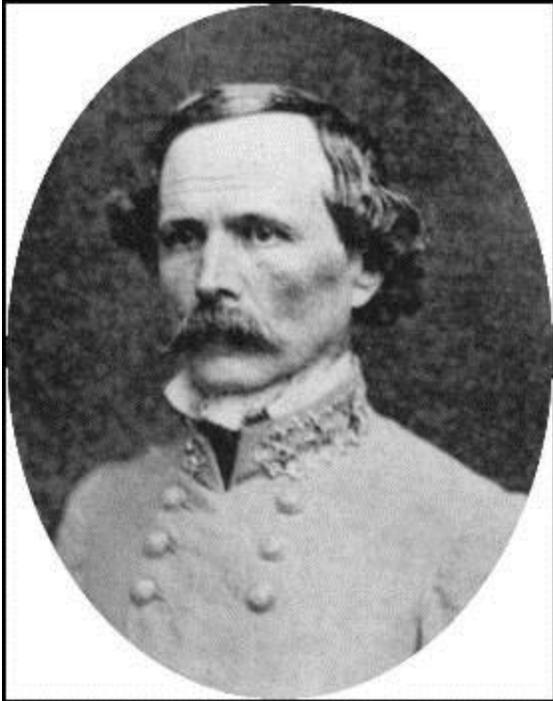


Jones Mitchell Withers

By John H. Allen



Major General Jones M. Withers, CSA

 The name “Withers” is an Old Norse term for “warrior.” Appropriate perhaps, for Huntsville native Jones Mitchell Withers, who participated in three wars, and was rewarded with high rank for his performance.

Jones Withers’s grandfather, William Withers, was born in Lancashire, England, in 1732. He came to America when he was 16, and clerked in a Norfolk, Virginia, store. Later, he was a private secretary to Virginia’s colonial governor, Robert Dinwiddie. During this time, he contested, successfully, with George Washington’s family for property

rights south of Mt. Vernon. When William was 27, he purchased property in Williamsburg. He lived on one side of a building, and rented out the other side to Mrs. Christiana Campbell for operation of a tavern. George Washington dined at the tavern 98 times, according to his diary, which he kept during the time he was a member of the House of Burgesses. In 1761, at the age of 29, William Withers sold the Williamsburg property, married Pricilla Wright, and purchased property in Dinwiddie County, southwest of Petersburg.

William and Priscilla Withers had a son named John, born in 1763. He married Mary Herbert Jones in 1795 in Dinwiddie County and together, they had nine children. In 1809, John Withers moved his growing family to a triangular-shaped piece of land he had purchased west of the town that would become known as Huntsville, Alabama, near today’s northwest quadrant of I-565 and Rideout Road (Research Park Blvd.). A separate, rectangular parcel of property was purchased a quarter mile to the west in 1818. One of the sons, David Wright Withers, is referred to in his father’s will as “my unfortunate son,” and suggests he would need “decent and comfortable maintenance” for the duration of his life. One of his daughters, Susanna Claiborne Withers, married Clement Comer Clay (second cousin to Henry

Clay), who later became the eighth governor of Alabama from 1835 to 1837. Clay's term as governor ended early when he was appointed to the U.S. Senate. Jones Withers's uncle, R.W. Withers, became a physician, and practiced medicine from his home in Mooresville. Jones Mitchell Withers was the eighth child, and was born at the Withers plantation on January 12, 1814, five years before Alabama became a state.

At the time of Jones Withers's birth, the War of 1812 was still raging and would not conclude for another year. Seven months after his birth, the British burned the White House, and President James Madison was obliged to find temporary housing.

The Withers property is identified as a half-section of land on the Hurricane fork of Indian Creek (a section is one-square mile; a half-section is 320 acres). During the Union occupation in the Civil War, the Hurricane Creek name was changed on Union maps to Indian Creek, and what had previously been known as Indian Creek, was changed to Big Spring Branch.



The green triangle and rectangle denote the two Withers property tracts

Hunt's Spring, as it was known before it was officially named Twickenham, and then Huntsville, had grown to become important to the early cotton economy of Alabama. By 1815, there were five cotton gins operating in the town. In turn, this led to the establishment of a broad variety of commercial establishments. The *Madison County Gazette*, the first newspaper in the territory, began publication in 1812 and in 1816 became the *Huntsville Republican*. By the time the court house was completed in 1816, it was flanked on all sides by brick storehouses, hotels, and homes. John Hunt, the namesake of the Huntsville, was a charter member of the Masonic Lodge we now know as Helion Lodge #1. Andrew Jackson was a frequent visitor to the lodge as well as Huntsville's Green Bottom Inn and race track. President James Monroe visited the Alabama Territory in June 1819; he and his entourage stayed at the Huntsville Inn. Perhaps a young Jones Withers had crossed paths with these notable men.

