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Exploring Desert Stone

Steven K. Madsen

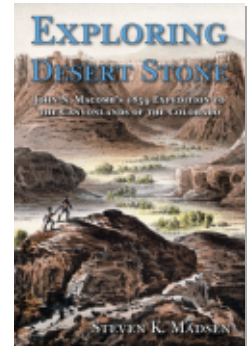
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EPILOGUE

The Civil War broke out on April 12, 1861 and disrupted the plans for a timely report on the findings of the Macomb expedition. Furthermore, it changed the lives of the expedition's main participants. Ultimately, what happened to the men? What did they achieve? More importantly, what were the major contributions of their San Juan Exploring Expedition?

During the Civil War, Macomb and Dimmock broadened the skills they had developed in the expedition. Macomb served as aide-de-camp to Gen. George McClellan. As the war progressed, the Union Army placed him with a balloon reconnaissance unit and he produced detailed maps of battle zones. At war's end, he was brevetted a colonel for meritorious service.¹

After the Civil War, Macomb remained a topographical engineer. For several years, he served as commander of the Philadelphia District of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. In 1874, in his honor, the government commissioned the *J. N. Macomb*, an iron snag boat employed on the Mississippi River. Continuing his military career, Macomb rose through

1. William H. Powell, comp., *List of Officers of the United States from 1779 to 1900*. . . , (New York: L. R. Hamersly, 1900), 448; Francis B. Heitman, *Historical Register and Dictionary of the United States Army from its organization, September 29, 1789, to March 2, 1903*, vol. 1 (repr., Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1965), 680. U.S. Congressional documents show that Captain Macomb faced additional demands following his return home. In June 1860, the War Department charged him with the building of "light-houses." On April 1, 1861, Capt. Montgomery C. Meigs, Macomb's brother-in-law, arranged for him to take charge of the U.S. Capitol extension, the new dome, and the Post Office extension since the War Department had transferred Meigs to the Gulf of Mexico. Shortage of funds and the casualties of war—including the housing of soldiers in the Capitol—disrupted the work. Macomb made little progress. The following year, Congress gave supervision over Capitol construction to the Interior Department. During the war, Macomb fought at the Battle of Cedar Mountain and in other skirmishes.



Charles Dimmock Papers, Special Collections Research Center, College of William and Mary

Charles H. Dimmock in his Confederate uniform, Petersburg, Virginia, November 5, 1863.



Courtesy Mary M. "Terby" Barnes

John N. Macomb, ca. 1862.

the ranks and created a large number of topographic maps; many are now considered rare antiques. In 1867, he achieved the rank of colonel in the U.S. Army. He retired in 1882, following fifty years of military service. Macomb died in Washington, D.C., on March 16, 1889, and was buried in Arlington National Cemetery. His wife, Nannie, died in 1916 and was buried in the same grave.²

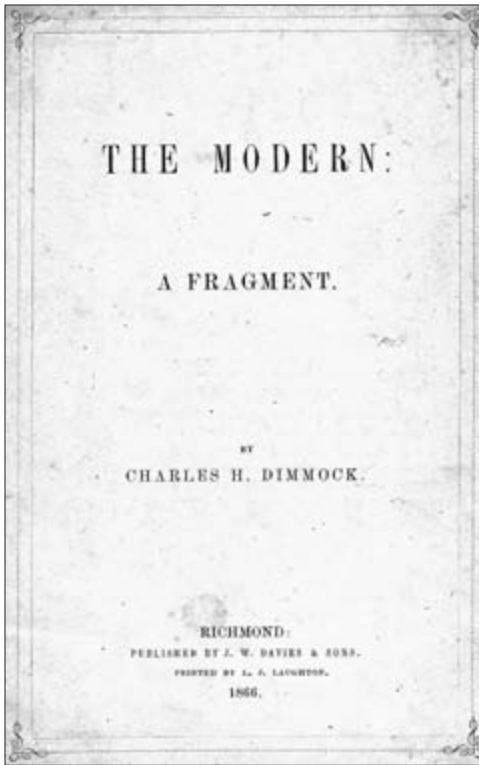
At the outset of the Civil War, Dimmock “promptly offered his services to Virginia.” On May 6, 1861, the Provisional Army of Virginia commissioned him “Captain of Engineers.” The army immediately ordered him to construct the defenses of Craney Island, near Norfolk. From Craney Island, the Confederate Army dispatched him to Gloucester Point for similar duty.³

