William Tecumsah Sherman

Clan Elizabeth (Thomas Munson's Daughter)

General William Tecumseh Sherman: Tormented brilliance

by Lori Hahn

Capt Thomas Munson > **Elizabeth Munson** > Hannah Higginbotham > Hannah Gould > Capt Isaac Hoyt > Mary Elizabeth Hoyt m. Charles Robert Sherman > **William Tecumseh Sherman**



William Tecumseh "Cump" Sherman (1820-1891) was a Union general during the Civil War. He gained recognition in the Western Theater, notably capturing Atlanta in 1864. Sherman's "March to the Sea" was a devastating campaign, employing scorched-earth tactics. His forces played a key role in the surrender of Confederate armies, contributing to Union victory. Post-war, Sherman continued military service, leaving a lasting legacy for his strategies and famous mangled quote: "War is hell." After Ulysses S Grant became President, Sherman became the General of the Armies, a post he held for many years.

I could discuss the lengthy military history of General Sherman, but as I researched, I found his personal story far more interesting. Sherman had a serio-tragic career prior to the Civil War and was haunted by the demons of his mind most of his life. Today we would call it bi-polar disorder, but then he carried monikers like "insane."

He was born February 8, 1820 in Lancaster, Ohio, to Elizabeth Hoyt and Charles Robert Sherman. His father was a well-regarded lawyer and judge, serving on the Ohio Supreme Court. He died unexpectedly of typhoid fever, in 1829, leaving his wife with 11 children and no means of support. Cump was then raised by neighbor and family friend Thomas Ewing, who later became a US Senator and first Secretary of the Interior.

He attended the United States Millitary Academy and graduated sixth in a class of 41. He was first sent to the Second Seminole War in Florida, a war he lamented. Then, he was posted in Georgia and South Carolina. His connections to the Ewing family was his entree into society in Charleston. Most of his classmates were gaining valuable fighting experience in the Mexican War. He was then sent to California as a military administrator at the time of the gold rush. Many of his men deserted to seek their fortune. He helped plat Sacramento, owned part of a general store in Coloma, California, and found other ways to augment his meager $70 monthly Army pay. But, all in all, his career was a disappointment for him.



Ellen Ewing Sherman

Eleanor (Ellen) Ewing, daughter of Senator Ewing, was also Cump's foster sister. She was born October 4, 1824. Though Senator Ewing did not want the Army life for his beautiful and talented daughter, the two were wed May 1, 1850 at Blair House in Washington DC, where her father was a member of President Zachary Taylor's Cabinet. President Taylor and Vice Presisdent Millard Fillmore attended. It would be a loving marriage to the end.

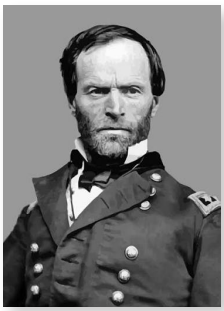
She spent the next few years bouncing back and forth from Cump's duty assignments in California and her family home in Ohio. She absolutely detested San Francisco and found comfort at home. In 1853, Cump resigned his commission and started working in the civilian sector.

From 1853 to 1858, Sherman held the position of a bank manager in both San Francisco and New York. Unfortunately, the bank experienced a downfall during the Panic of 1857. Following this setback, in 1858, Sherman relocated to Leavenworth, Kansas, where he pursued a career in law. He later assumed the role of the inaugural superintendent at the Louisiana State Seminary of Learning & Military Academy, which eventually became Louisiana State University, serving from 1859 to 1861. Sherman chose to resign from his position on January 18, 1861, upon learning of Louisiana's intention to secede from the Union. During the first 10 years of marriage, he and has wife had produced five children and had been together only four of the years. His relatively unsuccessful civilian career were fraught with erratic highs and lows that were apparent to his family, friends, and colleagues.

