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*Dramatic Publishing*

# *Civil War Voices*



*Musical by  
James R. Harris  
Original Arrangements by Mark Hayes*

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“From the moment the haunting strains of the violin and piano begin, you know you are in for something special ... Stirring, emotionally driven, powerfully written ... You will leave the theatre enlightened, renewed.” —*Times Square Chronicles*

“*Civil War Voices* is a soul-stirring crowd pleaser ... splendidly entertaining.” —*Backstage*

***Civil War Voices*** – Musical. By James R. Harris. Featuring songs of the period with original arrangements by Mark Hayes. Cast: 6 to 19m., 4 to 19w. This musical tells the compelling and passionate true stories of real people who lived through the Civil War, often using the actual words they left behind in diaries, letters and other writings. Joe Harris was a cotton planter from Alabama with a conflicted conscience about the war. The discovery of the existence of his diary inspired the play. Elizabeth Keckley endured the indignity of slavery, bought her freedom and became Mary Todd Lincoln’s closest friend and personal assistant in the White House. Theo Perry and his pregnant wife, Harriet, were a young, married couple from Texas who were separated by the war. Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain was a college professor from Maine who enlisted to fight for the Union, became a national war hero as a result of his actions at Gettysburg and accepted the Confederate surrender at Appomattox. The show contains exciting arrangements of some of the greatest songs of the period, such as “Battle Hymn of the Republic,” “Amazing Grace” and “Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child.” Appealing to all audiences, the songs and stories bring to life the incredible drama of this stirring era. *Flexible set. Music excerpts available online. Approximate running time: 1 hour, 50 minutes. Code: CN8.*

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By  
JAMES R. HARRIS

Original musical arrangements by  
MARK HAYES



**Dramatic Publishing**

Woodstock, Illinois • Australia • New Zealand • South Africa

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“*Civil War Voices* received its New York City premiere at the Midtown International Theatre Festival in 2010, produced by Bob Ost/Wildly Productive Productions in association with Sheila Simon Geltzer and Alma Villegas. It was subsequently produced and developed by Barter Theatre, Abingdon, Va., by Richard Rose, producing artistic director. Special thanks to Robin McKercher and Doane College. *Civil War Voices* ©2007-2012 by Rough and Ready, LLC. The author wishes to acknowledge the following source materials used for this show: *Letters of Theophilus and Harriet Perry*, Person Family Papers, Rare Book Manuscript and Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, N.C. The letters are used with the permission of Duke University. *Widows by the Thousands: the Civil War Correspondence of Theophilus and Harriet Perry*, edited by M. Jane Johansson. ©2000 by the University of Arkansas Press. Used with permission of the publisher, [www.uapress.com](http://www.uapress.com). *The Diary of Joseph Harris*, 1860-1865. ©1999 by Oakbowery Properties, Inc., Lincoln, Neb. Used with permission of Oakbowery Properties, Inc. *Behind the Scenes* by Elizabeth Keckley, originally published in 1868. *Through Blood and Fire at Gettysburg, Appomattox, and Other Personal Reminiscences of J.L. Chamberlain*, originally published in various publications circa 1907-1913.”

## AUTHOR'S NOTES

Although this musical is set against the backdrop of a great and panoramic national conflict, the staging requirements for the show are quite flexible and relatively simple. The show can be performed using a single unit set. As the action of the play unfolds, the audience is called upon in its collective imagination to the various locations of the war. Some productions have featured slide presentations depicting period scenes and characters as a backdrop for the performance, while others have not.

Because of the flexibility of the staging requirements, this musical has been produced in a remarkable variety of venues. It was first performed in a small church fellowship hall and an intimate college theatre, but then was next produced in a giant performing arts venue. It has been performed in a “gymnasium” in Gettysburg, an intimate New York theatre, and a wide variety of concert halls and theatres on a national tour. It was even produced “in concert” to commemorate the anniversary of the Battle of Bull Run, complete with a 100-voice choir backing up the actors.

Cast size is also flexible. There are around 30 speaking roles, many with solo singing parts. More actors can be added in the ensemble scenes and for the large choral numbers. The show has also been performed with a small ensemble cast, using cast doubling. Casting suggestions for a 10-person cast have been included at end of script.

