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ROBERT E. LEE

The following speech on Robert E. Lee was delivered before the Louisville Kiwanis Club on Friday night January 20th, by Supt. W. R. Mills, of the Mills High School.

"Robert E. Lee is a fit topic for a Kiwanis Club to consider. Especially is this true in this time when men who have acquired a surpassing measure of physical skill can earn a fortune in one evening, and the news papers the following morning will print page after page giving the details of the bloody spectacle. Robert E. Lee is a fit subject for our consideration at a time when we are so given to worship of the unusual, to glorifying the speculator.

"General Lee was born of distinguished ancestry; on the father's side he could trace an unbroken line back to the Battle of Hastings in the year 1066; another of his forebearers went with Richard the Lionhearted on the third crusade, and was wounded at the siege of Acre and was created the first Earl of Litchfield as a reward for his services. Another of his ancestors won fame and fortune in the service of Queen Elizabeth. His first ancestor to come to Virginia was Henry Lee who settled in the county of Westmoreland—the county that was the ancestral home of Gen. Washington. He was a member of the Virginia Council and served under Sir William Berkeley as Secretary of the Virginia Council. Robert E. Lee's father was 'Light Horse' Harry Lee, of Revolutionary fame. On his mother's side Robert E. Lee was descended from rich and influential family. His mother was Anne Hill Carter, the daughter of Carter of Shirley.

"Robert E. Lee was born at Stratford in Westmoreland county, Va., in 1807. His father died when he was eleven years old, and from that time to the time when he entered West Point he was the stay and counselor of his mother; she is reported to have said that Robert was husband, son and daughter to her. By this it must not be thought that young Lee was effeminate; he was far from it; he delighted in swimming, rowing, hunting and horseback riding—in short he was a strong, manly, red-blooded boy. But his fine courtesy and solicitude for his mother and younger sisters elicited from his mother the above tribute.

"Entering West Point at the age of eighteen, he went through the entire four years without a single demerit or a single reprimand from the school authorities; he stood high in scholarship and showed such marked genius in military science that in his senior year he was made adjutant of the battalion—the highest honor in the gift of the college. He graduated second in a class of 46—a class remarkable for the number of men who afterward became eminent leaders in the army of the Confederacy and in the army of the United States.

"Immediately after graduation he was assigned to the engineering corps of the army. From that time till he resigned his commission in 1861 he gave individual attention to his military duties.

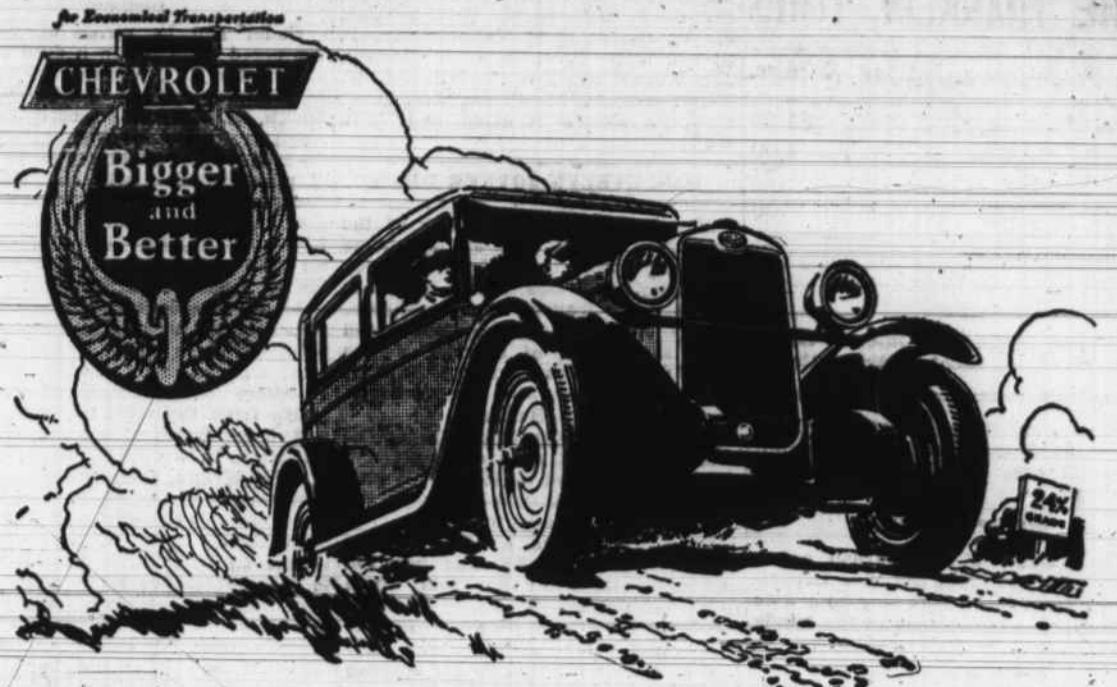
"In the Mexican war he saw active service and was promoted for his bravery and skill. So favorably did he impress his superiors in command that General Winfield Scott pronounced him the greatest military genius in America.