Sherman departed Louisiana and traveled to Washington, D.C., possibly in the hope of securing a position in the U.S. Army. Leaving the Louisiana position, he went to St. Louis, where he ran a street car line. As the political climate changed in St. Louis, he left to rejoin the Army.

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Sherman regained his commission in the Army and was initially appointed as the colonel of the 13th Infantry Regiment, Sherman unsucessfully led a brigade of inexperienced troops at the First Bull Run (First Manassas) before being reassigned to the Western theater. Sherman requested of Abraham Lincoln that he be assigned a subordinate position and served under General Halleck. During the time at Cumberland, Kentucky, time he suffered a critical depression.



He reported to his superiors, to civilian correspondents, and others that the effort in Kentucky was doomed to failure and only a force of 200,000 soldiers would save the day. Lincoln sent the Secretary of War in to review the situation and found a very dire situation with Sherman. All agreed that Sherman's doomsday beliefs were nothing short of delusional. His behavior was described:

"Over the following weeks, Sherman's fears only intensified, while others observed a tortured man suffering what has long been defined in psychiatric terms as intense mania. For example, two sympathetic New York journalists who shared long nights at the Louisville telegraph office with the general grew deeply alarmed by his behavior. Sherman talked incessantly while never listening, all the while repeatedly making "quick, sharp…odd gestures," pacing the floor, chain-smoking cigars, "twitching his red whiskers — his coat buttons — playing a tattoo on the table" with his fingers. All in all he was "a bundle of nerves all strung to their highest tension." Back at his hotel, other guests observed him pacing all night in the corridors, smoking and brooding, "and it was soon whispered about that he was suffering from mental depression." Such increased energy, talkativeness and hyperactivity (which can sometimes become impulsive and even psychotic), is the definition of mania, the twin — and opposite — of depression in the illness of bipolar disorder."[1]

He was relieved of duty and the press headlines claimed him "insane." He returned home to Lancaster to recover. His wife cared for him and he was able to rest and recover over the next few months.

In letters his wife would write to the Ewing family, she described at least two other similar breakdowns since their marriage. She also seemed to understand his illness most likely had a genetic connection. One of Sherman's uncles also struggled with chronic "melancholia."

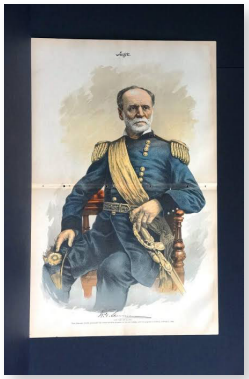
Despite his illness, he would return to duty. The tide would turn after Sherman's recovery and his remaining years of the war would be nothing short of brilliant. His gallant conduct at Shiloh with Ulysses S. Grant earned him a promotion to major-general.

Subsequently, Sherman directed his forces north through the Carolinas.



The extensive destruction of infrastructure and personal property during these marches, particularly in South Carolina, wrought devastation in the wake of Sherman's army and played a pivotal role in bringing the Civil War to its conclusion. The war would end in 1865. By that time, Sherman and his wife had three more children, totaling eight.

After the war, he had many more years of service, finally retiring as General of the Army in 1883. His legacy is complex and his entire life's history was looked at keenly by not only scores of scholars, but by the General himself. His journals are a fascinating look into his thoughts on war, his evolving feelings regarding African-Americans, and how he viewed the Indians as his military cleared the way for European-Americans' expansion into the west. No thought was simple nor unchangeable. He passed away 11 Feb 1891 in Manhattan, New York at the age of 71.



Read More:

Memoirs of General W. T. Sherman, by W. T. Sherman, ed. Charles Royster

Sherman: A Soldier's Passion for Order, by John Marszalek

Sherman's Civil War: Selected Correspondence of William T. Sherman, 1860-1865, by Brooks D Simpson



Generals Sherman, Grant, Sheridan steel engraving

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[1] *Sherman's Demons,* by Michael Fellman, The New York Times, Nov 9, 2011

[2] *Sherman's Demons,* by Michael Fellman, The New York Times, Nov 9,