A few words about the characters in the show seem to be in order. The Narrator “controls” the show by calling forth the other characters to tell their stories. The script is written so the same actor portrays the Narrator and Joseph Harris. The transformation of the Narrator to Harris can take place in a variety of ways: a change in accent, perhaps, or a slight change in costume, such as putting on a coat or hat for example. The Narrator and Joseph Harris can also be portrayed by separate actors, in which case stage directions should be adjusted accordingly. Abraham Lincoln is also a character in this show by virtue of his friendship with Elizabeth Keckley. However, I do not believe it is necessary to try to cast a Lincoln look-alike in the role. (After all, how many people actually look like Abraham Lincoln?) A simple, familiar device such as a stovepipe hat should suffice to convey the character to the audience.

Although there is a lot of sadness in the show, there are also moments of humor. I think it is important to highlight the lighter moments in the show whenever possible so as to lighten the burden of the war.

Lastly I would like to express my undying gratitude to my brilliant musical collaborator, Mark Hayes. Mark’s original musical arrangements make these classic American songs live anew. Anyone who is not genuinely touched by Mark’s stirring musical work in this show is a hard hearted soul indeed.



*Civil War Voices* was presented in New York at the Midtown International Theatre Festival by Bob Ost/Wildly Productive Productions in association with Sheila Simon Geltzer and Alma Villegas, with stage direction by Dennis Courtney and musical direction by Laura Bergquist. It was subsequently produced and developed by Barter Theatre, Abingdon, Va., by Richard Rose, producing artistic director. The Barter production was directed by Susanne Boulee with musical direction by W. Brent Sawyer.

\* \* \* \*

Special thanks to Robin McKercher and Doane College.

\* \* \* \*

For my parents, John and Eleanor Harris

# CIVIL WAR VOICES

## CHARACTERS

Narrator / Joseph Harris

Theo Perry

Harriet Perry

Elizabeth Keckley

Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain

First Master

Old Mistress

Cook

Keckley's Mother

Second Master

St. Louis Woman

Governor Washburn

Mrs. Jefferson Davis

Mary Todd Lincoln

Abraham Lincoln

Cornelia Harris

Sgt. George Buck

General Lee

General Hunt

Union General

First Soldier's Wife

Second Soldier's Wife

Narrator's Father

Confederate Medic

Confederate Officer

Confederate Woman

Celebrant #1

Celebrant #2

PLUS Fire Eaters, Confederate Soldiers, Union Soldiers, Citizens,  
Celebrants, Chorus

## CASTING SUGGESTIONS FOR 6 MEN AND 4 WOMEN

### MAN 1

Narrator  
Joseph Harris

### MAN 2

Theo Perry  
Governor

### MAN 3

Chamberlain  
Male Oppressor  
(non-speaking)

### MAN 4

Second Master  
Abe Lincoln  
General Lee

### MAN 5

First Master  
General Hunt  
Confederate Soldier  
Narrator's Father  
Confederate Medic

### MAN 6

Cook  
Sgt. George Buck  
Union General  
Celebrant

### WOMAN 1

Harriet Perry  
Celebrant

### WOMAN 2

Elizabeth Keckley  
Keckley as a Child

### WOMAN 3

Keckley's Mother  
St. Louis Patron  
Soldier's Wife  
Mary Lincoln

### WOMAN 4

Old Mistress  
Mrs. Davis  
Cornelia Harris  
Soldier's Wife

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# ACT ONE

## PROLOGUE

### (MUSIC 1: PROLOGUE)

TIME AND PLACE: *The present, in the attic of a house.*

AT RISE: *NARRATOR wanders in, looks around the room with wonder, eventually sees an old picture and picks it up tenderly.*

NARRATOR. When I was a little boy, I became fascinated with an old picture in a silver frame on my grandmother's parlor table. It was a picture of a Civil War soldier, no older than my brothers. He was wearing a Union uniform with brass buttons down the front and an ill-fitting cap with a musket at his side. He looked at once determined to be brave and scared to death. His eyes stared straight forward with a look that said, "What's to become of me?" My grandmother told me the young boy was her mother's brother and that he was killed by a stray bullet during the Civil War. The haunting look on that young soldier's face has stayed with me all my life.

