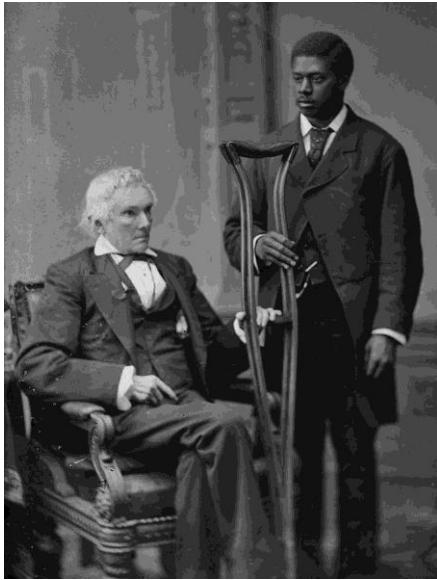


Civil War Crutches Bear Remarkable History

AT THE ATWOOD

By Lynn Van Dine



When Rosalind DeLong of Chatham first told us at the Atwood House & Museum about the crutches dating back to the Civil War, we were definitely interested.

Then she showed us the picture, and we began to get excited.

After some historical digging, we became downright enthused.

“Roz,” as she likes to be called, is the co-owner of Longshore Restaurant and a collector of antiques. “I love things that come with a story,” she says. And what a story the crutches have to tell.

Depicted in the 1860-80s daguerreotype by Matthew Brady’s studio (yes, THAT Matthew Brady, famous for his pictures of the Civil War), is a seated man with a shock of white hair and a black gentleman standing, holding the crutches. The seated man is none other than Alexander Hamilton Stephens, vice president of the Confederacy, 1861-1865, under President Jefferson Davis.

Before the war, Stephens was a distinguished politician from Georgia, serving in the U. S. House of Representatives in Washington, D.C. Frail all his life, he required crutches to make his way from place to place.

Stephens was an author of the Georgia Platform, which opposed Southern secession from the United States. Nonetheless, after Georgia and other Southern states seceded and formed the Confederate States of America, Stephens was elected as the Confederate Vice President. In his Cornerstone Speech of March 1861, he defended slavery in the most adamant terms.

Not long into the Civil War, Stephens began to rail against President Jefferson Davis' policies, especially those of conscription and the suspension of habeas corpus (the prosecution for unlawful imprisonment).

In February 1865, he and three other Confederate commissioners met with his longtime friend, President Abraham Lincoln, in an unsuccessful bid for peace at the Hampton Roads (Va.) Conference. Although peace was not achieved, Lincoln agreed to look into a personal matter for Stephens -- the whereabouts of his nephew, Confederate Lt. John A. Stephens. When Lincoln returned to Washington, he ordered the release of Lt. Stephens.

After the war, Stephens was imprisoned until October 1865, and he tried to distance himself from his earlier statements about slavery. His former slaves stayed on with him for little or no pay. Stephens represented Georgia in the U.S. House of Representatives for several years until he was elected Governor in 1882. He died four months into his term in March 1883.

Whew! What an amazing story a pair of crutches and a photograph have to tell!

The crutches themselves are things of beauty with graceful wooden supports and padded leather, and currently on display in the *Chatham and the Military* exhibit at the Atwood House & Museum.