Jones Withers, and his older brother Augustine Withers (1806-1869), sold the family plantation, as recorded in 1837, after their father had died, even though his Last Will and Testament did not specifically name them as heirs to the land (Jones Withers was a participant in the Creek Indian Wars at this time). It is unclear whether both parcels of land were sold, or only one, for Jones later returned to Huntsville with his new wife, and presumably lived on one of the parcels. The

parcel that was sold included the cemetery where John Sr. was buried, along with his wife Mary. The cemetery portion was reserved to the family, excluded from the sale per the deed specifications. Augustine Withers and his wife, Mary Ann Woodson Withers, are buried in Huntsville's Maple Hill Cemetery.

Jones Withers received his early education at Huntsville's Greene Academy, a boys' prep school chartered by the Territorial Legislature in 1812. It was the first educational institution established in Alabama. It was built on the north side of Clinton Avenue between Calhoun Street and White Street, but was burned by Union soldiers during the Civil War. The academic success of the institution can be seen in the many graduates who went on to distinction in Alabama. For example, other than Withers, the student roster in 1828 included such well known antebellum family names in Huntsville as Birney, Chambers, Clay, Mastin and Veitch. Clement Claiborne Clay, the son of Alabama's eighth governor, was a student at the academy in the late 1820s, and would later serve his state as a senator, in both the Federal and Confederate senates.

At the age of seventeen, Withers was appointed by President Andrew Jackson to become a cadet at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, New York. Graduating in 1835, he was assigned to the 1st Dragoons at Ft. Leavenworth, Kansas, with the brevet rank of 2nd Lieutenant. The 1st Dragoons was a mounted infantry troop. But in

September of the same year, Withers resigned, perhaps because of the offer of a job from the Governor of Alabama. He initially returned to his home in Huntsville, before going to Tuscaloosa, the State Capital at that time.

Jones Withers was a Democrat, a Mason, and a Presbyterian. He had a light frame, brown eyes, and was described as having a nervous temperament.

Withers began work in Tuscaloosa as the secretary for Gov. Cement Clay (whose wife was Jones Withers's sister), and proceeded to study law. A year later, he was admitted to the bar.

Withers got married on his birthday, January 12, 1836, to 19-year-old Rebecca Eloise Forney. Rebecca was the daughter of Hon. D.M. Forney of Lowndes, formerly a U.S. representative from Lincoln County, North Carolina, and an officer in the War of 1812. Rebecca was the second of nine children. Circumstantial evidence suggests that the bride and groom did not return to the Withers home in Huntsville where extended family members still lived, but instead made their home in Tuscaloosa. Rebecca and Jones Withers would eventually produce ten children.

NOTE: This writer can find no such town named Lowndes in Alabama. There was and is a Lowndes County, southwest of Montgomery. "Lowndes" may have been a community in Mobile, because Capt. Martin formed-up his regiment for the Mexican war in Lowndes.

The Creek Indian War of 1836

During the Creek Indian troubles of 1836, Withers served on the staff of Maj. Gen. Benjamin S. Patterson, Alabama Volunteers, and proceeded to Tuskegee to drill volunteers. Upon the arrival of Gen. Jessup, Withers was transferred to Jessup's staff. Meanwhile, Gov. Clay ordered Maj. Gen. Patterson into action against the Creek Indians.

The Creek War of 1836 was a conflict fought between the Muscogee Creek people and non-Native land speculators and squatters in Alabama. Although the Creek people had been forced from Georgia, along with many Lower Creeks moved to the Indian Territory west of the Mississippi River, there were still about 20,000 Upper Creeks living in Alabama. However, the state moved to abolish tribal governments and extend state laws over the Creeks. Opothle Yohola appealed to the administration of President Jackson for protection from Alabama; when none was forthcoming, the Treaty of Cusseta was signed on March 24, 1832, which divided up Creek lands into individual allotments. Creeks were given the option of either selling their allotments and receiving funds to remove to the west, or staying in Alabama and submitting to state laws. Land speculators and squatters began to defraud Creeks out of their allotments, and violence broke out, leading to the so-called "Creek War of 1836." Secretary of War Lewis Cass dispatched General Winfield Scott to end the violence by forcibly removing the Creeks to the Indian Territory.

Tuscaloosa Years

At the close of the Indian troubles, Withers returned to civilian life in Tuscaloosa, and resumed his duties as private secretary to the governor. In 1838, he was elected Secretary of the State Senate. However, he was not re-elected in 1839. Meanwhile, he practiced law, was a captain in the State Militia, and was also elected a director of the State Bank. He ran in the election for State Attorney General, but was defeated.