In mid-war, on October 14, 1863, Dimmock married Elizabeth Lewis Selden in Gloucester, Virginia. (Five children resulted from their marriage—Mary Lewis, Robert Selden, Elizabeth Maxwell, and twins Blanche and Minna.)⁴

The army then reassigned Dimmock to Petersburg to supervise the construction of a line of breastworks. At Petersburg, he employed slaves and free black men to build the ten miles of earthen ramparts, dubbed the “Dimmock Line,” zigzagging around the city. He requested two hundred men “to labor on the defense works” at a wage of \$2 per day and “rations furnished by the government.” Pleased with Dimmock’s extraordinary work, the citizens of Petersburg presented him with a “magnificent stallion and equipment.” (In the war, Petersburg experienced a nine-month siege from U. S. Grant’s army—“the longest period that any Southern city held out against Federal capture.”)

During the siege of Petersburg, Dimmock remained with the army, “engaged all the time in strengthening and building works, until General [Robert E.] Lee evacuated Petersburg and the quick following surrender at Appomattox court-house.”

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2. “John Navarre Macomb, Jr., Colonel, United States Army,” Arlington National Cemetery Web site, <http://www.arlingtoncemetery.net/jnmacomb.htm> (accessed August 14, 2003). There is an interesting story, c. 1834, about Macomb’s association with Robert E. Lee, a fellow West Point graduate. Lee, who lived at Arlington, would ride into Washington to his office and return home each day. “One day as Lee was mounting his horse to start for Arlington, he saw Macomb approaching. He called, ‘Come, get up with me.’ Macomb leaped up behind him on the horse and the two galloped off down Pennsylvania Avenue. As they passed the White House they met Levi Woodbury, the Secretary of the Treasury, whom they greeted with a great assumption of dignity, much to that gentleman’s bewilderment.” Joseph Grégoire de Roulhac Hamilton and Mary Cornelia Thompson Hamilton, *The Life of Robert E. Lee for Boys and Girls* (Boston, Mass.: Houghton Mifflin, 1917), 42.
 3. Dimmock, Papers, 1850–1873, Section 11, Obituaries, VHS.
 4. “Charles Henry Dimmock + Elizabeth Lewis Selden,” <http://www.dimmock.org/family.php?famid=F1805> (accessed December 28, 2007); Merrow Egerton Sorley, *Lewis of Warner Hall: The History of a Family*, repr. ed. (1937; repr., Baltimore, Md.: Genealogical Publishing), <http://worldcat.org/wcpa/oclc/4953525> (accessed May 19, 2007).



