)
Bluff on the North Platte River with the Black Hills in the Distance, near Fort Laramie, Dakota Territory

Alexander Gardner produced negatives in both an imperial print (seen here) and stereograph of this particular landscape. Although the imperial print is untitled, he jotted down a descriptive caption on the stereograph: “On the North Platte, Black Hills in the Distance.” But Gardner had in fact photographed what are now known as the Laramie Mountains (Wyoming), which lay just west of the fort. Still, his caption does call to mind South Dakota’s Black Hills, which serves as a reminder of the consequences of the treaty of 1868. According to the terms, the Black Hills—Pahá Sápa in Lakota—lay indisputably within the Great Sioux Reservation. In 1874, prospectors, trespassing but protected by the army, discovered gold there. The government sought to buy the Black Hills; the Lakotas’ refusal to sell led to the Sioux War of 1876. In flagrant violation of the treaty, the government took possession of the Black Hills after securing only a minority agreement among Lakota headmen to cede them. The Lakota continue to assert their rights to Pahá Sápa.

Albumen silver print, 1868

National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution; William T. Sherman Collection of Alexander Gardner Photographs (P10122)
William G. Bullock served as the general manager of the sutler’s store at Fort Laramie from 1858 to 1871. Civilians appointed by the secretary of war, sutlers sold military and non-military provisions to army personnel and often expanded their monopolistic enterprise to include trade with Native people. The situation at Laramie was no different, and as the sutler’s operative, Bullock formed professional (and personal) relationships with Native individuals. The Lakota, Northern Cheyenne, and Northern Arapaho had in fact been trading at Laramie for more than three decades, and often relied on trade when the government failed to deliver pledged annuities. The 1868 treaty forbade them from crossing south of the North Platte River, thus prohibiting them from entering the fort. As early as December, Oglala Lakota leader Red Cloud—eager to trade with Bullock for food—challenged Laramie’s commanding officer. To avoid an armed conflict, the commander relented, but the treaty, not yet ratified by Congress, was already sowing the seeds of discord.

Albumen silver print, 1868

National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution; William T. Sherman Collection of Alexander Gardner Photographs (P10126)
AG137

Bridge over the Laramie River near its Junction with the North Platte River, Fort Laramie, Dakota Territory

In the spring of 1868, Alexander Gardner received an appointment to photograph treaty negotiations between the Indian Peace Commission and leaders of several northern Plains Indian nations. Over the course of weeks, the Crow, Northern Cheyenne, Northern Arapaho, and Lakota arrived at Fort Laramie and met independently with the peace commissioners. Between councils, Gardner was free to make views of the fort and its surroundings.

The proprietors of the toll bridge pictured here charged the hefty fee of $2.50 per wagon for passage over the Laramie River and into the fort. In the 1850s and 1860s, Fort Laramie represented the final outpost of the United States for tens of thousands of white Americans migrating along the Oregon Trail to the gold fields of California or the farmlands of the Pacific Northwest.

Albumen silver print, 1868

National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution; William T. Sherman Collection of Alexander Gardner Photographs (P10128)
During the Civil War, Lieutenant W. H. Brown of the Eleventh Ohio Volunteer Cavalry was stationed at Fort Laramie. After his enlistment ended, he purchased a nearby storage shed and converted it into a hotel. The hotel accommodated immigrants traveling west and served as a boardinghouse for unmarried army officers. When Brown was forced to discontinue the sale of alcohol to his guests, he gave up the hotel and instead began a stagecoach line. The hotel itself managed to survive, but by the 1880s it was dilapidated and, complained one lodger, overrun by “horrid little bugs.”