The Move to Mobile

In 1841, Withers moved to Mobile, and initially resided across Mobile Bay at Point Clear. He was the Attorney of Alabama for the State Branch Bank at Mobile. He also entered the cotton factor business. In the antebellum South, most cotton planters relied on cotton factors (sometimes also called commission merchants) to sell their crops for them. It was big business for the states of Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, and Mississippi, who produced more than half of the world's cotton. The port of New Orleans exported the most cotton, followed by Mobile.



Cotton factors and others go about their business in A Cotton Office in New Orleans
by French painter Edgar Degas, 1873

Cotton factors also frequently purchased goods for their clients, and even handled shipment of these goods to their clients, among other services. As one source notes, the factor was a versatile man of business in an agrarian society who performed many different services for the planter in addition to selling his crops. He purchased or sold slaves for his client, arranged for the hiring of slaves or the placing of the planter's children in distant schools, gave advice concerning the condition of the market, or the advisability of selling or withholding his crop, and bought for his client a large portion of the plantation supplies.

In 1846, Jones Withers was appointed to a committee to close out the State Bank of Alabama. At this time, he was reported to be "residing in Lowndes."

Mexican War

In 1846, Mexico refused to recognize the independence of

Texas. Mexico threatened war with the U.S. if it annexed Texas. Meanwhile, President James K. Polk's spirit of Manifest Destiny was focusing U.S. interests on westward expansion.

American forces quickly occupied New Mexico and California, then invaded parts of northeastern and northwest Mexico; meanwhile, the U.S. Pacific Squadron conducted a blockade and took control of several garrisons on the Pacific coast further south in Baja California.

Comanche, Apache, and Navajo Indians, especially the Comanche, took advantage of Mexico's weakness to undertake large-scale raids hundreds of miles deep into the country to steal livestock for their own use and to supply an expanding market in Texas and the United States. The Indian raids had left thousands of people dead, and northern Mexico was devastated. When American troops entered northern Mexico in 1846 they found a demoralized people. There was little resistance to the Americans from the civilian population.

Jones Withers volunteered as a private in Capt. W.E. Martin's company for service in the Mexican War.

General Winfield Scott and about 12,000 U.S. troops had captured Vera Cruz, Mexico. In a letter from Vera Cruz, dated Oct. 1, 1847, Withers wrote to his uncle, Dr. R.W. Withers, that he had just arrived via small steamer, and that Gen. Scott is "...in possession of the city of Mexico." He further noted a number of killed and wounded, including 750 men and 59 officers in Gen. North's Division. Withers also

expressed the belief that he might be transferred to some other regiment and promoted to full colonel due to the deaths of Lt. Col. Graham and Col. Ransom.

However, the U.S. government declined to receive the Withers's regiment; only a portion of it got as far as New Orleans. By then, Withers had been appointed lieutenant colonel, and by April 9th, was promoted to full colonel of the Ninth Infantry.

According to a descendent of Jones Withers in Mobile, a Mexican town presented Col. Withers with an ornate silver-decorated saddle that is now housed in the Mobile History Museum. It was reportedly a gift for his "fair and just conduct" in the occupation after the Mexican War.

Return to Mobile

At the close of the Mexican War, Withers resigned his commission and returned to Mobile and became engrossed in mercantile affairs before trying his hand again at politics.

In 1855, Withers was elected a representative on the American ticket for Mobile County in the State Legislature. However, he resigned the following year when elected mayor of Mobile. He was reelected annually, and served until the outbreak of the War Between the States in 1861.

In 1860, the *Clotilde*, the last known ship to arrive in the Americas with a cargo of slaves, was abandoned by its captain near Mobile. A number of these slaves later formed their own community on the banks of the Mobile River

after the Civil War, which became known as Africatown. The inhabitants of this community retained their African customs and language well into the 20th century.

The War Between the States

Mobile grew substantially in the period leading up to the War Between the States as it was called there when the Confederates heavily fortified it. Union naval forces established a blockade under the command of Admiral David Farragut. The Confederates countered by constructing blockade-runners: fast, shallow-draft, low-slung ships that could either outrun or evade the blockaders who maintained a trickle of trade in and out of Mobile. In addition, the Hunley, the first submarine to sink an enemy vessel in combat, was built and tested in Mobile.

At the outbreak of the war, Withers presented himself for duty in Montgomery and was commissioned a colonel of the 3rd Alabama infantry regiment, companies F & S.

On April 13, 1861, the Confederate Secretary of War, R.H. Smith, sent a telegram to President Jefferson Davis recommending that Col. Withers be accepted in the Confederacy with the rank of Brig. General. In the letter, Smith said, "You know he is a graduate of West Point. In my opinion, he is a man of high military and civil ability. I have known him well from boyhood. He has been mayor of this city for more than five years and by common consent is acknowledged to be the

best and ablest mayor Mobile has had.”