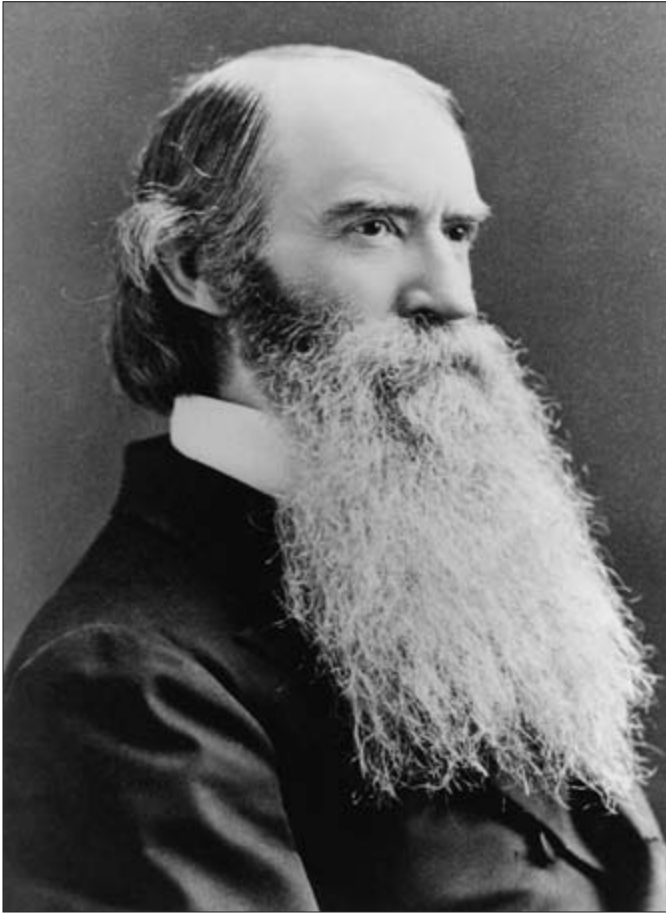
Cover to Charles H. Dimmock's *The Modern*, a chapbook of poetry.

On April 10, 1865, following his surrender to the North, Dimmock was issued a “Pass for a Paroled Prisoner for the Army of Northern Virginia . . . by order of GEN. R. E. LEE.” One month later Dimmock took the oath of allegiance to the United States.

Dimmock returned to his civil engineer profession and “added to it the kindred profession of architecture.” Robert E. Lee later commended Dimmock for serving “the state of Virginia in peacetime.” He helped organize the Ladies Hollywood Memorial Association, a group that initiated the removal, and reburial in Richmond, of fallen Confederates from the Gettysburg battlefield, and served as its engineer and business agent. Dimmock also designed a ninety-foot pyramid monument in Hollywood Cemetery to honor the Confederate dead.⁵

Soon after the war, Dimmock wrote a chapbook of classical poetry, published under the title *The Modern: A Fragment*. (Before the Civil War, he had hinted of his love of poetry when he drew a pencil sketch of Edgar A. Poe’s headstone in Baltimore.) In his work, Dimmock denounced

5. Dimmock, Papers, 1850–1873, Section 11, Obituaries, VHS.



Courtesy of the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, Division of Geological Survey

Dr. John S. Newberry in his later years.

modernity, longing for a return to an age of elegance and grace. He also showed his concern about the distant future and the contemporary human condition. Typical of Victorian-age literature, he appeared to imitate Alexander Pope, Shakespeare, Milton, and other classical writers. (Unfortunately, in his writings he overlooked the romance of his reconnaissance out West and the tragedy of his Civil War experiences.)⁶

In 1869, the citizens of Richmond elected Dimmock to the office of city engineer. He faithfully and efficiently discharged his duties. “The

6. Charles H. Dimmock, *The Modern: A Fragment* (Richmond, Va.: J. W. Davies & Sons, 1866). The only known illustration of Edgar Allen Poe’s headstone is a sketch drawn by Charles H. Dimmock c. 1860. See “Poe’s Lost Headstone,” E. A. Poe Society of Baltimore, <http://www.eapoe.org/balt/poegravs.htm> (accessed 17 May 2007).

improved and beautified condition of the streets of Richmond, made under his direction, [serve as] enduring memorials of his skill and taste,” reported a local newspaper. Three years into his term of office he was stricken with cancer, but “he remained at his post often when he should have been in bed.” “I must attend to my duty,” he declared to his family and his physician.

