

# Executive Order No. 13

## Jane Cooper-Wilson

At the end of July, 1864, a very unlikely and volatile young man was placed in command of the Union's military machine in the field. The young officer's name was Phillip H. Sheridan. Ulysses S. Grant wrote to Henry Halleck, Chief of Staff, stating: "I want Sheridan put in command of all the troops in the field, with instructions to put himself south of the enemy and follow him to the death." Halleck and U.S. Secretary of War, Edward M. Stanton, believed that Sheridan was too young for the task. However, Grant was convinced that Sheridan possessed the commitment, aggressive determination and military ability to contain the enemy and to get the job done.

Nonetheless, Sheridan was a paradox. It has been written that the men under his command greatly admired him and considered him to be "a brother in whom they had unlimited confidence and that his very appearance immediately changed the character of every man in a moment." Captain George B. Sanford once stated that, "Sheridan is like an electric shock." The young officer was living proof, of the old adage that a person's looks can be deceiving. He was an oddly-proportioned man having a short, thickly-set body with extremely long arms and "duck legs." Abraham Lincoln, who would never take any prize in a beauty contest, described Phillip Sheridan, with witty perfection. Lincoln commented that Sheridan was, "a brown, chunky little chap, with not enough neck to hang him, and such long arms that if his ankles itched, he could scratch without stooping." His head was abnormally large in proportion to the rest of his body and his voice croaked, becoming raspy when he became excited. Sheridan also possessed a hair-trigger temper and his retaliation against the enemy was swift and decisive.

Until, this time the "hit and run" guerrilla tactics of Lee's Confederate Army, and incompetence on the part of Union military leaders, had produced victory after victory for the Rebels, which shattered the moral of Union men at arms and Government officials in Washington. Grant's military genius and his choice of commanding officers changed all of that, in favor of the Union. In spite of this fact, one pro-slavery stronghold remained.

Throughout the Civil War, slavery flourished in the State of Texas as swiftly as it declined in other parts of the Confederacy. As the tide of war began to change in favor of the Union, more affluent planters from Louisiana and Arkansas hastily moved their chattel across state lines into Texas, where prices remained high until the last few months of the conflict and Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation meant little, or nothing. Far removed and isolated from the major arena of the War, Texas slaveholders were not as prone to economical loss due to anti-slavery agitation and Union interference with their way of life. Very few of those held in bondage in the state of Texas had any chance of self-emancipating by attempting to reach the protection of Union lines. The Confederates

made a last ditch attempt to salvage “the peculiar institution.” One quarter of the slave force had been claimed by the Confederate Army, who feared being caught between the Union pincer movement that encroached both from inland and from offshore. Confederates steadfastly refused to arm their African – American recruits, yet desperately needing the manpower, put them to work driving supply wagons and as laborers fortifying earthworks on the coast. This decision enabled every able-bodied white man to be moved to the front. Brainwashing had also become a way of life, for pro-Slavers and Texas slaveholders had no difficulty in devising and perpetuating ridiculous propaganda methods to keep their slaves under control. However, the Union war machine could not be stopped.

Approximately eleven months after taking command, Sheridan issued orders to Major General George Granger. Granger was the Union commander of the Department of Texas. The son of Irish immigrants and a native of Wayne County, N.Y., Granger had graduated from West Point in 1845, at the age of 23. No stranger to war, Granger had distinguished himself on the frontier, Mexico and in numerous battles during the Civil War.

On June 19<sup>th</sup> 1865, Granger, along with 1800 – 2000 Union soldiers, marched boldly into Galveston. Within the rank and file were 34 Regiments of U.S. Colored Troops, including Cavalry units, which came to be known as, “The Buffalo Soldiers”. Recognizing the purpose of the presence of African-Americans in uniform, white citizens were humiliated and rankled by what they believed to be a deliberate attempt on the part of Washington to rub salt in their wounds. Although all vestige of hope for the Confederacy had been lost in the midst of bitterness, ash and rubble, the Southern mindset was as firmly entrenched as ever. Without doubt, the sight of these armed Black soldiers added tremendous insult to injury where the badly bruised and shaken Southern pride was concerned. However, the Union occupation of Galveston also set the scene for great jubilation among Texas slaves who had been unknowingly held in bondage for two long years after Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation became effective.

From the balcony of Ashton Villa in Galveston, Major General Granger made the following address to the apprehensive crowd that had assembled below:

The people of Texas are informed that, in accordance with a proclamation from the Executive of the United States, all slaves are free. This involves an absolute equality of personal rights and rights of property, between former masters and slaves and the connection heretofore existing between them, becomes that between employer and hired labor. The Freedmen are advised to remain at their present homes, and work for wages. They are informed that they will not be allowed to collect at military posts; and that they will not be supported in idleness either there or elsewhere.

