Wheeler, Junius Brutus

by T. C. Parramore, 1996

21 Feb. 1830–15 July 1886


Junius Brutus Wheeler, army officer, textbook author, and professor, was the son of John and Sarah Clifton Wheeler. He was a native of Murfreesboro, where his father was for many years a prosperous merchant and shipowner. After enlisting as a private in the Twelfth Infantry Regiment in May 1847, Wheeler served gallantly in the Mexican War and "was appointed Lieut. by the President for bravery in the field" during the same year. Discharged from the service in 1848, he gained appointment to the military academy at West Point in July 1851 determined, as he told his family, to graduate "with distinction" or "leave his brains there." The former he accomplished in 1855 and was breveted second lieutenant of cavalry that July. An outstanding engineer, he was transferred to the Topographical Engineers in 1856 and promoted to first lieutenant in 1860.

The secession crisis of 1861 tore apart the Wheeler family, leaving Junius's half brother Samuel a major in the Confederate army and his half brother John Hill Wheeler a Disunionist. In a letter to his cousin John W. Moore in North Carolina in February 1861, Lieutenant Wheeler regretted the election of Abraham Lincoln as a minority president but held firm in the belief that the outcome was legitimate and concluded with the declaration: "I am a Union man." He served throughout the Civil War with the Corps of Engineers, where he was promoted to captain in 1863 and breveted major in April 1864 for gallant and meritorious service at the Battle of Jenkins's Ferry in Arkansas. He was breveted lieutenant colonel and colonel in March 1865 and promoted to major in 1866. In September 1871 Wheeler was appointed professor of civil and military engineering at West Point. Over the next thirteen years he published a series of textbooks on military topics, including An Elementary Course of Civil Engineering (1874), Elements of Field Fortifications (1880), A Course of Instruction in the Elements of the Art and Science of War (1878), and A Textbook of Military Engineering (1884). He was retired with the pay of colonel in 1884 and died two years later.

In Washington, D.C., in September 1855 Wheeler married Emily Truxton Beale. They had eight children: Emily Beale,
Sarah Clifton, Mary Eliza, Gertrude, Julia, Amy, John, and William Mackall.

References:

William H. Powell, comp., *List of Officers of the Army of the United States from 1779 to 1900*. [14]


Wheeler family manuscripts (copy in possession of T. C. Parramore).

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Origin - location:

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