On March 29, 1873, following an eight-month bout with stomach cancer, forty-one-year-old Charles H. Dimmock died at his father-in-law’s home in Gloucester, Virginia. Richmond officials paid tribute to his memory and attended his funeral at the city’s St. James’ Church, followed by internment in Hollywood Cemetery. The city mourned Dimmock’s death by passing resolutions “recognizing the calamity which the community has suffered by his death.” Citizens praised “his virtues and noble qualities, . . . so well known and so highly esteemed.” Petersburg subsequently honored his memory by naming a thoroughfare, Charles H. Dimmock Parkway, after him.⁷

In contrast to Dimmock, John S. Newberry stood firmly on the side of the North during the Civil War. In a letter to Macomb, Newberry expressed his outrage over the Confederate victory at Bull Run and predicted Union troops would sound the war cry, “*Revenge! Revenge for Bulls Run. And the murdered [&] wounded!*”⁸ During the war, Newberry’s medical skills aided him as a member of the United States Sanitary Commission, a private relief agency. He became the secretary of the commission’s western department, directing the work in the Mississippi River Valley. He also wrote a number of reports outlining the contributions of the institution.

Following the war, Newberry became a professor of geology and paleontology at New York’s Columbia School of Mines and continued his distinguished career in science. From 1869 to 1882, he served as Ohio’s state geologist. During his forty-year career, Newberry wrote 212 scientific papers. One of the greatest geologists of the nineteenth century, his numerous achievements included corporate member of the National Academy of Sciences, president of the American Association for the

7. Katherine Wilkins, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, personal communication with author, November 14, 2006; Dimmock, Papers, 1850–1873, Section 11, Obituaries, VHS. Dimmock’s father, Capt. Charles Dimmock, was a West Point graduate. Following Captain Dimmock’s death in the Civil War a Southern composer dedicated a marching quick step in his honor. See Francis Buck, “Le Carnival de Venise, Quick Step: Composed and Arranged for Piano Forte and respectfully Dedicated to Captn. Charles Dimmock (of Richmond, Va.),” (Richmond, Va.: George Dunn, n.d.), <http://scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/sheetmusic/conf/conf00/conf0011/> (accessed 17 May 2006). See also George W. Cullum, *Biographical Register of the Officers and Graduates of the U.S. Military Academy, from 1802 to 1867*, vol. 1 (rev., New York: James Miller, 1879), 212–13.

8. Newberry to Macomb, July 26, 1861, NA. Today, Newberry’s name adorns a number of American landmarks and fossils.

Advancement of Science, president of the Torrey Botanical Club in New York, president of the New York Academy of Sciences, vice-president and organizer of the Geological Society of North America, and organizer of the International Congress of Geologists. He died on December 7, 1892, in New Haven, Connecticut.⁹

Newberry's friend Charles A. White praised his great qualities, including honesty: "A crowning proof of his integrity of character is found in the full accounting which he rendered the Government for all the money and property, amounting to millions of dollars, that passed through his hands in the course of his official work."¹⁰

White also wrote about the loss Newberry experienced by the delay in publishing the Macomb report: "Dr. Newberry was deprived of the credit of priority, which was justly due him, in much of the important geological . . . work, which was afterward published by various authors from observations made in the region which he investigated when it was entirely new."¹¹

Nevertheless, during his life Newberry made outstanding achievements in the development of science. Adding to his contributions to the school of fluvialism—the study of landform changes produced by the action of streams—and his studies of ancient ruins, Newberry laid the groundwork for more focused scientific studies of the individual mountain ranges in the Colorado Plateau province. Newberry's focused work, called "key studies," provided "a way to understand the basic principles of a region's creation."¹²

Newberry explained that the strata on the eastern edge of the Colorado Plateau, the western base of Nacimiento Mountain, "form the geological summit of the plateau." He wrote, "If properly studied, [Nacimiento Mountain] would serve to explain nearly all the difficulties of . . . the origin of mountain chains." Newberry believed that the mountain furnished "a key to the mode of formation of all the great ranges of the Rocky Mountain System." He also pointed to the need for further explorations west of the Colorado River to examine the geological structure of the "high table-lands."