The U.S. Coloured Troops were to remain in Texas, to enforce Order No.13 and to maintain order until December, 1867. Ramifications of Order No. 13 gave rise to what

became known as sharecropping. The defeat of the Confederacy also led to a new, but short-lived form of government called Radical Reconstruction, which in turn caused a domino effect that resulted in Jim Crow laws and Ku Klux Klan reprisals and atrocities throughout the South. Executive Order No.13 also brought into being the oldest annual African-American Emancipation celebration in the United States, in which former slaves and their descendants celebrated their new-found freedom with great rejoicing, singing, dancing and feasting on barbeque and other ethnic foods. Over time, the date was abbreviated in the oral history of the illiterate former slaves to become 'Juneteenth'. In 1980, Juneteenth was declared an official state holiday.

It was with great pride that the SilverShoe Historical Society hosted our First Annual Juneteenth Celebration & Memorial Candlelight Service, on June 21, 2008 at the Bethel – Union Pioneer Cemetery in New Lowell, Ontario. The SilverShoe Historical Society was initially established in 1997 to restore the Bethel-Union Pioneer Cemetery (formerly Sunnidale Union Cemetery), located in Old Sunnidale Township, near New Lowell in Simcoe County. The Bethel-Union Pioneer Cemetery is the final resting place for approximately 25 Black families who became part of the New Lowell community and economy – some were fugitive slaves who made their way to the area via the Underground Railroad, others came earlier following the American Revolution. The cemetery is unique in that it is integrated with burials of Blacks, whites and Aborigines – an uncommon practice for the time. Each and every year, subsequent to the initial Cemetery restoration in 1997, The SilverShoe Historical Society has held a Candlelight Memorial Service at the site, to give thanks for the lives of those who paved the way during the early nineteenth century. In 2008 the organization's budget was at an all time low and we needed to find a way to present the restoration improvements that had been completed as part of The Roots of Freedom grant project, funded by the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration. The Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration offered a total of \$250,000, in Provincial Grant funding to assist deserving organizations in the promotion and preservation of African Canadian history and culture in the Province. The 2007 Roots of Freedom grants were funded by the Ministry, in commemoration of the Bicentennial of the Abolition of the Atlantic Slave Trade. The SilverShoe Historical Society was fortunate to be the recipient of \$8,000 net grant funding through the Ministry and an additional \$2,000 in municipal grant funding, which was used to reinforce the embankment on the north-side of the cemetery; to clean and restore the remaining grave markers and to complete further landscaping at our cemetery site. None of this would have been possible without the assistance of the Owen Sound Branch of the Emancipation Festival and the Township of Clearview.

The Executive of The SilverShoe Historical Society sought to schedule our event at a convenient time, so as not to conflict with any other events in the area or with the program of events that were already in place for Owen Sound's Emancipation festivities. The Juneteenth tradition and historically significant date, lent itself as an almost perfect solution to a great dilemma. Through no fault of our own and much to our dismay, our event did conflict with Aboriginal Day celebrations. This was very unfortunate, however Juneteenth proved to be an enormous success. It is estimated that upwards of 300 visitors

attended throughout the day. Tours of the Cemetery gave visitors an opportunity to see the ten-foot Memorial North Star that was commissioned by the Owen Sound Branch of the Emancipation Festival, in commemoration of the Old Sunnidale's first generation Blacks who travelled the Underground Railroad - and also those who assisted in their emancipation. The Star will be a constant memorial of the Ancestors' long and perilous flight to freedom and of their enduring faith in The Creator.



**2008 Juneteenth**

First time visitors to the Bethel – Union Cemetery were amazed and visibly moved to see the graves of African-Canadian freedom seekers, first hand. Many visitors were brought to tears, by the sight of these fugitive slave graves and the impact of viewing “The Mass Grave”, which holds the bodies of the victims of the cholera, diphtheria, scarlet fever, typhoid fever, consumption and influenza epidemics of 1896 - 1918 and to learn of the vast number of children who lost their lives in the fight against simple childhood diseases during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Guests were full of praise and admiration for the amount of work that has been accomplished at our cemetery site, as well as being completely entranced by the magnitude of spirituality that they had experienced. The majority of people were left in total awe of the irrefutable and somewhat disconcerting presence of the Ancestors.



**2008 Juneteenth**

concentrating our efforts on upgrading The SilverShoe Historical Society website<sup>1</sup>, where everyone can go to find more information about Juneteenth 2009 as time grows closer and to learn more about the work of The SilverShoe Historical Society.

Since the 2008 Juneteenth event took place, the SilverShoe Historical Society Executive has been overwhelmed by enquiries from people requesting details about our plans for 2009. Great discussion has taken place concerning how our organization can improve the event. Our various committees are working diligently toward organizing a venue that will appeal to everyone. Our goal is to provide families with the opportunity to educate themselves; to share in the experience of multiculturalism; to make new friends and to have a lot of fun. At the present time, we are

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<sup>1</sup>[www.silvershoe.ca](http://www.silvershoe.ca)

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