

Mississippi Musicians: The Stone Brothers of Natchez

by Nancy Dearing Rossbacher

*Joseph Newman Stone
(half-plate ambrotype)*



When I embarked on researching two men named J.N. Stone and Charles Stone, presumably brothers, all I knew was that they'd served as musicians for the Confederacy in the Civil War.

There was no reason to expect that I'd find anything more than two siblings who marched off to war, played some tunes, and marched back home. Although it's certain that no one's war experiences were that prosaic, I wondered if our scheduled cover story, featuring the brothers' ambrotypes and a uniform coat, might be accompanied only by two paragraphs of stretched-out, belabored text.

Instead, the research netted me two trips to Paris (if only virtual ones), a stay (if only imaginary) at a historic B&B in Natchez, Mississippi, and delightful visits (if only on the telephone and by e-mail) with two great-grandchildren of one of the Stone veterans.

The family Stone was, I discovered, not only large but well traveled, well connected, well educated, and musically gifted. They were elite but far from effete: Five of the Stone brothers

*Charles G. Stone
(half-plate ambrotype)*





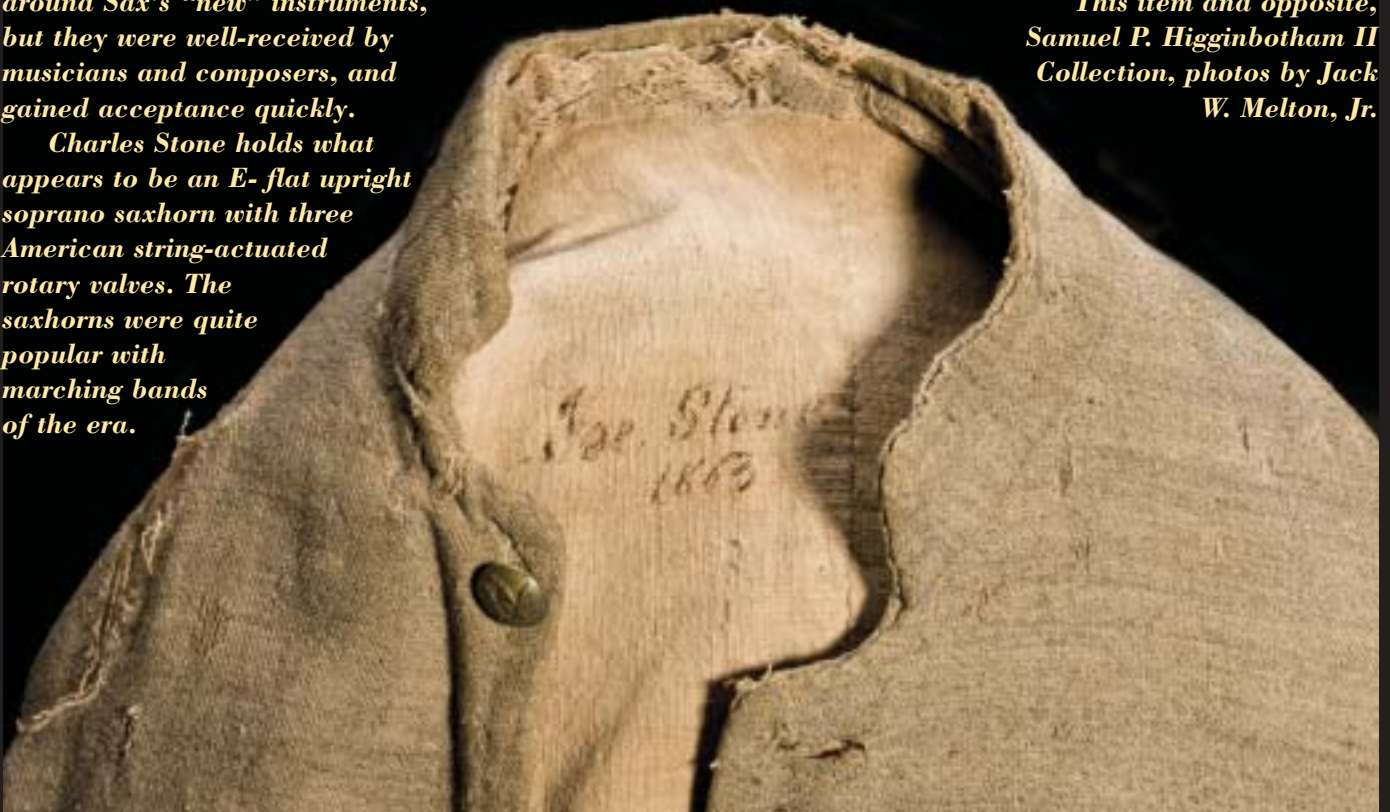
An 1881 photograph of the extended family of Joseph Newman Stone. Standing on the gallery, left to right, are Ruth Britton (daughter of Capt. William A. Britton II and sister of Joseph's wife Theodora Britton); Mary Giddings (Newman) Stone, wife of Dr. Charles Henry Stone and mother of Joseph Newman Stone; and Sallie Montgomery (cook). On the steps are Anna Mary Stone and Ruth Britton Stone, daughters of Joseph Newman Stone, and their mother, Theodora (Britton) Stone with son Joseph Newman Stone II in her lap. Standing in the yard are two unidentified domestic employees, Joseph Newman Stone standing behind a white horse called Old Tom, atop which sits little Charles Henry Stone II, with Stone employee Bartlett Harding holding Old Tom. Courtesy descendant Joseph Britton Stone.

