



Lieutenant John Lorimer Worden, ca. 1863.  
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### A Grand Fete in Grand Rapids for Lieutenant John Lorimer Worden

by

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In July 1862, John L. Worden went to visit his mother. Only four months had passed since the world-famous Battle of Hampton Roads (March 8–9, 1862) in which he was a casualty. He was temporarily blinded when, with concentrated fire, the CSS *Virginia* made a direct hit with a 7" exploding shell on the pilot house of the

USS *Monitor*, driving bits of gunpowder, iron, and paint into his eyes. Lieutenant Worden was taken by steamer to Washington, D.C., to recover for eleven weeks at the home of his naval school classmate and good friend Lieutenant Henry Augustus Wise (1819–1869), who had

witnessed the battle from Fort Monroe. Among Worden's visitors at the Wise home at 225 H Street NW was President Abraham Lincoln who offered the thanks of a grateful nation for the heroism Worden demonstrated in commanding the *Monitor* in the first battle of ironclads. Part of his recuperation, with his wife Olivia Toffey Worden at his side, took place at his old duty station, the U.S. Naval Observatory on 23rd Street NW, in the Foggy Bottom section of Washington, D.C. He also visited the *Monitor*, which had been brought to the Washington Navy Yard for repairs. He accompanied Lincoln when the president himself visited the *Monitor*. When sufficiently recovered from his wounds, John and Olivia went to the Toffey family home at Quaker Hill, Dutchess County, New York, for further rest and recuperation.

The first notice that then-Lieutenant Worden was going west to see his mother appeared on the front page of the *Daily Cleveland Herald* on July 1, 1862. It quoted him saying, "I am on the point of going West, to see an aged mother, who I have not seen for several years, and who is now in great affliction." His mother, Harriet Graham Worden (1793–1883) was certainly glad to see him. His father, Ananias Worden, had died two years earlier and was laid to rest at the Courtland Township Cemetery, near Rockford, Kent County, Michigan. Except for their daughter, Martha Ann Eliza (1814–1848), who had married in 1841 but died in Tarrytown, Westchester County, New York, in 1848, and son John Lorimer (1818–1897), who had gone to live in New York City with his mother's first cousin, John Lorimer Graham (1797–1876) and then joined the U.S. Navy on January 10, 1834, the rest of the Ananias Worden family moved west. In 1847–48 they relocated from Dutchess County, New York, to Kent County, Michigan. There they had a large farm in the southern part of Courtland Township. It was next to two other large farms in adjacent Cannon Township, one owned by Ananias Worden, Jr. (1822–1890) and the other by the widower of Martha Ann Eliza, Moses J. Kipp (1810–1890), who had married her younger sister, Clara (or Clarissa) Graham Worden (1824–1909) in 1850. Two other children of Ananias and Harriet were deceased by the time of the lieutenant's visit: Charles A. Worden (1826–1854) had died of yellow fever in Chicago and Eugene Bucharnois Worden (1833–1862) had died at home just four weeks earlier. Both are buried near their parents in the Courtland Township Cemetery. A third son, James Barenloe Worden (1830–1885), went to California before 1860 in search of gold and spent the rest of his life there.

On the evening of July 9, 1862, "a most enthusiastic reception" was held in Luce's Hall, a political and social gathering place on Monroe Street in Grand Rapids, the seat of Kent County. Although described as "relatively impromptu," there was a "spontaneous outpouring of the people, free, generous and hearty," according to the local media. In fact, notice of the evening's event had only been announced the same day. Nevertheless, a committee was formed and considerable effort took place to make a successful and memorable event. Luce's Hall "was tastily ornamented with evergreen wreaths, boughs and scrolls, and adorned with the Stars and Stripes, spread out at either end of the room." Over the platform on which Lt.



Worden was seated, there was a large painting of the *Monitor*, "which attracted much attention and was the cause of many proud reflections among the thoughtful of the audience."

The audience, composed of men, women, and children, began gathering hours before, and by 9:00 PM the hall "was literally packed with patriots, of all classes, ages and sexes, who had come to see and extend the hand of welcome and a hearty greeting to the patriot and hero." The "distinguished stranger" and his relatives were conducted to the platform and seated, along with local dignitaries including Judge Lyon and N.L. Avery, Esq. The "hero guest" was introduced to the audience by the arrangements committee chairman, P.R.L. Peirce, Esq., "in a few well-timed and appropriate remarks, referring to and refreshing the minds of the audience with telegraphic despatches at the time of the battle..." Lt. Worden modestly "replied in a very feeling manner, thanking the audience for the honors they had bestowed upon him, so imposing and unexpected." Although the media reported the gist of his remarks—as just given—there were no direct quotes from his brief speech.

After the preliminary remarks, the audience was invited to come forward to "take the Lieutenant by the hand, which invitation was accepted by hundreds, if not thousands, during the evening." Eventually, Chairman Peirce "supposed that the Lieutenant's hand and arm required rest and 'quinine for the shakes,'" and he moved the program on. Mrs. Wenham came forward and sang "a new patriotic song" accompanied by Mrs. T.B. Church on the piano. The song was "warmly received and loudly cheered." Then, in "the best conceived and finest executed scene of the kind that we ever witnessed, was next presented." Thirty young ladies and little girls, all attired in pure white and ornamented with festoons and wreaths of fresh flowers, tastefully arranged upon their dresses and heads," came on the stage. "This bevy of beauty and loveliness, all unexpected to the majority present," slowly encircled Lieutenant Worden, who was seated near the center of the platform. They moved slowly around him in single file, "singing some beautiful lines prepared for the occasion, a welcome to the brave, a requiem for the dead, a prayer for the future of the patriot hero." As they passed him, they cast at his feet bouquets, wreaths, and garlands of flowers "until he was half buried beneath the sweet tokens of love."

