

# March 19, 1864: Beginning of the End of the Civil War

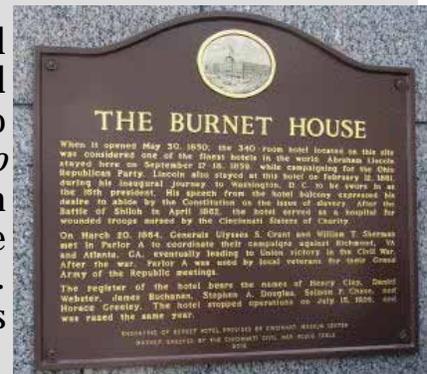
By Steve Wiser, AIA

March 19, 1864: this should be a significant date not only in Louisville but throughout the United States. For on this date, the beginning of the end of the Civil War was being set in motion downtown at the original Galt House, at First and Main Streets. There is even a historic marker at this exact spot that reads: "Sherman and Grant met here March 1864 to plan invasion that led to 'March to the Sea'." (Refer to the 3 photos to the right).

Thus, today, 150 years ago, Union Generals Ulysses S. Grant and William T. Sherman were in Louisville, and were deciding how this great war could be brought to a conclusion. At least that is if this marker text was fully accurate.

In today's internet world, 'facts' can easily be misinterpreted. But, 'facts' can also be simply verified via search engines. In researching a book a few years ago, I sought to double-check this famous Grant-Sherman get together in Louisville. Upon typing the words 'Grant Sherman Louisville March 1864' into the search engine, nothing of relevance appeared. Strange I thought. Well, what about entering 'Grant Sherman Louisville 1864'. Still nothing. Very strange. Upon further investigation, I could find no account of either Grant or Sherman ever being in Louisville during the whole year of 1864. If the 'March to the Sea' was definitely planned here as the history marker stated, then there should be a reference somewhere in a Civil War chronological database. The validity of this 'fact' was becoming highly questionable.

Then, in 2013, Cincinnati installed a historical marker that made the same claim: Sherman and Grant met at the old Burnett House in March 1864 to plan the Civil War's final campaign. (Refer to photo on the right) Additional search engine research revealed other cities boasting the same fact, like Nashville, Washington D C, and Chattanooga, etc. So, what is the basis for Louisville's connection to this noteworthy event?



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Fr. Clyde Crews, who is professor emeritus and historian at Bellarmine University, discovered the answer in an old newspaper, the "Louisville Daily Democrat". On March 20, 1864, it was reported that "*Lieutenant-General Grant, the commander-in-chief of the United States armies, and staff, and Gen. W. T. Sherman and staff, arrived from Nashville last evening and put up at the Galt House.*" (Photo at

*Left*) Crowds crowded around the hero of the war and it was with great difficulty that he moved from one part of the building to another." Grant and Sherman were indeed here in the city on March 19 and 20, 1864.



Further reading of the memoir books authored by Grant and Sherman did confirm their joint journey from Nashville to Cincinnati between March 19 and 20. Neither though noted stopping in Louisville along the way. Evidently traveling by the L & N Railroad, they spent the night here at the Galt House. And, during this trip, they did discuss what strategy would best bring about the end of the war. Maybe not the exact grand 'March to the Sea' scenario, but certainly important military tactics were considered which would result in the war's ultimate fate. Grant (*Top Left Photo*) would give the go ahead for Sherman (*Bottom Left Photo*) to invade the south thru Atlanta and onto Savannah at a later date. So, the text on the historical marker is a bit more exaggerated than factual it turns out.



There will be no national recognition of what occurred here 150 years ago at First and Main. But, the course of American history was about to change as two legendary military leaders arrived in Louisville on the evening of March 19, 1864.

*(Steve Wiser, AIA, is a local architect, author, and historian whose latest book is 'Historic Houses of Louisville'.)*

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