Opposite, Joseph Stone with what appears to be a B-flat upright soprano saxhorn with three berliner piston valves. The saxophones were still in their infancy, having been created by Belgian instrument maker Adolphe Sax in Paris a scant 20 years before the Civil War. Controversy swirled around Sax's "new" instruments, but they were well-received by musicians and composers, and gained acceptance quickly.

Charles Stone holds what appears to be an E-flat upright soprano saxhorn with three American string-actuated rotary valves. The saxhorns were quite popular with marching bands of the era.

Below, closeup of "Joe Stone 1863" inked into the interior of the jacket featured on the front cover.

This item and opposite, Samuel P. Higginbotham II Collection, photos by Jack W. Melton, Jr.





The family of Joseph Stone's wife was acquainted with the Confederacy's only First Lady, Varina Davis, shown above and with family below. Mrs. Davis was herself a native of Natchez.

served in the Civil War, and none appear to have survived the war unscathed.

When it came to sacrifice for the fledgling Confederacy, the Stone family of Natchez was unstinting.

The family patriarch had an unlikely background for a man whose five eldest sons marched off to defend the South: He was from New Jersey. Northern native Dr. Charles Henry Stone removed to Natchez and in 1833 married Mary Giddings Newman, a granddaughter of Samuel Brooks, first mayor of Natchez.

Prewar records show the offspring of the prosperous family numbering nine—three daughters and six sons, one of whom was a medical doctor and another training to be one when the war intervened.

Paterfamilias Dr. C.H. Stone did not live to see the conclusion of the long and costly struggle between his native and adopted lands. He passed away in 1864.

When war erupted, three of his sons wasted no time in casting their lot with the Confederacy. Joseph Newman Stone, Charles G. Stone, and Garnett Stone joined Company G, 1st Confederate Infantry—Joseph and Charles in April 1861 and Garnett two months later.

Garnett was discharged the following September, but went on to fight with Company B, 10th Mississippi, “the Natchez Southrons,” from which he was discharged for disability. There is also a record of a “Garnet” Stone serving with the 36th Georgia, which would jibe with the



Stone family lore that Garnett, when discharged from any unit for disability, just reenlisted with another unit. The story has it that he eventually landed a desk job in the service, enabling him to contribute without testing the limits of his physical challenges. Family historian Dorothy “Dot” Stone Green related by e-mail:

Then one day his former commander who had discharged him for the disability came into this office and saw Garnett there. He told those in charge that it was against military rules to accept a soldier who had been discharged for a disability in the army to another post in the administrative part of the army. Garnett found it hard to accept and he finally came home, but I do not know whether it was before the war ended or after.

Joseph and Charles remained in the 1st Confederate Infantry for a full year, during which time Charles penned a letter to his father that implied the war was an amusing adventure. The playful missive was transcribed in *They Found It in Natchez* (Pelican, 1939), coauthored by descendant Theodora Britton Marshall.