"General Lee was opposed to slavery and long before the Civil War had freed all of his negroes. He was opposed to secession in 1860, but believed firmly in the right of a state to secede from the Union. He could not be censured for his opinion; the book on the Constitution at West Point when Lee was a student specifically stated that the question of remaining a member of the Union was one for the people of each state to decide. It was further taught at West Point when Lee was a student that the Federal Government had no right to force a state to remain in the Union.

"When political passion was running high in 1860 Lee saw that secession would mean war, and he foresaw that war would mean untold suffering and hardships for the people of the country he loved. He counseled moderation, but when his native State, Virginia, threw in her fortunes with the Confederacy, Lee felt that there was only one course open to him; he promptly resigned his commission in the army, and when, a day or so later, he was offered the chief command of the army of the United States, he refused the command and in a letter to his old commander and comrade in arms, General Scott, Lee said that save in defense of his native state did he ever again wish to draw his sword.

"Immediately he was called into the service of Virginia and when the army of Virginia was transferred to the Confederacy, Lee went with it. From that time till the final curtain at Appomattox, the history of Robert E. Lee is the history of the Confederacy. Lee did not win renown early in the war; in fact, his first services were not successful and he was bitterly criticized for his failure to hold West Virginia against almost insurmountable difficulties. Because of his lack of success, he was transferred to the personal staff of the President of the Confederacy as a sort of military advisor. He remained in this capacity until the battle of Seven Pines; Gen. Joe Johnston was wounded and Lee was placed in command. From that hour his home was with the Army of Northern Virginia.

"Lee's rank as a soldier is secure. Among his comrades in arms, he was considered while in the field the peer of any man then living. As the passions of men have cooled and a clearer view has become possible, even his enemies have accorded him first place as a field marshal. Charles Francis Adams of Massachusetts said, 'It is my contention that Lee and his army never sustained defeat. They succumbed to exhaustion. Lee's place in military history is secure.' Theodore Roosevelt said, 'Lee will undoubtedly rank without any exception as the



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greatest captain the English speaking people have brought forth. In England Lee's fame was high; Col. Henderson of the British army who was much in the camp of Lee said, 'Lee stands out as one of the greatest soldiers of all times.'

"Time does not permit a consideration of Lee's battles and campaigns. Suffice it to say that he saw the fall of General after General placed in command of the Union army to crush him. For three years he baffled every attempt to take Richmond, and Richmond fell only when the army of Lee was exhausted.

"After the surrender Lee was placed in a trying situation; he was almost penniless; his magnificent home at Arlington had been confiscated by

the Federal Government, and his home at the White House on the Pamunkey river had been burned. He had not a roof over his head nor the means of earning a living for his family. In his seemingly helpless situation the manliness of the man shone with all its purest splendor. When offered by a big corporation, a handsome salary for the use of his name as head of the corporation, he replied that he knew nothing about the business. Upon being told that he would not be expected to know anything about the business, that his name was all that was wanted, the grand old hero said, 'My name is not for sale.' When his admirers in England offered him

(Continued on Page Six)

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