NOTE: R.H. Smith is not listed as a Confederate Secretary of War. He may have been an interim Secretary until the government was organized.

President Davis received another letter in support of Withers, apparently from Davis’s friend, C.J.M. Roe. The letter said, in part, “...I therefore again take the liberty of presenting Col. Withers’s name to you, which I would not do if I were not sure that his talents can surely be of service to the country. He is a man of rare ability of military education and war experience as a soldier having commanded a regiment in Mexico and is the Uncle of Priv. John Clay.”

On April 26, 1861, Withers proceeded to Norfolk, Virginia, where he was placed in charge of a brigade. In May, he commanded the Eastern Division of the Norfolk Department under General Benjamin Huger, of Virginia and North Carolina.

On July 10, Withers was commissioned a brigadier general and ordered back to Alabama where he was to command the defenses of Mobile. The orders were signed by Secretary of War, Leroy Pope Walker, of Huntsville.

In a telegram to Withers in Mobile from the Confederate States “Engineer Bureau,” dated Sept. 19, 1861, Maj. D. Leadbetter, acting chief of the Bureau, discussed the removal of a large rifled cannon from Mobile to Memphis. There is mention of assistance from Lieutenant Withers, perhaps the nephew of Gen. Withers, since his own son was only 12.

By December 1861, Mobile was under martial law. The first line of earthworks and gun emplacements were completed three miles west of the city, built mostly by volunteers.

Withers Commanded the Department of Alabama and Mississippi, east of the Pascagoula River and that portion of Mississippi east of the Pearl River. In January, 1862, he commanded the District of Alabama in the Department of Alabama and West Florida.

In March, 1862, Mobile was turned over to raw recruits. There is anecdotal evidence from descendants living in Mobile that Withers sold his home in Mobile during the Civil War for Confederate bonds, which became worthless. It isn’t known when the sale occurred, or where his family lived after the house was sold.

Rather early in the war, the Confederate government decided not to defend its entire coast, but to concentrate its efforts on a few of its most important ports and harbors. Following the loss of New Orleans in April 1862, Mobile was the only major port on the eastern Gulf that would be defended. The city subsequently became the center for blockade-running on the Gulf.

Battle of Shiloh

Withers was summoned to Corinth, Mississippi, and in early April was placed in command of a Division in Polk’s Corps, Army of Tennessee, and then the 2nd Division of the 2nd Corps (and later, 2nd Division of the 1st Corp.) This was all in preparation for the Battle

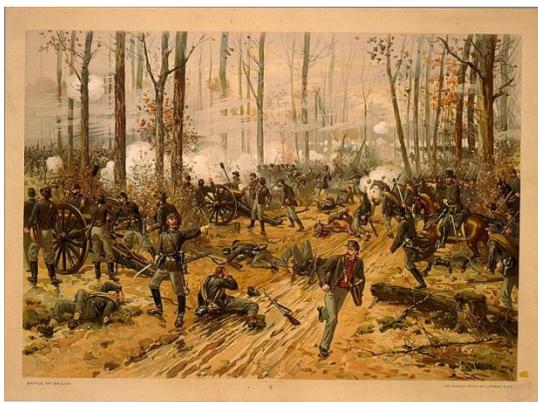
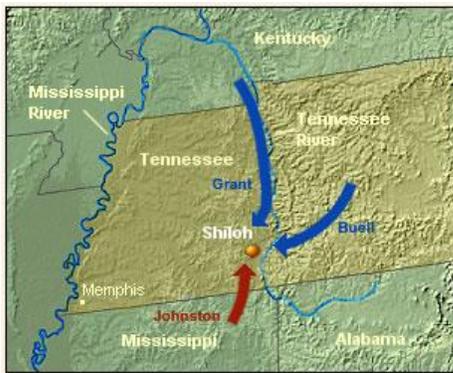
of Shiloh, 23 miles to the east northeast.

The Battle of Shiloh, also known as the Battle of Pittsburg Landing, was a major conflict in the Western Theater of the Civil War. It was fought April 6 and 7, 1862, in southwestern Tennessee. The Union army under Maj. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant had moved via the Tennessee River deep into Tennessee and was encamped principally at Pittsburg Landing on the west bank of the river.

Confederate forces under Generals Albert Sidney Johnston and P. G. T.

Beauregard launched a surprise attack on Grant there. The **Location**

of



Shiloh and a scene from the two-day battle

Confederates achieved considerable success on the first day, but were ultimately defeated on the second

day when Union reinforcements arrived.