Camp Chalmers
Dec. 12th, 1861

Dear Father:

Joe and I are still nursing the even tenor of our

ONE FAMILY’S SOUTHERN SERVICE

Dr. Henry Stone, CSN

b. 1837

Assistant surgeon aboard the CSS *Tuscaloosa*
Surgeon, Confederate Medical Staff

Musician Joseph Newman Stone, CSA

b. 1838

1st Confederate Infantry, 32nd Alabama, and
Buck’s Mississippi Cavalry

Musician Charles G. Stone, CSA

b. 1841

1st Confederate Infantry, 32nd Alabama, and
Buck’s Mississippi Cavalry

Pvt. Garnett Stone, CSA

b. 1844

1st Confederate Infantry and 10th Mississippi Infantry

Musician Nolan Stone, CS Engineers

b. 1846

1st Confederate Engineers



Courtesy Joseph Britton Stone

Little Charles Henry Stone, son of Confederate veteran Joseph Newman Stone, died in childhood.

ways, enjoying good health and fine spirits, and relying upon Providence for a renewal of hostilities here, in which case we anticipate more fun. Don’t laugh when I call it fun, for this kind of scientific fighting is nothing in the world but fun. ’Tis for all the world like rolling tenpins. True enough it is sometimes attended with unpleasant consequences, but that only makes it the more interesting ...

[Some new Mississippi regiments arrived and when they were] shown around, you would have died laughing, at the ridiculous observations they made. In one of the beds there were a number of large white bags filled with sand, which for the sake of amusement one of the boys informed them were filled with powder.

They immediately made tracks for home in the greatest astonishment at the extreme want of respect we showed such combustible materials,



Music is writ large in the history of the Stone family of Natchez. At top left is a rosewood piano of Antoine Bard, Paris, 1856. It resides, along with a 1903 Steinway grand piano, in the Stone House's music room.

Above is an Edgar Degas painting titled "The Rehearsal of a Song." Some art historians believe the distraught woman on the left to represent Lucy Stone's sister-in-law Estelle, widow of a Confederate officer and subsequently wife of Edgar's brother René. At center of the painting is reportedly America Olivier, with whom René Degas, seated at the grand piano, trysted—and took off.

At center left is a circa 1840 portrait of family patriarch Dr. Charles Henry Stone, which hangs in the dining room at the Stone House.

Joseph Stone's house, purchased in 1877 and converted from a billiard hall to a residence, remains in family hands more than 130 years later. The property, shown at left as it appears today as a B&B, is on the National Register of Historic Places.

All images this page courtesy Joseph Britton Stone except Degas painting, Dumbarton Oaks Research Library, Washington, D.C.





Full view and detail views of the buttons, the pocket, and the inscription on the CS Depot jacket of Joseph Newman Stone. Courtesy Samuel P. Higginbotham II Collection, photos by Jack W. Melton, Jr.





A circa 1840 Mallard rosewood and bird's-eye maple secretary-bookcase at the Stone House in Natchez. The family heirloom has passed down through the Stone family.

recuperated and returned to his unit through the end of 1864.

Archival records indicate that both men also served with Buck's Company of Mississippi Cavalry, for which Joseph was a bugler and Charles most certainly also a musician, before their lengthy service came to a conclusion.

Eldest brother Henry, a physician like his father, became an assistant surgeon with the Confederate States Navy in February 1863 and served aboard the ironclad CSS *Tuscaloosa*, which was launched at Selma, Alabama, that month. The ship was designed as a 152'-long floating battery that boasted 4" iron plating and was armed with a 6¼" rifle and three 32-pdrs. She scudded around the Mobile waters until the city fell in April 1865 and the Rebels scuttled her.

Dr. Henry Stone was no longer aboard by that time, having resigned in the autumn of 1863. He went on to serve as a full-fledged surgeon with the Confederate Medical Staff, and according to Stone family records, spent some of the time in Tennessee and Georgia. An erudite, poetic letter he wrote from Kennesaw Mountain to home in 1864 appears in *They Found It in Natchez*:

Battlefield near Marietta, Ga.

Tuesday, June 27th, 1864

Dear Mother:

Yesterday about 10 o'clock the enemy charged our line of works 200 yards in advance of the place I now occupy and advanced until they had gained their summit, in one place having succeeded in planting their colors. They were repulsed with great loss in killed and wounded and lost a good many prisoners. ...

I have been many times where shot and shell and messengers of death generally come playing sad havoc with human life, and have never yet been able to discover that such a work of slaughter and butchery could be justly called beautiful. I recognize beauty at every step in the creations of the Good God, in the solitary wildflower that lifts its graceful head beside the gnarled and gigantic oak; in the summer sunset, and in the passing cloud, and wonder by what strange misapplication of terms that should be called beautiful which is the handicraft of the archfiend of evil. ...

My dear home constantly presents itself to my view as the mirage to the traveller worn down

by laying it around so loose. ...