*(NARRATOR looks again tenderly at the picture, and then puts it down in a place where it will remain for the rest of the play.)*

Like many Americans, I have ancestors from both sides of the war. My mother was from Nebraska and my father was from Alabama. My dad grew up on an Alabama farm that had been in his family for generations. There were lots of old stories about the war, including one about a family member who hid up in a tree as the Union troops passed beneath, and another about a neighbor who was hung by his thumbs by Union troops sent to tear up the railroad. It seems he wouldn't tell them where he had buried his silver.

*(He makes his way to an old trunk, hesitates, then lifts the lid. Reverently, he pulls out an old book.)*

Then I found a diary that my great-great-uncle kept in Alabama during the Civil War. As I read his diary, I could feel the warm breath of his life and times on every page. And I began to look for true stories of the war left behind by other Americans as well.

*(He puts the book back and takes a stack of letters from the trunk.)*

I found the letters of Theo and Harriet Perry.

*(THEO and HARRIET PERRY enter tentatively from opposite sides of the stage. NARRATOR hands them the letters. They gain strength.)*

THEO. I left my pregnant wife and child in Marshall, Texas, to fight for the South.

HARRIET. We wrote to each other devotedly throughout the war. This is our true story and these are our words.  
*(They run to each other and embrace.)*

NARRATOR. I discovered a book by a freed slave named Elizabeth Keckley in a New York museum shop.

*(NARRATOR takes a book from a trunk and KECKLEY enters. He gives her the book. She becomes animated.)*

KECKLEY. I was born a slave. Therefore I came upon the earth free in thought, but fettered in action. This is my true story and these are my words.

NARRATOR. A friend told me about the inspiring memoirs of Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain.

*(NARRATOR takes a book from the trunk, and CHAMBERLAIN enters. He gives the book to CHAMBERLAIN.)*

CHAMBERLAIN. I was a college professor in Maine when the war broke out. I enlisted and fought for the Union. I soon found myself at the center of the most important battle ever fought in North America. This is my true story and these are my words.

NARRATOR. But it was my uncle's diary that inspired my quest.

*(NARRATOR takes his uncle's diary from a trunk and is transformed into JOSEPH HARRIS.)*

HARRIS. My name is Joseph Harris, a cotton planter from Oak Bowery, Alabama. It is November 9, 1860. This is my true story and these are my words.

CHAMBERLAIN. This is my true story and these are my words.

KECKLEY. This is my true story and these are my words.

THEO & HARRIET. This is our true story and these are our words.

ALL (*holding their pages up to heaven*). And these are our words.

SCENE 1: An Alabama townhall meeting

**(MUSIC 2: DIXIE UNDERSCORE)**

HARRIS. I heard today that Abraham Lincoln was elected president. This is ominous news as he is opposed bitterly to our Southern institutions.

*(FIRE-EATERS drift in one at a time.)*

I went to a mass meeting for the purpose of taking into consideration the best means of Alabama seceding from the Union in consequence of Lincoln's election. Oh, this is a dangerous business. I have never heard as much confusion as I heard there. Passions are running so high everyone wanted to speak at once!

*(ENSEMBLE MEMBERS gather together to form a meeting of "fire-eaters.")*



SOUTHERN FIRE-EATERS.

The North won't fight. they need our cotton.

We must defend our sacred honor.

Alabama must secede at once.

A war with the North wouldn't last a month.

*(Ad lib.)*

HARRIS. I perceive that we are on the eve of one of the greatest revolutions imaginable.

**(SONG 3: THE BONNIE BLUE FLAG)**

FIRE-EATER #1.

WE ARE A BAND OF BROTHERS,

AND NATIVE TO THE SOIL

FIGHTING FOR THE PROPERTY

WE GAINED BY HONEST TOIL.

FIRE-EATER #2.

AND WHEN OUR RIGHTS WERE THREATENED,

THE CRY ROSE NEAR AND FAR;

HURRAH FOR THE BONNIE BLUE FLAG

THAT BEARS A SINGLE STAR!

ALL FIRE-EATERS.

HURRAH! HURRAH!

FOR SOUTHERN RIGHTS, HURRAH!

