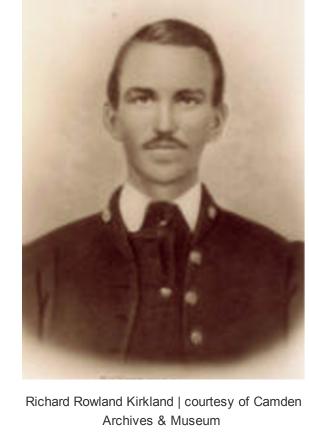
BLUE AND GRAY DISPATCH

The Angel of Marye's Heights

Laura Elliott, September 8, 2020 blueandgrayeducation.org



Marye's Heights"—the Confederate soldier who risked his own life to provide aid to Union wounded between the lines at Fredericksburg on December 13, 1862. He was killed in action at Chickamauga on September 20, 1863. The story of Kirkland's selfless act at Fredericksburg

captures a moment of humanity and civility amid the horror that was the Civil War.

Richard Rowland Kirkland of the 2nd South Carolina Infantry is best known as the "Angel of

Although it does not specifically name Richard Kirkland, a vague reminiscence, written by an unnamed correspondent known only as "C. McK" and published in Charleston's News and Courier on January 23, 1880, is typically cited as the initial report of the Kirkland incident. At Fredericksburg, Joseph Brevard Kershaw was in command of the brigade that included Kirkland's regiment, the 2nd South Carolina. In response to questions raised by C. McK's article, Kershaw wrote the editor of the News on January 29, 1880, providing additional particulars,

including the identity of the previously unnamed hero. Kershaw's detailed description of Kirkland's valor was reprinted in newspapers across the country, and that narrative ultimately became the identity of Richard Rowland Kirkland.



Even a story as inspiring as Kirkland's is subject to examination. Is it possible to determine if Richard Rowland Kirkland deserved the sobriquet of the "Angel of Marye's Heights"?

In a well-written series on Kirkland from 2010, historian Mac Wyckoff notes that earlier primary

Kershaw's 1880 narrative. Both accounts briefly describe a Confederate soldier who crosses the

sources support Kershaw's version of the Kirkland story. Wyckoff cites Walt Whitman's

memorandum of January 21, 1863, and the memoirs of Col. James R. Hagood of the 1st South Carolina as two accounts that may refer to the Kirkland incident that predate Joseph B.

stone wall and carries water to wounded Union soldiers. Hagood specifies that this soldier was from Kershaw's brigade. Since neither report mentions Kirkland by name, it is possible that those narratives could describe the actions of other men who aided the wounded between the lines. During the battle of Fredericksburg, Whitman was across the river ministering to the wounded Federals, and Hagood's 1st South Carolina was assigned to Jenkins's brigade,

Pickett's Division, so neither man would have likely witnessed Kirkland's valor.

In 2009, historian Michael Schaffer published a well-researched article, challenging the validity of the Kirkland incident. Schaffer states: "The exact deed for which Kirkland received this accolade was first and most extensively described by J. B. Kershaw, commander of the brigade in which Kirkland served, in a letter to the Charleston News and Courier dated January 2 [sic], 1880. " Citing the time elapsed; historical inaccuracies; lack of timely, primary source corroboration; absence of mention in the Official Records; and Kershaw's use of flowery language, Schaffer suggests that the Kirkland story is likely a fictionalized exaggeration or generalization. he was over the wall. But he had not touched the opposite tarf before a volley of bullets, fired from a hundred concealed points, welcomed him on his mission of mercy. But miraculously, he was unharmed. He knelt down, the object of a murderous fire, put his canteen, like a blessed Samaitan, to the lips of a dying soldier, and arranged his knapsack for a pillow. The Federals were mistaken. They thought, reasonably enough, his purpose to be the rifling of their dead, but they discovered his noble mission, and the firing upon him slackened and caused, and his work went on as it had, oblivious of the cruel shafts hurled at his charmed life. From one to another he passed in his loving work, and two great and hostile armies forget their animosities in wondering observation and admiration of the hero who braved almost certain death to do a kind act to suffering men. This painting will do much toward the total destruction of the ctill smoking cumbers of sectional animosity. with a Unionist's bullet. Sergeant Kirk-A BEAUTIFUL WORK OF ART. -- A cor-