Albumen silver print, 1868

National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution; William T. Sherman Collection of Alexander Gardner Photographs (P10135)
Oglala Lakota headman Man Afraid of His Horses (1808?–1899)—pictured between fellow Oglala Lakota delegate Fire Thunder (lifedates unknown) and a man who is possibly Northern Cheyenne representative Pipe (lifedates unknown)—appeared at Fort Laramie for the negotiations in the spring of 1868 but waited until November to sign the treaty as did his ally Red Cloud (Oglala Lakota). During the Bozeman Trail conflict, his son Young Man Afraid of His Horses had distinguished himself as a leader, and after 1868 father and son guided their sub-band through the turbulent post-treaty period. After gold was discovered in the Black Hills in 1874, the federal government sought to renegotiate the 1868 treaty by offering to buy the Black Hills from the Lakota. The Lakotas’ refusal led to the Sioux War of 1876 and to the infamous Battle of Little Big Horn. In the wake of Custer’s crushing defeat, as a means of punishment, the government considered abolishing the Great Sioux Reservation and deporting the occupants to Indian Territory (now Oklahoma). Man Afraid of His Horses and his son were instrumental in keeping the government from once again dispossessing their people from their land.

Albumen silver print, 1868

National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution; William T. Sherman
Collection of Alexander Gardner Photographs (P15384)
Group of Lakota women and children with High Wolf, at the Indian Agent’s Quarters, Fort Laramie, Dakota Territory

Just weeks after the close of the 1868 negotiations, Office of Indian Affairs Special Agent J. P. Cooper expressed concern over the immediate implications of the Fort Laramie Treaty. Orders from the fort commander, General William T. Sherman, prohibited Cooper from distributing annuities and insisted that he direct the Lakota to Fort Randall—an astonishing 400 miles east of Laramie. In a letter to the regional superintendent of Indian affairs, Cooper asked “Would it not be more reasonable and wiser . . . to feed them at some point north of Laramie, within their own country?” The civilian members of the Indian Peace Commission had attempted to restrict the army’s role in implementing Indian policy; however, Congress immediately charged Sherman with executing the terms of the 1868 treaty. The responsibility of distributing annuities was transferred from the Office of Indian Affairs to the army. Sherman used his newfound annuity duties to remove the Lakota as far as possible from, in his words, “the white settlements and lines of travel.”

Albumen silver print, 1868

National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution; William T. Sherman

Collection of Alexander Gardner Photographs (P15383a)
In 1868 the commissioners met separately with several bands constituting the Lakota Nation (Teton Sioux). Multiple leaders from each band signed the Fort Laramie Treaty; for example, twenty-five headmen of the Sicangu Lakota (Brulé Sioux) band added their marks to the treaty on April 29. Leaders within the Oglala Lakota (Oglala Sioux) band were less united in their approach. While many Oglala headmen met with the commission and signed the treaty in May, the prominent Red Cloud refused to even travel to Fort Laramie. For many months the federal government stated, but had not yet acted upon, its intention to abandon its military forts along the Bozeman Trail. Red Cloud insisted on personally witnessing the dismantling of the forts and the closing of the trail before he would sign. The forts were destroyed—indeed, he helped set them alight—and the trail closed in August; Red Cloud signed in November.

Albumen silver print, 1868

National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution; William T. Sherman

Collection of Alexander Gardner Photographs (P15380)
AG142

Crow leaders with their Agent-Interpreter, Fort Laramie, Dakota Territory

Left to right (all: lifedates unknown): Dr. Matthews, Mountain Tail, Pounded Meat, Black Foot, Winking Eye (seated on ground), White Fawn, White Horse, Poor Elk, Shot-in-the-Jaw, Crow or Crane, Pretty Young Bull

The arrival of the Crow on May 1, 1868, marked not their first but their second attempt to negotiate the treaty at the fort. The previous fall, the Indian Peace Commission had summoned the Crow to Laramie. For two days in November 1867, Crow leaders reminded their U.S. government counterparts about prior treaties in which they had agreed to cede land in exchange for annuities or goods that never materialized. In addition, Black Foot explicitly objected to the government’s proposal to create a reservation: “You speak about putting us on a reservation and teaching us to farm. . . . [This] does not please us. We want horses to run after the game. . . . I would like to live just as I have been raised.” The Crow initially declined to enter into yet another written agreement with the government, but in the spring of 1868 signed a treaty that, despite their protestations, established the reservation.

