

# WORDENS PAST

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## From the Editor

Pat Warden

I would like to Thank Donna Rae Scarth for offering her assistance with WP. I am sure it will be a better newsletter with her assistance. Her experience certainly fits right in – an English teacher who taught Journalism and worked on a weekly newspaper.

There are some ongoing discussions concerning possible improvement in WP and its distribution, WFA, the web site and attracting new subscribers. If anyone has any ideas, please let us know.



## Son of Captain Worden: A Poem

Robert L. Worden  
Annapolis, Maryland

I wrote an article for the February 2007 (vol. 27, no. 4) edition of *Wordens Past* entitled “Thank You, Herman Melville.” My intent was to show that in the nineteenth century, one of the most eminent American poets and author—Herman Melville (1819–1891)—clearly knew how the name Worden was pronounced: not as “warden” but as “werden.” The proof is in the rhyme that

Melville used in his poem “In the Turret,” an ode to the captain and crew of the U.S.S. *Monitor* in its famous battle against the C.S.S. *Virginia* on March 9, 1862. The stanza of interest in the poem, which was published in Melville’s collection, entitled *Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1866), reads as follows:

Your honest heart of duty, Worden,  
So helped you that in fame you dwell;  
You bore the first iron battle’s burden  
Sealed as in a diving-bell.

Additional research has now uncovered another poem, unpublished, and ostensibly written by a family member, which uses similar rhymes. First the poem:

You start in life with heavy weight,  
A blessing, and a burden,  
For you can say with heart elate,  
I’m son of Captain Worden.

Your gallant father’s naval fame,  
Is your born right and guerdon,  
I hope as high will soar your name,  
As son of Captain Worden.

But let your ear this thought take in  
From meddling old Dame Worden  
You must your own bright honors win.  
Tho’ son of Captain Worden.

The untitled poem was written in Brooklyn, dated February 22, 1864, and signed by “X.” The original is in the John Lorimer Worden Papers at the Abraham Lincoln Library and Museum, Lincoln Memorial University, Harrogate, Tennessee (see “Archival Resources of Rear Admiral John Lorimer Worden,” *Wordens Past*, vol. 29, no. 1, May 2008).

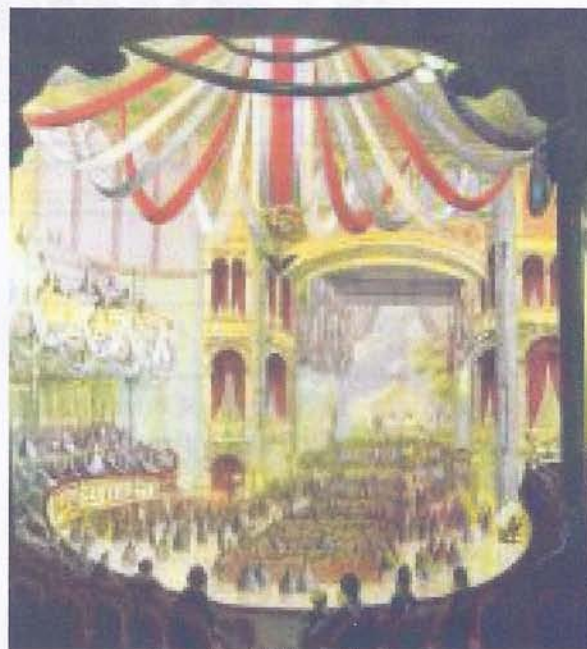
The author of this poem appears to be “meddling old Dame Worden” — **Olivia Aiken Toffey Worden** (1820–1903), the wife of then-Captain John Lorimer Worden (1818–1897). When the poem was written in February 1864, John and

Olivia Worden were living in Brooklyn, where Captain Worden was assigned to the Brooklyn Navy Yard and helping oversee the construction of monitors. He had been promoted to captain on February 3, 1863. Olivia was the third daughter and fifth of six children of Daniel Toffey (1788–1852) and Betsy Hollaway Toffey (1789–1868), of Quaker Hill, Dutchess County, New York. She and John Lorimer Worden were married at Quaker Hill on September 16, 1844.

For the “son of Captain Worden” there were two choices: **John Lorimer Worden Jr.** (1845–1873) and **Daniel Toffey Worden** (1847–1914). Perhaps the poem was written as an inspiration for both sons. However, the most likely recipient was the elder son. At the time, Johnny, as he was known in the family, was a third class (second-year) cadet at the United States Military Academy at West Point, New York, and on the verge of being discharged from the academy because of poor grades and an abundance of demerits. In the face of this dismal situation, Johnny was seeking a commission in the New York State Volunteers in hope of joining the war effort. He certainly faced a “heavy weight” at the start of his adult life and his “meddling” mother urged him to strike out on his own path of honor.