HURRAH FOR THE BONNIE BLUE FLAG

THAT BEARS A SINGLE STAR!

FEMALE FIRE-EATERS.

AS LONG AS THE UNION

WAS FAITHFUL TO HER TRUST

LIKE FRIENDS AND BRETHREN,  
KIND WERE WE, AND JUST;

FIRE-EATER #3.

BUT NOW, WHEN NORTHERN TREACHERY  
ATTEMPTS OUR RIGHTS TO MAR,  
WE HOIST ON HIGH THE BONNIE BLUE FLAG  
THAT BEARS A SINGLE STAR!

ALL FIRE-EATERS.

HURRAH! HURRAH!  
FOR SOUTHERN RIGHTS, HURRAH!  
HURRAH FOR THE BONNIE BLUE FLAG  
THAT BEARS A SINGLE STAR!  
HURRAH FOR THE BONNIE BLUE FLAG  
THAT BEARS A SINGLE STAR!

FIRE-EATER #1. Ladies and gentlemen, our Southern  
cause is righteous. We must defend our sacred honor  
from Yankee insult. The South will be victorious!

ALL FIRE-EATERS (*cheering*). SECESSION!

(*HARRIS moves downstage.*)

HARRIS. I fear we may be moving too quickly. These  
people are my friends, and they are good people. They  
seem so sure that war is the answer. Why can't I be so  
sure? What if my friends are wrong? They could be  
killed. I could be killed. Our way of life could be de-  
stroyed. There must be some way to avoid war. I love  
the South and I fear for her future.

**(SONG 4: DIXIE)**

HARRIS (*heartfelt, slowly*).

I WISH I WAS IN THE LAND OF COTTON  
OLD TIMES THERE ARE NOT FORGOTTEN  
LOOK AWAY! LOOK AWAY! LOOK AWAY!  
DIXIELAND

IN DIXIELAND WHERE I WAS BORN IN  
EARLY ON ONE FROSTY MORNIN'  
LOOK AWAY! LOOK AWAY! LOOK AWAY!  
*DIXIELAND*

*(FIRE-EATERS take up song, slowly and stately at first,  
then building to a frenzy.)*

ALL FIRE-EATERS.

I WISH I WAS IN DIXIE  
HOORAY! HOORAY!  
IN DIXIELAND, I'LL TAKE MY STAND  
TO LIVE AND DIE IN DIXIE  
AWAY, AWAY, AWAY DOWN SOUTH IN DIXIE!  
AWAY, AWAY, AWAY DOWN SOUTH IN DIXIE!

TWO FIRE-EATERS.

OH, HEAR THE NORTHERN THUNDERS MUTTER  
NORTHERN FLAGS IN SOUTH WINDS FLUTTER  
TO ARMS! TO ARMS! TO ARMS, DIXIELAND!

ALL MALE FIRE-EATERS.

SEND THEM BACK YOUR FIERCE DEFIANCE  
STAMP UPON YOUR CURSED ALLIANCE  
TO ARMS! TO ARMS! TO ARMS, DIXIELAND!

ALL FIRE-EATERS.

I WISH I WAS IN DIXIE  
HOORAY! HOORAY!  
FOR DIXIELAND I'LL TAKE MY STAND  
TO LIVE AND DIE FOR DIXIE  
AWAY, AWAY, AWAY, DOWN SOUTH IN DIXIE!  
AWAY, AWAY, AWAY, DOWN SOUTH IN DIXIE!

*(HARRIS returns to being NARRATOR.)*

NARRATOR. I share my uncle's love of the South. But there are some things about the Old South I will never understand. How could anyone have been so blind to the injustice of owning people as property? Southerners of the time, including my uncle, were very religious. They engaged in a great deal of moral self-examination on a variety of topics, but not slavery. Listen carefully to the words of "Bonnie Blue Flag."

**(SONG 5: BONNIE BLUE FLAG REPRISE)**

FIRE-EATER #2.