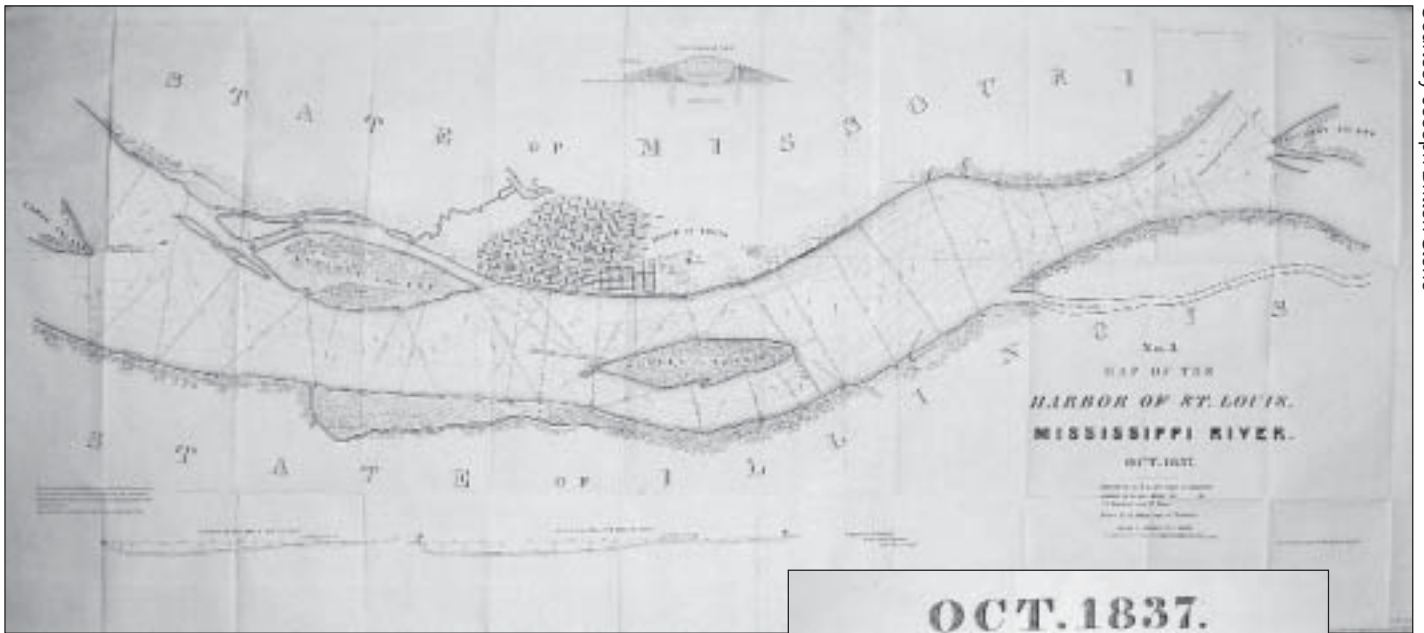
Yesterday I received a letter from Ma but I don't remember the last time I heard from you. Indeed I think I have been neglected of late. Only give me letter for letter and I will be satisfied. Ma must think her letters are tiresome, and tell her she can never write too long.

Your affect. Son
Chas. Stone

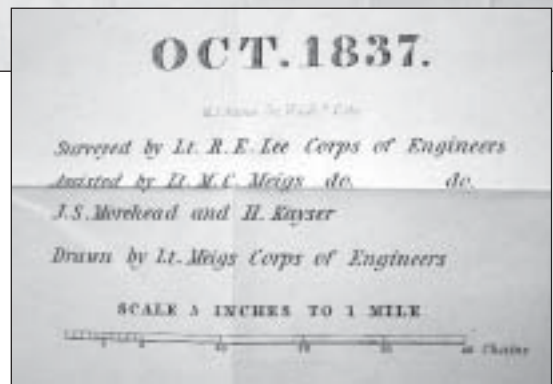
When their service with the 1st Confederate Infantry came to a close, Joseph and Charles moved on to service with the 32nd Alabama. The brothers contributed their musical talents to the Cause, for Joseph served as a regimental musician and Charles as chief musician.

So in demand were Charles's accomplishments that in 1863 he was detailed as a musician for the 6th and 9th Tennessee.