As a result of his performance here, Withers was promoted to Maj. Gen. On April 11, he was granted 10 days leave, and on May 11, he was granted 21 days leave.

At the reorganization of the army at Tupelo in June, Withers was assigned to a reserve division, right wing, Army of the Mississippi, under Maj. Gen. Leonidas Polk. His new command consisted of Gardner's (Ala.) brigade, Chalmer's (Miss.) brigade, Jackson's (Ala.) brigade, Trapier's (SC & Ala.) brigade, and the batteries of Waters, Bortwell, Robertson, and Ketchum.

Battle of Perryville

In a desperate bid to bring divided Kentucky fully into the Confederate fold, Maj. Gen. Braxton Bragg launched his invasion of that state in late August 1862. In preparation for Bragg's campaign into Kentucky, Jones Withers was in Headquarters, Reserve Division, A.M. Camp, two miles from Harrison Ferry, Tennessee, on August 27.

By October, Union Maj. Gen. Don Carlos Buell had brought 60,000 troops together at Louisville and was sure he was ready to meet and defeat Bragg. Many units from both forces – about 37,000 Federals and 16,000 Rebels – came together near Perryville on October 8, 1862.

This strange battle was punctuated by misperceived friendly fire. Before the action began, Bragg sent a division under Gen. Withers

to near Salvisa, Kentucky, to intercept a corps commanded by Union Gen. Thomas L. Crittenden. By chance, men under Withers encountered the advance guard of Rebel Gen. Kirby Smith. Smith's men were wearing brand-new recently captured Federal uniforms. As a result, both bodies of the Confederates took the other for enemies. According to Maj. E.T. Sykes, their mutual mistake led these bands of Rebels to skirmish and fire upon one another with unknown consequences.

The Battle of Perryville, took place in the Chaplin Hills west of Perryville, as the culmination of the Confederate Heartland Offensive (Kentucky Campaign). Braxton Bragg's Army of Mississippi won a *tactical* victory against primarily a single corps of Buell's Union Army of the Ohio. However, the battle is considered a *strategic* Union victory, sometimes called the Battle for Kentucky, since Bragg withdrew to Tennessee soon thereafter. The Union retained control of the critical border state of Kentucky for the remainder of the war.

After Perryville, Bragg's popularity dwindled. Two generals, Kirby Smith and Henry Heth thought Bragg had lost his mind. "Historians have generally accepted the charge that the Kentucky campaign caused nearly every Confederate except President Jefferson Davis to lose confidence in Bragg."

On October 25, Bragg's beleaguered forces left Kentucky marching night and day, to Tennessee. The hungry Confederates subsisted on parched

corn, pumpkin, and drank standing water found in holes in the ground.

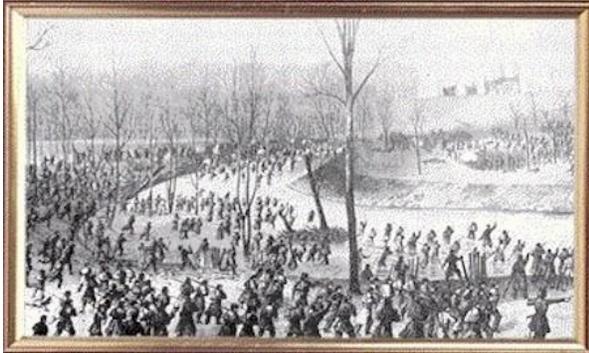
The Battle of Stones River

In early December, Bragg's forces arrived in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, although part of his troops were diverted to Vicksburg, Mississippi, by order of Jefferson Davis. The Battle of Stones River, known in the South as the Battle of Murfreesboro, was fought from December 31, 1862, to January 2, 1863, in Middle Tennessee in freezing weather.

Withers's division was posted west of the river, and was the front center division of the army, its right being the pivot on which the successful wheel of the army was made on December 29. Bragg's 38,000 Confederate troops defeated Rosecrans' 50,000 Union troops. Casualties were enormous. Withers's skill and gallantry in the battle were highly commended by Generals Polk and Bragg. His division had the most dangerous, difficult work of the day to perform, and they fought nobly, but victory came with a terrible cost. Casualties were estimated at 30%, or 2,500 out of 7,700 engaged. It was the culmination of the Stones River Campaign in the Western Theater.

Of the major battles of the Civil War, Stones River had the highest percentage of casualties on both sides. Although the battle itself was inconclusive, the Union Army's repulse of two Confederate attacks and the subsequent Confederate withdrawal were a much-needed boost to Union morale following their defeat at the Battle of Fredericksburg, Virginia, and it

dashed Confederate aspirations for control of Middle Tennessee.