The Grand Rapids newspaper reporting on the evening's events also carried the texts of the three songs specially written for the event. They were sung to Lieutenant Worden by the "bevy of beauty and loveliness." First was the "Welcome" song:

#### Welcome

All hail! all hail! son of the sea!  
 Fresh from the battle's thunder:  
 Whose strange, new craft will ever be  
 'Mid naval powers, the wonder.  
 Take, oh take our Floral gift,  
 Flora's richest treasure.

Amid home scenes, returned to rest,  
 from toil and strife a season,  
 We greet with joy our guest, to-night,  
 The honored foe of treason.  
 Take, oh take our Floral gift,  
 Flora's richest treasure.

Next, the ladies sang a requiem for the dead:

#### Requiem

With the gladness of this hour,



Mingle tears and pain,  
 For the brave, the dearly loved,  
 Who ne'er shall come again.  
 There's turf above their noble brows,  
 For still, in death, they lie;  
 No battle sound shall wake them more,  
 Nor gentle night winds sigh.

Finally, the thirty white-clad celebrants sang their prayer to Lieutenant Worden:

#### Prayer

And if again thy heart beat high,  
 Beneath the war ship's tower,  
 Then may the foe before thee fly,  
 And vict'ry crown the hour.  
 To shield thy head when peril's near,  
 God's own right arm be given,  
 And when life's conflicts all are o'er  
 God takes thee home to Heaven.

The newspaper did not reveal the author or authors of these songs. However, any one of the persons named in the article could have penned them and several had musical experience. They were all prominent members of Grand Rapids society. Judge Lyon was Truman H. Lyon, a justice of the peace and judge in his early days in Michigan. He had served as Grand Rapids postmaster and in the Michigan Senate and as supervisor of Grand Rapids Township. He also owned a wool processing factory, ran a tavern and a hotel, and was a member of St. Mark's Episcopal Church. His son, Truman H. Lyon, Jr., was a stage proprietor on Monroe Street, near Luce's Hall. N.L. Avery was Noyes L. Avery, the owner of a gypsum manufacturing mill, a manager of the Grand Rapids Mercantile Library Association, a member of the local military draft board, formerly Grand Rapids postmaster, and member of the First Park Congregationalist Church. Event chairman P.R.L. Peirce was Peter R.L. Peirce, an architect, merchant, former Kent County clerk, former vice president of the Kent County Teachers' Institute, and a manager of the Mercantile Library Association. He also sang alto in the St. Mark's Episcopal Church choir. Mrs. T.B. Church was Mary E. Stuart Church, the long-time organist of St. Mark's; her husband, Thomas B. Church, a lawyer, had been a member of the Michigan House of Representatives, editor of the *Daily Enquirer*, and was former mayor and city attorney of Grand Rapids. Mrs. Wenham—Cora Bliss Wenham—was prominent in local musical circles, sang in concerts, and was a soprano in the St. Mark's choir. She was noted as having been "gifted with a fine voice, enriched by enthusiastic cultivation." Her husband, John C. Wenham, was in the book-binding business at the time of the Worden event.

The relatives who accompanied Lieutenant Worden to the stage undoubtedly included his proud mother, Harriet. Others who likely would have been present were his sisters Jane Louisa (1816–1894); Clara and her husband Moses Kipp; and Lucy Harriet (1836–1893). Also probably attending were his brothers Ananias, Jr. and his wife Jeannie Ogden Niles Worden (ca. 1835–1880); Isaac Gilbert (1828–1902) and his new wife Louisa Watson Worden (ca. 1844–1880); and William Pinter (1839–1862), who would die just four months after his brother's triumphant visit. Collectively, there also were three young nephews and two young nieces who may have attended the reception for their famous uncle. Also possibly attending was Harriet's older sister, Elizabeth Ann Graham Scofield (1791–1873), a widow who lived with Clara and Moses Kipp. John L. Worden's brother Frederick William (1820–1898) was a major in the 13th Michigan Infantry Regiment, which, at the time, was building forts and guarding railroads in Alabama, unless he was on home leave, preparing for his forthcoming marriage to Mary McKibbin on August 14. John's brother James lived in California and also would not have been present.

Ernest B. Fisher, who edited a history of Grand Rapids published in 1918, claimed the following: "Commodore John L. Worden, the hero of the Monitor in its ever memorable battle with the Confederate iron-clad, the Merrimack, was a resident of Grand Rapids for a number of years. He is well remembered by



our older citizens." Fisher may have misconstrued the recollections of those older citizens who may have attended or heard about Worden's July 1862 reception and also knew that Harriet Worden and two of her daughters (Jane Louisa and Lucy) were living in Grand Rapids by 1870. The *Monitor* hero very well may have visited Grand Rapids other times, before or after 1862, but those possible trips are subject to additional research.

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#### Our Worden Heritage

Clayton B. Worden  
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Continued from Volume No XXVIX Issue 2

#### Chapter 3: Peter Worden I continued

In 1661 a series of events began to take place that would have a profound effect upon Peter and his family and every other family throughout the Plymouth Colony. These were the events that culminated in 1676 with King Philip's War. As early as the mid-fifties the missionaries were working with the Indians throughout the Colony, trying to convert them to the Christian faith with the visions of creating whole congregations of Indians. On Cape Cod alone, first twenty were converted, then two hundred, and a congregation was formed. Soon there was a half dozen congregations spread out up and down Cape Cod. The Indians were also taught in the ways of the English, including English Law.

There was one insurmountable problem which both the Indians and the English faced equally. Neither group had the faintest idea how the other viewed the concept of land ownership. The English were