The “son of Captain Worden” poem was written on a single sheet of letterhead stationery of the Gentlemen’s Executive Committee, Brooklyn and Long Island Fair in Aid of the U.S. Sanitary Commission. The use of this stationery for the poem is of interest.

The Brooklyn and Long Island Fair in Aid of the U.S. Sanitary Commission was held from February 22 to March 8, 1864. It was a lavish affair held at the Brooklyn Academy of Music with the purpose of raising funds for the U.S. Sanitary Commission. The Sanitary Commission—a forerunner of the American Red Cross—had been established in 1861 to organize women to serve as seamstresses, nurses, cooks, and fund-raisers to support medical services and hospitals for wounded and ill military men. Cities throughout the North held fairs to raise funds to support the commission’s work. The Brooklyn Academy of Music, located at 176–184 Montague Street in Brooklyn Heights, had a theater that held 2,200 people, a smaller concert, and a “baronial” kitchen.



The main exhibition hall at the Brooklyn and Long Island Fair, 1864  
Courtesy Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

Among the many items for sale at the Brooklyn fair were clothing for all ages and genders, worsted goods, afghans, glassware, jewelry, “French goods,” fancy goods, fine cushions, dry goods, musical instruments, real and wax flowers, books, and furniture. Children were entertained at a skating pond and a fishing pond and could purchase toys and adults were entertained with stage and musical shows. Elaborate meals were served in two specially built auxiliary buildings, one next door to the academy and another connected via a covered bridge across Montague Street, which also included a Hall of Manufactures. The price of admission also allowed the public to visit the nearby Taylor Mansion, in which a “Museum of Art, Relics, and Curiosities” was on display. This involved loaned and donated objects of art from Europe and Asia, paintings and lithographs, rare books and manuscripts, war trophies, and many other items. Among the war trophies of interest to our subject were a “cane from piece of Merrimac [sic, former U.S.S. *Merrimack*, or C.S.S. *Virginia*],” a “lot pieces of Merrimac,” and a “7-inch shell from Merrimac,” all donated by Rev. George Jones (1800–1870), a retired Navy chaplain and first chaplain of the U.S. Naval Academy. A portrait of John Ericsson (1803–1889), the Swedish designer of the U.S.S. *Monitor*, was on display and for sale. Of even greater interest in the long list of displayed items

was "Captain Worden's Presentation Sword and Sash," loaned by Captain Worden. (For more information on this sword, see "Admiral John Lorimer Worden's Sword Recovered," *Wordens Past*, 25, no. 1, May 2004.) By closing day, the fair had raised more than \$400,000 (about \$5.4 million in 2008 dollars using the Consumer Price Index) for the cause. Captain John L. Worden also was one of the many military men who donated his autograph included in albums being sold in the Autograph Room.

Captain Worden was a member of the Gentlemen's Executive Committee for the fair and also of the Internal Arrangements and Reception of Goods Committee. The latter committee was highly praised for the plan it developed to have "as few tables as possible under exclusive control of societies or individuals," choosing instead "to regulate the internal economy of the Fair upon a comprehensive system which should be under their entire control." According to the published fair history, "[t]o this wise decision, doubtless, much of the wonderful order and success of the Fair are to be attributed." The history of the fair also reported: "Among the ladies and gentlemen whose services were conspicuous in the collection, arrangements, exhibition, and sale of the articles in the museum, were ... Mrs. Captain John L. Worden."

Coincidentally, Captain Worden lodged temporarily at the Pierrepont Hotel in 1862. This residential hotel was located at 90 Montague Street, just two blocks from the Brooklyn Academy of Music. At the time of the 1864 fair, John and Olivia Worden were living at 148 Columbia Street, just a mile south of the academy.

On the opening day of the fair, a grand military parade was held through the streets of Brooklyn. At the head of the parade were local military and civil leaders, including Rear Admiral Francis Hoyt Gregory (1780–1866), who oversaw the monitor construction program at the Brooklyn Navy Yard, and "officers of the Navy Yard," which would have included Captain Worden. Olivia would have been on site and on duty at the museum. Perhaps in a spare moment, with the letterhead stationery in hand, she penned the poem, which she dated February 22, 1864.

So, once again, we learn from a family member that "Worden" rhymes with "burden" and also

with "guerdon." For those who do not have their dictionary handy, "guerdon" is from Old French, which, in turn, was derived from the Medieval Latin *widerdonum*, which came from *widar* (again or against) in Old High German and *donum* (a gift) in Latin. It means a reward, a requital, or a recompense.

The author of this article wishes to thank the Archives and Special Collections of the Abraham Lincoln Library and Museum for providing a copy of the original poem and permission to quote it.

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