The Battle of Stones River was fought in freezing rain

Bragg retreated from Murfreesboro to Tullahoma. Once there, he had to retreat again. Bragg then lost Middle Tennessee and North Alabama. In response to the loss, Bragg was quoted, “Last night I took up a more defensible position, losing nothing of importance.” Historians have noted that the implication that these two areas were unimportant to the Confederacy was ludicrous. Middle Tennessee and Alabama were the largest concentrated areas for the production of much needed war materials. Bragg blamed Union General William Rosecrans for the loss, stating “Rosecrans did not fight fair.”

For the first several months of 1863, Withers’s Division was attached to Polk’s Corp, Army of Tennessee in Shelbyville, under the authority of Bragg. But he continued in command of his division during the Tullahoma Campaign.

On March 3, 1863, Maj. Gen. Withers returned to Mobile where a Grand Review of Rebel forces took place. Also present were Generals

Buckner, Slaughter, and Cummins. Four pieces of artillery that had been captured at Murfreesboro were presented to the Army of Mobile. Each piece was inscribed with the names of Alabamians who fell in the battle.

From April until the end of June, 1863, Withers was back in Shelbyville, Tennessee. In May, he apparently penned a letter of resignation, but there is no further explanation. It does say, however, that from January until May, the Duck River Camps of middle Tennessee, were rocked with charges and countercharges between Generals Bragg, Polk, Hardee, Breckenridge, Cheatham, McCown, and others. During this time, Withers wrote a letter to the *Mobile Advertiser and Register* in which he appears to support Bragg.

During the war, perhaps no town symbolized the internal divisions within the South more than Shelbyville, Tennessee. On the one hand, it was the lynchpin in Bragg’s defensive network below the Highland Rim. Leonidas Polk’s whole corps manned the entrenchments above the town as the Confederate commander sought to protect the main road south of his army. Yet, the community itself was fervently unionist and was called “Little Boston.”

The Tullahoma Campaign

The Tullahoma Campaign, or Middle Tennessee Campaign, was fought between June 24 and July 3, 1863. During this time, Gen. Jones Withers continued in the command of his division. The Union Army of

the Cumberland, commanded by Maj. Gen. William Rosecrans, outmaneuvered the Confederate Army of Tennessee, commanded by General Braxton Bragg, from a strong defensive position, driving the Confederates from Middle Tennessee and threatening Chattanooga. Generals Withers and Patrick Cleburne were commended by Bragg for valor, skill, and ability displayed at Murfreesboro. Afterwards, Withers requested, and was granted, a 30-day leave.

The Tullahoma Campaign was arguably Rosecrans's most significant achievement of the war, described by historians as a "brilliant" campaign that achieved significant goals with very few casualties on either side. However, it was overshadowed by contemporaneous Union victories at Gettysburg and Vicksburg and it left his opponent's army essentially intact, which led to Rosecrans's disastrous defeat at the Battle of Chickamauga in September.

Bragg's poor health continued to plague him and he was hospitalized in Chattanooga. His health improved sufficiently, although the relationship with his troops continued to decline. The army was disorganized, disobedient and poorly trained. Confusion reigned. The Union Army began bombarding Chattanooga, so Bragg retreated.

On September 19, 1863, the Battle of Chickamauga was fought. Bragg actually won the battle but did not realize it. Instead of focusing his attention on the enemy, he made war on his own superior officers and let the Federals escape back to Chattanooga. No strategic position

was won; the Federals were still in control of Chattanooga.

Not only was Bragg fighting his superiors, he was also arguing with his subordinates. One said, "Bragg is so much afraid of doing something which would look like taking advantage of an enemy that he does nothing. He would not strike Rosecrans another blow until he has recovered his strength and announces himself ready. Our great victory has turned to ashes."

Mary Boykin Chestnut, wife of Brigadier General James Chestnut, wrote in her diary, "Bragg, thanks to Longstreet and Hood, had won Chickamauga; so we looked for results that would pay for our losses in battle. Surely they would capture Rosecrans. But no! There sat Bragg like a good dog, howling on his hind legs before Chattanooga and some Yankee holdfast grinning at him from his impregnable heights. Bragg always stops to argue with his generals....I think there is something wrong about the man."

Bragg was focusing more on trying to get rid of his detractors and was unaware of the Union army building up its forces. He laid siege on Chattanooga, trying to cut the supply line to the Union Army. But the Confederate Army was outgunned and outmanned, so Bragg added another disaster to his inept military career.

Between July and August of 1863, Maj. Gen. Withers was encamped near Chattanooga at Confederate headquarters. This is all we know about his participation in this campaign.

In December, Jefferson Davis finally realized he had to do

something about Bragg, and so replaced him with Maj. Gen. Joseph E. Johnston.

