

Excerpt from *The Lost Gettysburg Address* by David T. Dixon

Following his public speech in support of the Union, Charles Anderson and family attempt to flee Texas, only to be captured and forced to return to San Antonio. His wife and children are allowed to leave, but Anderson is imprisoned in a Confederate military camp outside the city. A local widow, a Belgian astronomer, and a young nephew of a Confederate officer hatch a plan for Anderson's escape.

If Anderson assented to this plan, he was to exit the tent and bow three times. He waited several minutes after Kreische left his tent, then walked out into the yard. He looked at the sky as if examining the weather, stroked his beard and lowered his head. He paced and bowed inconspicuously, repeating this slow and seemingly innocent behavior two more times. Then he walked back inside the tent, taking care not to look away at any time. Bayard observed the signal and the game was on.

One clear night followed another. The conspirators grew anxious. Kitty Anderson's fiancé, Will Jones, passed the tent one morning and, when the guard was not looking, tossed a satchel into Anderson's study. The purse contained several hundred dollars. The money was collected by Jones from his fellow officer prisoners. Anderson stashed the money and a pair of shoes in a hole under his bed and awaited a change in the weather. His asthma had returned, though not in as serious a form as he had led his captors to believe. The illness gave Anderson the excuse to opt out of the nightly games he had been playing with some of his guards and focus on planning his escape. He sent money to Dr. Ferdinand Herff one day to secure some stramonium, more popularly known as "Jamestown weed." He often smoked the

plant to relieve his symptoms and help him sleep. A strong narcotic, stramonium is lethal in large doses.

On the first cloudy afternoon of that week, Anderson approached Captain Mechling with a request. He told the captain that he was supposed to take only small puffs of the intense weed, but that he had smoked an entire pipe full in his desire to get a good night's rest. He asked Mechling to let him sleep undisturbed if he was not up by breakfast. The captain honored the request. Anderson placed his boots outside to be blackened as he had done every night during his confinement, and he retired for the evening.

Anderson waited until everyone in camp was asleep except the guards. He slipped unseen into his study tent with his shoes, money, and little else. When the sentry passed to the side of Anderson's bedroom, Charles crept out under the tent wall of the study. Clouds and rain blotted out the stars and most of the light from the half moon. Anderson was thankful for the darkness but afraid of losing his bearings. As he sneaked away from the Confederate soldiers, he paused each time the lightning flashed, hoping to catch a brief view of his surroundings. Soon he was completely lost. After wandering for a few hours, Anderson saw some lights and decided to approach them so as to determine his position. As he walked toward the illumination, a sentinel challenged him. Anderson remembered that the only other brigade encamped nearby was that of General Henry B. Sibley. Sibley's troops were stationed on the Salado River, preparing for a campaign into New Mexico territory. Some of these troops would ultimately clash with forces commanded by Anderson's son Latham at the Battle of Val Verde.

Maintaining his composure, Anderson answered the sentry, stating that he had important business with Sibley and asking for directions to his tent. The ruse worked, and Anderson walked calmly in that direction. As soon as he was out of the guard's sight, Anderson quickened his pace and headed for the river. After struggling for countless minutes while wading away from Sibley's camp in water up to his

neck, Anderson heard the drums beat a general alarm. Since he had failed to show up at Sibley's tent, he was now being hunted. On and on Anderson walked through the driving rain, his cheap, borrowed shoes disintegrating in the process. His feet and hands were bleeding from encounters with the briars and brambles of his trackless flight. The featureless landscape and poor visibility led him to crawl on his hands and knees at various points, trying to feel for a road or a way marker of some kind.

Anderson had been stumbling along until well after midnight when he found himself at the old powder house on the outskirts of town. This was good news. He was in widow Ludlum's neighborhood. Unfortunately he had never been to the house, so he was unsure precisely which of the nearby dwellings was hers. Finding a small abode that seemed to match the description, he took a chance and crept into the courtyard. He saw two horses that appeared out of place in such a small enclosure. He suspected that he was at the right address. Houzeau and Ludlum had been ready for several nights to receive their secret guest. The scientist placed a large book on his bedroom windowsill each evening. Anderson pushed the window open as instructed, and the book fell to the floor. Houzeau sprung from his bed and was dressed in sixty seconds. He went into the courtyard and felt for Anderson's hand in the gloaming predawn darkness.

"He is here, he is here," Houzeau whispered to awaken Ludlum, "and he wants to leave." The escapee was in no condition to travel, however. Ludlum disposed of Anderson's wet clothes and put him to bed. When he woke in a few hours, the widow explained that there had been a change of plans. Some of the bread and meat that Ludlum had hidden away for Anderson's journey was missing. She suspected that her servant, a Frenchman named Esau, had taken it. She went to the servant's room while Anderson was sleeping and found the goods in his possession. Ludlum was convinced that Esau would surely betray them if a substantial reward were offered. Rather than stay a few weeks as planned, Anderson had to leave at once. The widow gave him some of her son's clothes and a revolver. She trimmed the fugitive's red beard close, cut his hair, and dyed both with lamp black. Houzeau assembled the necessary supplies: a pencil and paper,

compass, candle, matches, powder, bullets, map, a gourd of fresh water, and a six-day supply of biscuits. He fitted Anderson with a belt containing twelve-hundred dollars, including the money from Jones. Anderson gave Houzeau a few business papers he had somehow hidden from his captors and the October 4 letter from McCulloch. The pair mounted their horses before dawn and vanished.