in the South, from carrying out his announced determination to undertake the execution of a great national work, based on a heroic ipoident which took place at the fierce battle of. Frederickaburg. The ipoident is this. After the gallant charge of the National Irish Brigade npon the stone fance behind which a portion of Gen. Kershaw's division of South Carolinians were posted, which a portion of Gen. Kershaw's division of South Carolinians were posted, which a portion of Gen. Kershaw's division of South Carolinians were posted, which a portion of Gen. Kershaw's division of South Carolinians were posted, and dying Unionists, who, on the repulse and retreat, were left to suffer the united agonies of a battle field. It is declared that the Irishmen made as heroic a charge as it had been hopeless and fatal; and when they had retreated, both armies kept up a murierous sharpshooting upon each other. So fatal was this cruel sport that the Federal reports declare that 150 Unionists felt in their rifle pits from the fire behind the stone wall. On the Confederate ide the mental content of the property wall. rifle pits from the fire behind the stone wall. On the Confederate side, the moment a hand or head was raised above the wall, it was sure to be perforated PREVIOUSLY UNNOTICED

soldier.

respondent of the Louisville (Ky.)

Ledger thus speaks of a picture which is being executed by Capt. W. P. Hix, of this city. The figures will be life size: "The sudden death of Mr. Wearn will not deter Capt. Hix, the surviving partner, and one of the finest and most famous portrait and landscape painters in the South, from carrying out his an-

with a Unionist's bullet. Sergeant Kirkland, one of the sharp-shooters, stationed behind the stone wall, is the hero of the incident. He was afterwards, we mourn to say, killed in battle. He belonged to the Second South Carolina Infantry. The groans of the wounded Federalists lying just over the wall pierced his humane heart, and his kindly, humane nature rebelled sgainst the crucity of their sufferings. They cried for water, and there was no friendly hand to bring it. Kirkland resolved to make the attempt to relieve the wants of the dying, and with that moral and physical horoism which surmounts all obstacles, and dares death for the good of others, he repaired to Gen. Kershaw's headquarters and asked the privilege of jumping over the wall and carrying water to the lips of the wounded enemy. At first the General would not think of such folly. He told Kirkland that sure death awaited the man who mounted the wall, for the fire was incessant and fatal. Kirkland declared that he could not bear to hear the groans of anguish which greeted his ears, aff he would make the attempt to relieve them if the general would give his consent. The appeal was too strong to be resisted by the magnanimous Kershaw, and he reluctantly gave his permission; whereupon the gallant sergeant departed on his more than perilous mission, assuring his friends that he did not believe he would be killed. A bound, and The Daily Phoenix (Columbia, SC), January 18, 1874, p. 2 Actually, neither the account by "C. McK" nor Joseph B. Kershaw's 1880 letter was the first published report naming Richard Kirkland a hero at Fredericksburg. There is another little-known narrative by William Preston Hix. His report, originally published in the Louisville (Ky.) Ledger and reprinted in Columbia, South Carolina's The Daily Phoenix, January 18, 1874, names Kirkland as the hero and predates both the previously cited accounts by six years: A BEAUTIFUL WORK OF ART" — A correspondent of the Louisville (Ky.) Ledger thus speaks of a picture which is being executed by Capt. W. P. Hix [William Preston Hix], of this city [Columbia, SC]. The figures will be life size:

The man referred to as Capt. W. P. Hix was William Prest Hix (A/3rd SC) of Columbia, SC. In 1850 Preston Hix (b. @1836) is enumerated in the household of his father Edward Hix, a carriage maker, along with brothers Edward M Hix (b. @1832), Willis Hix (b. @1841) and Eugene Hix (b. @1838) and his occupation is listed as "portrait painter.

The Daily Phoenix. (Columbia, SC), January 18, 1874, page 2.

undertake the execution of a great national work, based on a heroic incident which took place at the fierce battle of Fredericksburg. The incident is this: After the gallant charge of the National Irish Brigade upon the stone fence behind which a portion of Gen. Kershaw's division of South

Carolinians were posted, the ground was covered with the dead and dying Unionists, who, on the repulse and retreat, were left to suffer the untold agonies of the battle field. It is declared that the Irish made as heroic a charge as it had been hopeless and fatal; and when they retreated, both armies kept up a murderous sharpshooting upon each other. . . Sergeant Kirkland, one of the sharpshooters, stationed behind the stone wall, is the hero of the incident. He was afterwards, we mourn to say, killed in battle. He belonged to the Second South Carolina Infantry. The groans of the Federalists lying just over the wall pierced his humane heart, and his kindly human nature rebelled against the cruelty of their suffering. They cried for water, and there was no friendly hand to bring it. Kirkland resolved to make the attempt to relieve the wants of the dying, and with that moral and physical heroism which surmounts all obstacles, and dares death for the good of others, he repaired to Gen. Kershaw's headquarters and asked the privilege. . . He knelt down, the object of a murderous fire, put his canteen like a blessed Samaritan, to the lips of a dying

