Intimate Strategies: Military Commanders & Their Wives

Lesley J. Gordon, Ph.D.
University of Akron
Marriage & War

- Private vs. Public Life
- Victorian Marriage: Different Than Today
  - Practical & Romantic
  - Divorce Rare
  - Women: “Separate Sphere”
- Intimate Strategies: Meant to Fill Gap in Scholarship
  - See women & men in new light
The Davises

- Varina Howell
- Pres. Jefferson Davis
- Complex Relationship
- War strengthened marriage
- "Ideal of Patriarchy"
The Lees

- Gen. Robert E. Lee
- Mary Anna Randolph Custis
- Marriage that Complemented Differences
- She anchored Him
The Jacksons

- Gen. Thomas J. Jackson
- Mary Anna Jackson
- Mythic Stonewall
- Tragic End to Marriage with Jackson’s Death
- “Professional Widow”
The Picketts

- Gen. George E. Pickett
- Sallie “LaSalle” Corbell
- Lovers United by War
- Yet Two Troubled Souls
- Another “Professional Widow”
The Ewells

- Gen. Richard S. Ewell
- Lizinka Brown Ewell
- Strained Marriage
- Strong willed Wife
- Gen Ewell: under Siege
The Gorgases

- Gen. Josiah Gorgas
- Amelia Gayle
- Partnership & Traditional Marriage
- After War: She became “modern woman”
The Grants

- Gen. Ulysses S. Grant
- Julia Dent
- Successful Marriage
- Son of Abolitionist & Daughter of Slaveholder
The Shermans

- Eleanor “Ellen” Ewing
- Gen. William Tecumseh Sherman
- Foster Brother & Sister
- Then Marriage
- 60+ year Relationship
The Custers

- Elizabeth “Libbie” Custer
- Gen. George Armstrong Custer
- Passionate Courtship
- Libbie: Devoted Wife & True Professional Widow
The Chamberlains

- Francis “Fannie” Caroline Adams
- Gen. Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain
- Hero of Gettysburg
- Strained Wartime Marriage
The Frémonts

- Jessie Benton
- Gen. John Charles Frémont
- He: Married into Powerful Political Family
- She: His "chief of staff"
The Lees

- Admiral Samuel Phillips Lee
- Elizabeth Blair
- Her Family: Powerful Politically
- Great Efforts at Partnership
- Long Separations
Conclusions

- How did War affect Marriage?
- How did Marriage affect War (these famed & powerful leaders?)
- Civil War did not necessarily destroy marriage
- Need more attention to common soldiers marriages
- Fascinating Stories (women often overlooked)
- Division between battlefront & homefront imaginary