WE ARE A BAND OF BROTHERS,  
AND NATIVE TO THE SOIL  
FIGHTING FOR THE PROPERTY  
WE GAINED BY HONEST TOIL

SCENE 2: Slave quarters of a Southern plantation in Dinwiddie, Virginia

*(MUSIC 6: SOMETIMES I FEEL LIKE A MOTHERLESS CHILD starts as background with COOK humming melody softly.)*

KECKLEY. I, Elizabeth Keckley, was born a slave in Virginia, my mother's only child. My father was the slave of another man, and he could only visit us twice a year. Our reunions were always joyous. On one such occasion when I was about seven, my father was told by his master,

FIRST MASTER. I've decided to move to the West, and I'm taking you with me. Say your goodbyes. You will never return here again.

KECKLEY. The announcement fell upon that rude log cabin like a thunderbolt. I remember how my father cried out against the cruel separation—his last kiss; his wild straining to hold my mother; the tears and goodbyes. And then he was gone. My mother could not restrain her sorrow. My old mistress had no tolerance for her tears.

OLD MISTRESS. Stop your nonsense. There is no necessity for you putting on airs. There are plenty more men around here, and if you want a husband so badly, stop your crying and go find one.

KECKLEY. Mother turned away in stoical silence. My parents never met again in this world. *(Sings.)*

A LONG WAY FROM HOME  
OH LORD, MY LORD  
I FEEL SO FAR FROM HOME

KECKLEY & COOK.

SOMETIMES I FEEL LIKE I'M ALMOST GONE,  
SOMETIMES I FEEL LIKE I'M ALMOST GONE,  
SOMETIMES I FEEL LIKE I'M ALMOST GONE.  
WAY UP IN THE HEAV'NLY LAND,  
WAY UP IN THE HEAV'NLY LAND.  
LORD, WAY UP IN THE HEAV'NLY LAND.

*(Spoken.)* Later that year, I witnessed for the first time the sale of a human being. My master had just purchased his hogs for the winter, but he was unable to pay for them in full. To escape this embarrassment it was necessary to sell one of his slaves. Little Joe, the son of the cook, was selected as the victim.

FIRST MASTER. How old is that little boy of yours?

COOK. My Joe just turned five.

FIRST MASTER. I want you to go and dress him up in his Sunday clothes and bring him to me. I have a surprise for him.

KECKLEY. Joe arrived in his Sunday clothes with a bright face. The poor little boy had no understanding of what was about to happen to him. Behind closed doors, Joe was placed on the scales and was sold like the hogs, at so much a pound. His father was not told of the transaction, but his suspicions were aroused.

COOK. Where are you taking my little boy? What's happening?

FIRST MASTER. I'm just taking Joe to town for a visit. I'll bring him back in the morning.

KECKLEY. But he never returned. My mother began to worry that I would be sold.

KECKLEY'S MOTHER. Lizzy, you're the only thing I have left on this earth. I can't let anyone take you away

from me. Listen to me. I have a plan. Master can't do without his fine clothing. Lizzy, I will teach you to sew. If you become a fine seamstress, Master will never sell you.

COOK. Lizzy, you knew my little boy. You and my Joe were friends. Please, Lizzy. Listen to your mother.

KECKLEY'S MOTHER. Promise me you will learn, Lizzy.

KECKLEY (*as a child*). I promise, Mother.

*(MUSIC 6a: TIME PASSED. FIRST MASTER enters, clears his throat, and the group disperses.)*

KECKLEY (*cont'd., as herself*). Time passed and I became a young woman. For four years, a white man—I spare the world his name—had base designs upon me.

*(She is shadowed menacingly by MALE OPPRESSOR, who looks her up and down.)*

I do not care to dwell upon this subject, for it is one fraught with pain. Suffice it to say that he persecuted me for four years, and I became a mother. The child of which he was the father, my son George, was the only child that I ever brought into the world.

The years passed, and my new master moved to St. Louis. *(MUSIC 6b: ST. LOUIS/CALL OF DUTY - SOUTH)* There I was hired out to others as a seamstress to bring in extra money. Soon I had a large and extensive clientele that included some of the finest la-

dies in the city. Still I could not stop thinking of one thing: Freedom!

*(KECKLEY goes downstage and NARRATOR steps forward.)*

NARRATOR. While Keckley dreamed of her freedom, men across the South were answering the call of duty. Theo Perry, a young lawyer from the little town of Marshall, Texas, volunteered for service, but he deeply longed for home.