The sudden death of Mr. Wearn will not deter Capt. Hix, one of the finest and most famous portrait and landscape painters in the South, from carrying out his announced determination to

The Hix-Blackwell House in Laurens, South Carolina, where William Preston Hix and his brothers grew up | CC

William Preston Hix is listed on the 1860 U.S. Census for Laurensville, Laurens County, South Carolina, as the 22-year-old son of Edward and Mary Hix. His occupation is listed as "portrait painter." In 1859, Richard Wearn established the Premium Photograph and Ambrotype Gallery in Columbia. By 1860, portrait painter William Preston Hix was in partnership with Wearn, under the

In 1861, William Preston Hix and his three brothers (Edward Melville Hix, Willis Dickie Hix, and Clarence Eugene Hix) enlisted in Company A, 3rd South Carolina, which was part of Kershaw's brigade. William P. Hix enlisted June 1, 1861, at Columbia into Captain B. C. Garlington's company, which became Company A, 3rd South Carolina Infantry. The company muster roll, dated June 30, 1861, lists his age as 25. He was discharged February 13, 1862, for a fistula in his arm. The older brother of William P. Hix, Edward Melville Hix, served as a corporal in Company A, 3rd South Carolina, and later as sergeant major of the regiment. His younger brothers, Willis Dickie Hix and Clarence Eugene Hix, also served in Company A. Eugene was killed at Fredericksburg, and it was William P. Hix who filed the claim for Eugene's pay in arrears on their father's behalf. So, while William Preston Hix was not likely a direct witness to the

WHO WAS WILLIAM PRESTON HIX?

name Wearn & Hix

watercolors."

Kirkland incident, his brothers probably were—and two of them survived the war. Richard Wearn and William Preston Hix were partners in photography for fifteen years (except for nine months, when Hix was serving in the 3rd South Carolina.) The firm of Wearn & Hix is probably best known for the 1865 series of 19 images illustrating the destruction of Columbia. The Wearn & Hix partnership ended suddenly in January 1874 when Richard Wearn took his own life. Afterward, W. P. Hix & Co. continued to work in carte vista, cabinet cards, and stereographs,

while giving "much attention to the tinting of photographs" and to "producing paintings in oils and

W. Preston Hix went on to achieve success as a businessman, working in the development and sales of electrical service, including at least six years under Thomas Alva Edison. Hix moved to New York, where he built a grand home along the shore in the township of Rye. He died there in 1912 and was buried in Westchester County. It is unknown if Hix ever completed his painting

depicting Kirkland at Fredericksburg; it is clear that, in 1874, it was his intent to do so.

Richard Kirkland statue, Fredericksburg | photo courtesy of William J. Bechmann III CONCLUSION William Preston Hix's account proves that Joseph B. Kershaw was not the first person to detail the selfless act performed on the battlefield at Fredericksburg or to name Richard Kirkland as the hero. Hix's account was published six years before Kershaw's, names Sergeant Kirkland, and describes, essentially, the same noble act described by Kershaw. Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that Kershaw's account was not fabricated or contrived. Hix, the source of the 1874 account, had served in one of the regiments in Kershaw's brigade. He would have had direct interaction with men, including his own brothers, who witnessed Kirkland's acts of kindness firsthand. While Hix's account does not prove that what he describes occurred exactly

About the author: Laura Elliott is an independent historian whose primary research interest is the 16th Georgia Infantry of William T. Wofford's Brigade, Kershaw 's Division, Longstreet 's Corps. Laura resides in Rainbow City, Alabama, with her husband, James Fitts, whose great, great, grandfather, William Walker Fitts, was a private in the 16th Georgia. Private Fitts was killed at the Battle of Spotsylvania on May 12, 1864. This family connection first prompted her to begin her research of this neglected regiment.

BGES will be conducting an extensive tour of the Fredericksburg Campaign of 1862 in Fredericksburg on December 10-12, 2021. Led by Dr. Paul Severance, emeritus instructor of history and leadership at the National Defense University, Fort McNair, Washington,

as described, it indicates that men who could have or should have known about the event believed that it happened as described and that Richard Rowland Kirkland was the "Angel of Marye's Heights." Furthermore, the incident, as well as the identity of the hero, was likely accepted as fact by the men of Kershaw's brigade. Certainly, Hix's account lends credibility to later reports, including Joseph B. Kershaw's. Future archival research may uncover even earlier references to Kirkland or could confirm that the 1874 Hix article is indeed the first identification

of "Angel of Marye's Heights."

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