

The Civil War brought change and destruction to Chatham. The House, in 1862, owned by James Horace Lacey (1823-1906), a former schoolteacher who had married Churchill Jones's niece. As a plantation owner and slaveholder, Lacey sympathized with the South, and at the age of 37 he left Chatham to serve the Confederacy as a staff officer. His wife and children remained at the house until the spring of 1862, when the arrival of Union troops forced them to abandon the building and move in with relatives across the river in the beleaguered city of Fredericksburg. For much of the next thirteen months, Chatham would be occupied by the Union army who would refer to the mansion as the "Lacey House" in their orders and reports as well as diaries and letters.

Northern officers initially utilized the building as a headquarters. In April 1862, General Irvin McDowell brought 30,000 men to Fredericksburg. From his Chatham headquarters, the general supervised the repair of the Richmond, Fredericksburg and Potomac Railroad and the construction of several bridges across the Rappahannock River. Once that work was complete, McDowell planned to march south and join forces with the Army of the Potomac outside of Richmond.

President Abraham Lincoln journeyed to Fredericksburg to confer with McDowell about the movement, meeting with the general and his staff at Chatham. His visit gave Chatham the distinction of being one of three houses visited by both Lincoln and Washington (the other two are Mount Vernon and Berkeley Plantation).

Seven months after Lincoln's visit, fighting erupted at Fredericksburg itself. In November 1862, General Ambrose E. Burnside brought the 120,000-man Army of the Potomac to Fredericksburg. Using pontoon bridges, Burnside crossed the Rappahannock River below Chatham, seized Fredericksburg, and launched a series of bloody assaults against Lee's Confederates, who held the high ground behind the town. One of Burnside's top generals, Edwin Sumner, observed the battle from Chatham, while Union artillery batteries shelled the Confederates from adjacent bluffs.

Fredericksburg was a disastrous Union defeat. Burnside suffered 12,600 casualties in the battle, many of whom were brought back to Chatham for care. For several days, army surgeons operated on hundreds of soldiers inside the house. Assisting them were volunteers, including poet Walt Whitman and Clara Barton, who later founded the American chapter of the International Red Cross.



The Chatham or "Lacey House"



Made by T. H. O'Sullivan
Dec 1862

c1865 by A. Gardner