Joseph appears to have been the first in the family to fall victim to the weapons of war. From September to November of 1863 he was at Ross Hospital in Mobile, recovering from a gunshot wound—perhaps as a result of actions relative to the Chickamauga Campaign. He



The Stone brothers had two uncles, William James Stone and Henry Stone, who became noted engravers in Washington, D.C. Descendant Joseph Britton Stone, a collector of antique maps, has three large lithographed maps that were “engraved” by W.J. Stone, and all three of the maps were surveyed by then-Lt. Robert E. Lee, Corps of Engineers, in 1837. In the closeup at right, Stone’s name appears just above Lee’s.



Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division

by toil and suffering. I can see you plainly, painfully so, with sadness and resignation looking wistfully to the afar off battlefields where your four soldier sons are battling for the right determined to be free. ...

Oh, if that time would only roll round soon and today or tomorrow bring with it a termination of these bloody hostilities. We are so weary of the continued strife and nomadic comfortless life. We do not complain, however, of the want of comforts, but only of the separation from those we love so well.

Henry Stone

As Henry’s letter refers to his mother having “four soldier sons,” perhaps he thought that Garnett was no longer in uniform.

Or perhaps he was unaware that a fifth Stone brother, young Nolan, had joined up.

[cont. on p. 60]

The core of the Stone House was built circa 1850 by David Stanton, brother of Frederick Stanton, builder of famous Stanton Hall in Natchez. Palatial Stanton Hall, seen at left in an undated photograph, is today a popular spot for weddings and receptions.



This photograph of a fully rigged-out Joseph Newman Stone likely dates to his initial enlistment.

Washington & Lee University after college president Lee's death.)

Henry wrote:

I am particularly anxious to place my brother under your charge and his own desire to complete his education in the State of Va and under your supervision only equaled by my own—Of six brothers of us, four were educated in that state and five lived there—in fact we claim to be Virginians.

He continued his persuasive request:

My brother is at present a cadet of the La Mil Inst [Louisiana Military Institute, precursor to Louisiana State University] at Alexandria and would furnish good testimonials from that Seminary. He is a noble boy, Sir, and will reflect credit upon any Institution.

Clarence's future, however, was not as bright as hoped. A check of the Washington & Lee alumni records showed that Clarence never matriculated there. In 1870 he was still in Natchez, working as a clerk on a plantation. The 1880 census found him boarding in a house in Oden, Arkansas, currently unemployed and having worked only four months of the previous 12.

He died, date unknown, a single man in northern Mississippi, his once hopeful future having failed to reach fruition.

Eldest brother Dr. Henry Stone's postwar years were spent at various points in the South, and he passed away in May 1887 in Hot Springs, Arkansas. There are no known offspring from his marriage.

Charles, a chief musician during the war and a highly proficient violinist, continued to offer his talents to the listening public. Dorothy Stone Green, a great-grandchild of Joseph, notes that Charles was trained in London, Leipzig, and Paris (my first theoretical trip to the City of Lights during the research). Her work on the family also unearthed a Natchez newspaper clipping saved by an ancestor that told of Charles giving a concert in Paris in 1868. He had, the article stated, also played for "the crowned heads of Europe."

Charles did not spend all of his postwar life in Europe, however. I found a mention in a history of Houston, Texas, in the Reconstruction years: "The social amenities, however, were not neglected. Violinist Charles Stone gave a concert, and the road company of 'East Lynne' enjoyed a sellout."

It is believed that while in Paris, Charles met and

["Stone Brothers," cont. from p. 45]

Nolan, a new cadet at Virginia Military Institute, enlisted in Orange County, Virginia, as a musician with Company B, 1st Confederate Engineers, in April 1864. He had only been at the school for three months. (Quite coincidentally, the collector whose Stone family effects are shown on the front cover is himself a graduate of VMI and lives in Orange. The VMI and Orange connections were entirely unknown until this research brought them to light.)

Nolan was appointed corporal in June 1864, but by the following September was in a hospital in Richmond. The nature of the disease or injury for that and a subsequent hospital stay in February 1865 are unknown but appear to have been lingering. He survived to be paroled at Appomattox, but is reported to have died from the effects of unspecified war wounds in January 1867—the year he would have been graduated from VMI, had not a war intervened.

In the postwar years, some of the Stones appear to have prospered. Others, like young Nolan, were less fortunate.

In 1866, Dr. Henry Stone, veteran of the CSS *Tuscaloosa*, wrote to Robert E. Lee inquiring about possible placement at Washington College for the family's youngest brother, 17-year-old Clarence, the only noncombatant of the Stone brothers. (Washington College became

married a widow from South Carolina, but the union produced no children.