Back to Alabama

On Feb. 6, 1864, Withers was reassigned to the northern district of Alabama. In April, he was detached by the War Department and placed in command of the Alabama reserves with headquarters at Montgomery. He remained in this position for the duration of the war.

Battle of Mobile Bay

In August 1864, Rear Admiral David Farragut, assisted by a contingent of soldiers, attacked a small force of wooden Confederate gunboats, led by Admiral Franklin Buchanan, and successfully fought their way past Fort Gaines guarding the mouth of Mobile Bay. It was here that Farragut is alleged to have uttered his famous "Damn the torpedoes, full speed ahead" quote after the USS *Tecumseh* hit a stationary Confederate mine and sank. The *Tecumseh* rests on the bottom of Mobile Bay to this day.



Battle of Mobile Bay – Ft. Gaines on the left, Ft. Morgan on the far right

In March, 1865, federal forces entered the city of Mobile. Jones Withers was living in Mobile when the city surrendered – to avoid destruction – to the Union Army. Ironically, on May 25, 1865, just weeks after Jefferson Davis had dissolved the Confederacy, an ammunition depot explosion, termed “The Great Mobile Magazine Explosion,” killed some 300 people and destroyed a significant portion of the city.

Mobile had been the last important port on the Gulf of Mexico east of the Mississippi River remaining in Confederate possession, so its closure was the final step in completing the blockade in that region.

This Union victory at Mobile, together with the capture of Atlanta, was extensively covered by Union newspapers and was a significant boost for Abraham Lincoln's bid for re-election three months after the battle.

The “War of Secession” Ends

On April 9, Gen. Robert E. Lee surrendered his Confederate Army of Northern Virginia to Gen. Ulysses Grant at Appomattox Court House, however, some 175,000 Confederates still remained in the field. Many of these were scattered throughout the South in garrisons while the rest were concentrated in three major Confederate commands. As news spread of Lee's surrender, other Confederate commanders realized that the strength of the Confederacy was fading, and decided to lay down their arms. General Richard Taylor surrendered

his army at Citronelle, Alabama, just north of Mobile in early May. Upon hearing about General Lee's surrender, Gen. Nathan Bedford Forrest, "The Wizard of the Saddle," also chose to throw in the towel, reading his farewell address on May 9, 1865 at Gainesville, Alabama.

Return to civilian life

At the return of peace in the spring of 1865, Withers was paroled at Meridian, Mississippi, and on April 6, he resumed business in Mobile as a cotton broker and then editor of the *Mobile Tribune*. He was described as a "cynical publicist," but "a cultivated and incisive writer." He resided at the corner of Joachim and St. Francis Street. On December 28, he was pardoned by the U.S. Government.

By 1867, Withers was mayor of Mobile again, and was a partner in Withers, Adams & Company, located at 36 St. Michael Street. The business was soon relocated to the upstairs floor of 15 S. Commerce. He also changed his residence to N.S. Government Street at Ann Street. Most of these addresses are now paved over with parking lots.

On May 22 1867, the Reconstruction Government removed Mobile officials from office, including the sheriff and Mayor Withers. Here is the text of the official letter in which Withers yielded the office:

May 24th 1867
To the Honorable
Boards

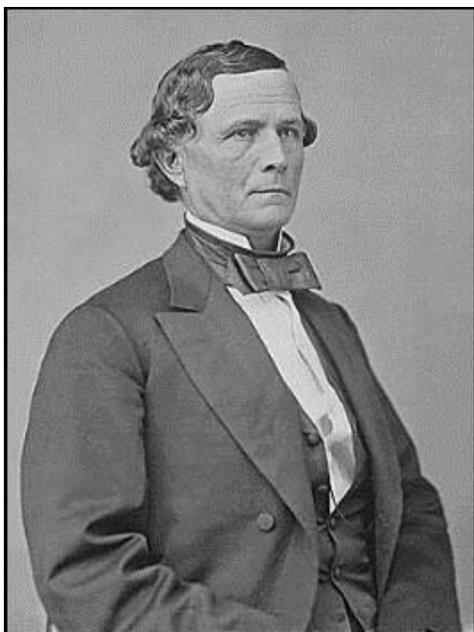
Aldermen & Common Council of the City of Mobile,

On the 22d. inst. an Order from "Major General John Pope, Commanding the 3^d Military District, on the recommendation of General Swayne" deposed me from the office of Mayor of the City of Mobile.

I yielded prompt obedience to the Mandate of a Controlling power, but in that act of obedience I simply yielded to a necessity, without impairing or forfeiting, or intending to impair or forfeit any claim or interest, personal or official, vested in me by the laws of the land & guaranteed to me by the plighted faith of the Government of the United States.