Modern scientists have verified many of the conclusions that Newberry arrived at during the San Juan Exploring Expedition. He correctly observed that "the Rocky Mountains had undergone several periods of

9. Guide to the John Strong Newberry Papers, 1898, Provenance Note 2005, Special Collections, George Washington University, Washington, D.C., <http://www.gwu.edu/gelman/spec/ead/ms0257.xml> (accessed May 4 2007).

10. White, "Biographical Memoir of John Strong Newberry, 1822–1892," 9.

11. *Ibid.*, 8.

12. Goetzmann, *Army Exploration in the American West*, 397; Schubert, *Vanguard of Expansion*, 90.

uplift and erosion, but the greatest period of uplift occurred between the close of the Cretaceous and the beginning of the Miocene,” explained William Goetzmann.¹³ Furthermore, Newberry accurately reported that “the pre-carboniferous rocks he had observed in the Grand Canyon were not present in the Nacimientto Mountains,” wrote geologist Bill Chenoweth. Moreover, in his report, Newberry keenly observed that the volcanic rocks in New Mexico’s Mt. Taylor had indeed, “been deposited at various times beginning in the Middle Tertiary and continuing into the present epoch,” noted Chenoweth.¹⁴

Eventually, near the close of the Civil War’s Reconstruction Period, the Secretary of War approved the printing of 1,500 copies of the expedition’s report. Author Ann Zwinger has eloquently described the now-rare publication in its scarce morocco binding: “It is a handsome large-format volume an inch thick, corners and spine of leather, gold lettered, endpapers feather-patterned in maroon, dark blue, cream, beige, and gold; twenty-two plates, eleven of which are colored, of landscape vistas and fossils, meticulously rendered. A book of quality and substance.”¹⁵

Out West, following Reconstruction, the heated atmosphere between federal troops and the Mormons had subsided. The government no longer needed to develop a military road to Utah’s southern settlements. C. Gregory Crampton wrote, “After the Macomb survey men [and women] became concerned more with the canyon country itself than trying to find a way through it.”¹⁶

For Old Spanish Trail researchers, the scientific observations and discoveries of the San Juan Exploring Expedition as well as its cartographic contributions provide new interpretations of the region surrounding the eastern leg of the Old Spanish Trail. Moreover, it sharpens our view of the trail itself and its grand legacy.

The expedition accomplished two important original goals: to explore the region traversed by the Old Spanish Trail and map the route of travel. Those goals left unrealized included finding the exact point where the Green and Colorado rivers merged and locating a suitable supply route through the region of the confluence to the southern settlements of Utah. It evolved from a political and military premise into a primarily scientific, geological study. It also made considerable contributions to the field of paleontology, and it set the stage for future archeological and geological

13. Goetzmann, *Army Exploration in the American West*, 397.

14. William L. Chenoweth, “John Strong Newberry: Pioneer Colorado Plateau Geologist,” *Canyon Legacy*, no. 24 (Summer 1995), 3.

15. Ann Zwinger, “. . . a worthless and impracticable region. . .,” *Plateau* 52, no. 2 (June 1980): 25.

16. As quoted in Barnes, *Hiking the Historic Route of the 1859 Macomb Expedition*, 8; C. Gregory Crampton, *Standing Up Country: The Canyon Lands of Utah and Arizona* (New York: Knopf, 1964), 64.



Courtesy of the Rochester Historical Society

Entrance to Wild Rose Pass, painting by Capt. Arthur T. Lee, ca. 1855. Charles Dimmock passed through the pass on his return home from New Mexico.

studies of the region. Furthermore, according to Aton and McPherson, the survey “stimulated commercial activity and facilitated settlement.”¹⁷ Ultimately, the San Juan Exploring Expedition laid the foundation on which later explorers and scientists could examine up close its contributions to a “region unexplored scientifically” and thereby enlighten and enrich the collective human mind.

17. Aton and McPherson, *River Flowing from the Sunrise*, 50.