Garnett, who was discharged for disability during the war and was, according to Dorothy Stone Green, likely asthmatic, apparently continued to suffer ill health. Postwar records on him are scant, but family lore indicates that the childless Garnett passed away while visiting cousins in Natchez.

Of the brothers, Joseph Newman Stone seems to have flourished the most in the postwar years. He married New York-born Theodora Britton, daughter of sea captain William A. Britton. The Britton family was prominent; in fact, personal correspondence between Theodora's aunt, Eliza Britton, and Varina Davis survives in the collections of Louisiana State University.

Not that Joseph Stone's family couldn't do some serious name-dropping had they wanted to. Lucy Stone, an elder sister of the Stone brothers, married William Suggs Balfour of the opulent Mississippi plantation "Homewood." His brother, Joseph Davis Balfour, served under Gen. Van Dorn's command, and died at the Battle of Corinth in 1862. Widow Estelle Balfour, having absented herself to Paris, subsequently fell in love with her first cousin: Jean Baptiste René Degas, younger brother of impressionist Edgar Degas, who captured Estelle in several haunting paintings and drawings.

We interrupt this article for a tragic scandal. The artwork of Estelle may be haunting because she was heartbroken.

After the war, Estelle and René relocated to New Orleans, where they married against the wishes of her family and, as first cousins, unrecognized by the Catholic Church. René then succumbed to the charms of a married woman named America Olivier, who read to the increasingly vision-impaired Estelle. René abandoned Estelle, their five children, and her daughter by Balfour. According to some sources, René then embarked on a bigamous marriage with Mrs. Olivier in Ohio.

Some art historians believe Edgar Degas, a visitor at his brother's New Orleans home, was aware of the intrigue before Estelle was. One of his paintings of the period shows a tension-filled tableau that may represent René caught between the two women.

Estelle died in 1909, blind, widowed, abandoned, and having outlived four of her six children—but immortalized, in all her grave solemnity, by Edgar Degas.

Back to the Joseph Stone story. In 1877 Joseph purchased a property built in 1850 as a resplendent private billiard hall, and he and Theodora revamped it into a home for their growing family.

Today the property is not only on the National Register of Historic Places, it is still in the hands of direct

descendants. Great-grandson Joseph Britton Stone undertook its renovation in 1999 with such attention to detail that it was awarded the Historic Natchez Foundation's Restoration Award in 2003.

That same year, he opened the antebellum home to visitors as a B&B offering antiques-filled rooms and a full Southern breakfast. The Joseph Stone House even has a billiard room, an appropriate nod to the time when the entire house was given over to that pastime.

The Joseph Stone House B&B rates? I was astonished to find them in the same general vicinity of those of countless cookie-cutter motel rooms with bolted-down TVs, yawny framed prints, and walls that are eggshell in both tint and thickness.

If I ever get to Natchez, I'm moving in at the Joseph Stone House.

It's not unusual when researching an identified Civil War artifact to find that the onetime owner had brothers or cousins who also served, thereby enriching the piece with additional history. But to find five brothers who cast their lot with the Confederacy is out of the ordinary. Even more uncommon is for three of them to have served as musicians in several different units.

In light of that, one more amenity at the Joseph Stone House merits mention. There is a music room with complimentary wine and a classical piano concert in the evenings. The pianist is none other than regimental musician Joseph Newman Stone's great-grandson, who has played at Carnegie Hall—living proof that musical talent is genetic. Apparently it hasn't watered down in the years since great-grandfather Joseph Newman Stone and great-granduncle Charles G. Stone played for their Confederate brethren.

The band plays on.

NSTCW

With thanks to Joseph Britton Stone of Natchez, Mississippi, for additional family information and the use of numerous photographs of family heirlooms. The Stone House B&B is located at 804 Washington Street, Natchez, MS 39120, (601) 445-7466, www.josephstonehouse.com.

Warm thanks are also extended to Dorothy Stone Green of Atlanta, Georgia, for her generous sharing of Stone family history, images, and anecdotal accounts.

We thank Samuel P. Higginbotham II for sharing with our readership the uniform coat of Joseph Newman Stone and the wartime ambrotypes of Joseph and Charles. We are also grateful to Chris Nelson for input about the brothers' musical instruments.

The author, an inveterate research junkie who is also managing editor of NSTCW, specializes in reconnecting identified military artifacts with the histories of their onetime owners. Her website is ndearing.com.