J.M. Withers.
Endorsements:

Received & ordered,
filed & spread on the
Minutes
By Common Council,
May 28, 1867



Jones M. Withers, Mayor of Mobile
Brady National Photographic Art
Gallery (Washington, D.C.)

In 1869, elections were held under the watchful eye of Federal troops. Riots ensued. Then, on April 22, Withers's wife, Rebecca died in Mobile. She was only 51-years-old, had been married for 32 years, and had borne 10 children, possibly three of whom predeceased her.

In 1870, Withers was listed as a merchant, with his residence at S.E. corner, Joachim and State Streets, Mobile. In 1871, his business was listed as "Withers, Eggleston & Co." He was also editor of the *Daily Tribune*. His residence that year was 15 No. Jackson.

In August 1871, former Gen. Braxton Bragg accepted a position as Chief Engineer for the State of Alabama. He moved to Mobile where his duties including improving the river, harbor and bay. However, after quarreling with a "combination of capitalists," he left for a job in Texas. We can only

presume that Withers and Bragg met while Bragg was in Mobile, particularly since Withers was editor of the newspaper.

The aftermath of the war left Mobile with a spirit of governmental and economic caution that would limit it for a large part of the next century. The last quarter of the 19th century was a time of turmoil for Mobile. The government was controlled by Republicans after Reconstruction and instituted by Congress in May 1867. Many of those politicians instituted policies that caused the disenfranchised Democrats to become embittered. In 1874, Democrats around the state used violence and extreme measures to keep African Americans and non-Democratic voters from participating in the November election. Election day in Mobile saw armed gangs roaming the streets and mobs of people surrounding the polling places to scare any non-Democrats away.

On April 3, 1873, General Withers was appointed to act as an attorney for the city in the sale of municipal bonds. From 1878-79, Withers served as the Mobile City Treasurer.

The decline of the city continued under the Democrats. By 1875, the city was more than \$5 million in debt and could not even pay the interest on the loans. This debt had been accruing since the 1830s. A game of political maneuvering continued to be played between rival factions as the city bordered on bankruptcy. In 1879, the city charter was repealed by the state legislature, abolishing the "City of Mobile" and replacing it with three

city commissioners appointed by the Alabama governor. The commissioners were charged with governing the new "Port of Mobile" and reducing the city's debt. The debt problem would not be settled until the last note was paid in 1906.

Washington, D.C. Years

In 1880, perhaps due to the political and economic turmoil in Mobile, Withers moved to Washington, D.C., where he became a claims agent and journalist. He apparently did not return to Mobile again until nine years later (no information is available about these years). In 1889, his address is listed as S.S. St. Francis, 3 E. Claiborne, Mobile. The population of Mobile in 1890 was 31,076.



Newspaper Row on Pennsylvania Avenue, Washington, D.C., 1874

Epilogue

It may be that Withers came home to die. Less than a year after returning from Washington, D.C., he died in Mobile on March 13, 1890 at the age of 76. His home address, at the time of his death, was listed as

the southwest corner of Jackson and St. Francis streets. He was buried in Magnolia Cemetery. Ironically, Withers's old Confederate superior, Gen. Braxton Bragg, is also buried in Magnolia Cemetery.



Withers family plot, Magnolia Cemetery

Jones Withers's wife and five of their ten children predeceased him, as well as three of his sons-in-law. Their children were, at the time of his death, as follows:

- 1) Harriet (Hattie) Brevard (1838-1908), m. Major Daniel E. Huger, who served on the staff of his father-in-law, Major-General Withers, and was with him on July 14, 1864, when Withers was recommended for appointment as brigade commander; one daughter
- 2) Herbert (1839-1882), *deceased* - m. F. Cornelia (1839-1928)
- 3) Daniel Forney (1841-1890), *deceased* - m. Clara Montgomery (1841-)

- 4) Mary Jones (1843-1918), m. Gen. Bryan M. Thomas (1843-1905) – one daughter
- 5) Priscilla (Cilla) McDowell (1845-1871), m. H.E. Witherspoon, *deceased* (1845-)
- 6) Jones Mitchell (1849-1885), *deceased* – m. Emma Norvell (1854-1899)
- 7) Charles Hopkins (1851-1870)
- 8) Eloise Forney (1855-1860), *deceased*
- 9) Virginia Clay (1858-), m. G.B. Cleveland, *deceased*
- 10) Daisy L. (1860-), m. Collier Humphreys, *deceased*.



Mary Jones Withers Thomas, Jones Withers's fourth child
This is the only known photograph of any of the Jones & Eloise Withers off-spring.



The Narrative can be found in the TVCWRT book published in 2012 titled, *North Alabama Civil War Generals; 13 Wore Gray, the Rest Blue*. Complements of the TVCWRT.