

National Patriotic Instruction
Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War

April 2025


GRAND ILLUMINATIONS

During and after the Civil War, "illuminations" referred to public displays of light, often involving fireworks and window-lighting, to celebrate victories, political events, or to commemorate the war. These illuminations were a form of mass celebration and a way to express national unity and pride, particularly in the aftermath of the war.

In recognition of this month's 160th anniversary of the end of the Civil War, and to help us better understand the joyful and celebratory fervor that permeated the Union after four long years of strife, here are some contemporary accounts of illuminations that took place across the country, in cities both large and small:

Smyrna Times, Smyrna, Delaware
Vol. X, No. 44, p. 2, col. 1 — April 13, 1865

VICTORY!



ILLUMINATION!

RICHMOND!

Surrender of Lee!

Peace the Prize of War

A Grand Illumination in celebration of the recent victories of the Union arms, will take place in this town to-morrow evening, the 13th inst. The friends of the Union, and all who love the brave and indefatigable soldiers of the Republic who have conquered a permanent peace, will join in the illumination.

Addresses may be expected by Col. EDWIN WILMER, Hon. N. B. SMITHERS, JACOB MOORE Esq., and others.

The speaking will be interspersed with excellent vocal and instrumental music.

Let the illumination be general.

The Kansas Patriot, Burlington, Kansas
Vol. 1, No. 30, p. 3, col. 1 — April 15, 1865

Grand Illumination!

Last evening, many of the citizens of Burlington illuminated their buildings in honor of the recent resplendent victories of the Union armies.—The Wakling Brothers had the Masonic Hall illuminated beautifully. In one of the windows the word "Sumter" was displayed in large and conspicuous letters. The PATRIOT building appeared in a blaze of glory; both stories of the building, in which is the Drug Store, shone in great splendor, and the law office of Silas Fearl, Esq., Dr. Manson's office, Mr. Watrous' grocery store, the residence of Esq. Metcalf, and P. W. Lamb's Harness shop, were all brilliantly illuminated. The whole affair reflected great credit upon the patriotism and liberality of our citizens. It was the first of the kind that was ever witnessed here.

Rutland Weekly Herald, Rutland, Vermont
Vol. 71, No. 14, p. 4, col. 1 — April 6, 1865

THE COUNTRY ABLAZE.—The whole country was fairly ablaze on Monday evening over the news of Richmond's fall. Illuminations, flag raisings, gun firings and every other conceivable mode of giving expression to the public joy and gratitude, were the order in every loyal city and village throughout the length and breadth of the land, to which the telegraph could convey the glad tidings of the nation's sure deliverance.

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Illuminations also took place in the western states and even in the vanquished South!

Wilmington Journal, Wilmington, California
Vol. 1, No. 21, p. 2, col. 2 — April 8, 1865

Some of the citizens were not to be satisfied with the salute given at the Barracks; so they secured two anvils and a quantity of powder and blazed away until long after mid-night. The streets of the place never presented a more cheerful appearance, flaming bon-fires, brilliant illuminations, the firing of crackers and the noise of burning powder, with the shouting and singing, made it seem as if Fourth of July had come before its time. These rejoicings were kept up until early in the morning; and when the sun rose, the amount of fuel, powder and liquor in the place was far less than when it set the previous day. The demonstration passed off without any accident; and every resident of Wilmington will long remember the celebration of the capture of Richmond.

The soldiers who started for Arizona on last Tuesday, received the news in the evening, and they also had a joyful time.

Note: The "Barracks" referred to are the Drum Barracks in Los Angeles County, which still exist and now operate as a Civil War Museum.

The Black Republican, New Orleans, Louisiana
Vol. 1, No. 2, p. 2, col. 3 — April 22, 1865

ILLUMINATION OF NEW ORLEANS.

On Saturday evening last, the 15th inst., the city of New Orleans took the first rank in the South in honor of the late Union victories.

THE SANITARY COMMISSION,
corner Carondelet and Common streets, blazed with 150 candles, placed in order from top to bottom, above them one large U. S. flag floating the breeze.

DR. DOSTIE'S OFFICE,
No. 17 St. Charles street, held out 100 transparencies of National colors, three large National flags, one large star, twelve feet in circumference, with fifty-two little gas-burners set in order, all of which were cunningly attached to the gallery of the second story. Above the star hung an American vase decorated with National colors and silver stars.

CUSTOM-HOUSE.
This building was decorated with 1613 burning candles and a large number of American flags.

PARK HOTEL.
The Park Hotel held out a challenge to Lafayette Square with 300 candles, and American flags flying, with U. S. soldiers on guard beneath the balconies.

HON. THOS. J. DURANT'S
mansion held the south-side of Canal street displayed the American coat-of-arms, surrounded by a vast number of transparencies of National colors, and a splendid bust of the Chief Magistrate.

The Weekly Union Record, Oroville, California
Vol. 12, No. 24, p. 3, col. 2 — April 15, 1865

THE fall of Richmond and the surrender of Lee were appropriately celebrated at Sacramento, April 12th—the anniversary of the rebel attack on Sumter. A procession of the military and firemen, a salute, and an illumination, with the ringing of bells, were features of the occasion. A similar celebration occurred at Portland, Oregon, on the same day.

May we always be mindful of the hardships and sacrifices that our ancestors endured, which lead to such widespread expressions of jubilation 160 years ago!

Numquam obliviscaris!

In Fraternity, Charity, and Loyalty,
Tad D. Campbell, PCinC
National Patriotic Instructor