Albumen silver print, 1868

National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution; William T. Sherman Collection of Alexander Gardner Photographs (P15385)
Indian Peace Commissioners in council with the Northern Cheyenne and Northern Arapaho,
Fort Laramie, Dakota Territory

Left to right: Colonel Samuel F. Tappan (1831–1913), General William S. Harney (1800–1889), General William T. Sherman (1820–1891), General John B. Sanborn (1826–1904), General Christopher C. Augur (1821–1898), General Alfred H. Terry (1827–1890), and Commission Secretary Ashton S. H. White (lifedates unknown)

In the summer of 1867, when Congress convened the Indian Peace Commission, popular opinion in the eastern United States supported a diplomatic resolution to the so-called “Indian problem” on both the northern and southern Plains. (The negotiations on the southern Plains were not photographed.) Consisting of civilians and army generals, the commission managed to secure treaties with the region’s “hostile” tribes and convened its final meeting on October 7, 1868. By then, public sentiment had taken an aggressive turn and demanded increased military intervention in Indian matters. Overruling their more diplomatically minded colleagues, the commission’s military members—led by General William T. Sherman—used the shift in the political landscape to advantage. As a body, the commission resolved that the government “should cease to recognize the Indian tribes as ‘domestic dependent nations.’” Treaty-making, or diplomacy, was at an end, and in the coming years, military conflict characterized U.S.–Indian relations on the Plains.

Albumen silver print, 1868
National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution; William T. Sherman
Collection of Alexander Gardner Photographs (P15390)
Group of Cheyenne Chiefs, Fort Laramie, Dakota Territory

As part of the treaty-making process, the Indian Peace Commission distributed gifts to the headmen of each tribe. In addition to items such as foodstuffs, ammunition, and cloth, the commissioners distributed surplus military uniforms, overcoats, and hats requisitioned at the end of the Civil War. Often misidentified as “Indian policemen,” the Native American men wearing uniforms in Alexander Gardner’s Laramie photographs are in fact the recipients of treaty gifts, including the unidentified Cheyenne man at the left wearing a U.S. Army mounted great coat.

Albumen silver print, 1868

National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution; George V. Allen Photograph Collection, Photo Lot 90-1 (NAA INV 09824200)
Indian Peace Commission, Fort Laramie, Dakota Territory


Albumen silver print, 1868

National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution; George V. Allen Photograph Collection, Photo Lot 90-1 (NAA INV 09824100)
AG146 <CASE with 147>

*Interior of Council Chamber, Man Afraid of His Horses in center, Fort Laramie, Dakota Territory*

From Washington, D.C., to Fort Laramie and back again, Alexander Gardner hauled a substantial amount of photographic equipment, including three cameras and the glass-plate negatives required of each. He used two different view cameras—one accommodated a 12 x 18-inch negative and the other a 5 x 7-inch—and a stereoscopic camera. Gardner made very few prints from his 12 x 18 negatives; from his 5 x 7 negatives he made the 9 x 12-inch prints on display. He most likely intended to distribute his stereographs to a popular audience.

Albumen silver print, 1868

National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution; George V. Allen Photograph Collection, Photo Lot 90-1 (NAA INV 09825100)
American Indian Encampment near Fort Laramie, Dakota Territory

Alexander Gardner often reshot the views he had photographed with his 12 x 18-inch camera with his stereoscopic camera, as was the case with Indian Encampment. Compared to its large-format equivalent, which can be seen on display nearby, this stereograph was clearly composed with three-dimensional viewing in mind. When viewed through a stereoscope, the now-volumetric figures seated on the outcroppings in the middle distance—missing in the larger print—serve to guide the viewer’s eye through the scene.

Albumen silver print, 1868

National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution; George V. Allen Photograph Collection, Photo Lot 90-1 (NAA INV 09825000)