

Dr. Francis Tumblety's Two Year Sojourn in the Capital

Michael L. Hawley

On December 1, 1888, New York City lawyer Charles Dunham gave an interview to the *New York World* and stated he met Whitechapel murder suspect Francis Tumblety in Washington DC soon after the Civil War's First Battle of Bull Run, fought on July 21, 1861. He gave a damning account of personally witnessing Tumblety's collection of uterus specimens, the same organ that was taken from two of the Whitechapel fiend's victims:

He is not a doctor. A more arrant charlatan and quack never fattened on the hopes and fears of afflicted humanity. I first made the fellow's acquaintance a few days after the battle of Bull Run. Although a very young man at the time I held a colonel's commission in the army, and was at the capital on official business.... One day my lieutenant-colonel and myself accepted the 'doctor's' invitation to a late dinner--symposium, he called it--at his rooms. He had very cosy and tastefully arranged quarters in, I believe, H. street. There were three rooms on a floor, the rear one being his office, with a bedroom or two a story higher... Then he invited us into his office where he illustrated his lecture, so to speak. One side of this room was entirely occupied with cases, outwardly resembling wardrobes. When the doors were opened quite a museum was revealed--tiers of shelves with glass jars and cases, some round and others square, filled with all sorts of anatomical specimens. The 'doctor' placed on a table a dozen or more jars containing, as he said, the matrices of every class of women. Nearly a half of one of these cases was occupied exclusively with these specimens. [New York World, Dec 2, 1888]

It would later be revealed that Charles Dunham was a Civil War reptile journalist/ spy/agent provocateur, perfectly capable of lying to the press for ulterior reasons, even over two decades later in 1888. Tim Riordan, author of *Prince of Quacks: The Notorious Life of Dr. Francis Tumblety, Charlatan, and Jack the Ripper*

Suspect (2009), explained that Dunham never met Tumblety in the capital and he even got Tumblety's Washington DC residence wrong, Dunham claiming it was 'H. street':

The colonel claims to have met Tumblety in Washington a few days after the Battle of Bull Run. As the battle took place on July 21, 1861, there is a problem. At the time and probably until September, Tumblety was in New York, not Washington. He had just started a major advertising campaign in Harper's Weekly. This, along with other evidence from the last chapter, show he could not have had a residence in Washington at that time. Thus Dunham could not have met Tumblety then. Dunham's biographer reports that he was in Washington for brief periods in July, August and November 1861. Beyond that, his whereabouts are unknown.

In this interview, Dunham goes to elaborate lengths to describe Tumblety's office and rooms on H Street. Everyone else who knew Tumblety in Washington, as well as listings in the city directory and all of his advertising, reports that his office was at the corner of Pennsylvania Avenue and Seventh Street, nowhere near H Street. ...even after 25 years, no one would mistake Pennsylvania Avenue for H Street. The "Avenue" was the center of Washington life while H Street, in 1861, was a largely undeveloped residential neighborhood of small houses. Dunham made it appear that Tumblety had his office in one of these structures but the earlier description of the Washington Building give lie to that account.

Further, Tumblety claims that his residence was the Willard Hotel, not the space above his office. This is supported by the 1862 directory.

This has convinced many that Dunham certainly did lie to the reporter; therefore, he never saw Tumblety's collection of uterus specimens. The problem is, Riordan's research is incomplete, making it likely Dunham did see Tumblety at the capital AND that his residence was – at least for a certain time period - on H Street. Further, there was a significant reason why Tumblety would have preferred having his office on H Street at that very moment in time.

First, Riordan's statement gives the impression that the biographer of Dunham – Carman Cumming – stated Dunham was in the capital for ONLY three brief periods in

1861, but that was not his intentions. In *Devil's Game: The Civil War Intrigues of Charles A. Dunham* (2004), Cumming actually stated:

“He is known to have visited the capital at least three times in 1861 – in July, August, and November- and may have been there more often.”
[Author emphasis added]

Cumming himself admits Dunham was likely in the capital for more than just three brief periods, but was Tumblety even in Washington DC in 1861? In order to best answer this, we will separate Tumblety's early Civil War time in the capital into three periods: the year 1861, 1862, and 1863. The first period was from just after the First Battle of Bull Run when General McClellan took over command of the Army of the Potomac on July 21, 1861, to December 1861 when he travelled back to New York and stayed for well over a month. The second period was from March 1862 when he returned to the capital, then began his major full-column Washington DC advertising campaign from March to August 1862, when the Army left their camps for Manassas and fought in the Second Battle of Bull Run. The third period was when he returned from Fredericksburg, Maryland, in March 1863 up until he left for Philadelphia in May of 1863. In Tumblety's autobiographical pamphlets; the following from *Dr. Francis Tumblety: A Sketch of the Life of the Gifted, Eccentric and World-Famed Physician Francis Tumblety New York, 1889*, he states:

When General McClellan was appointed Commander of the Army of the Potomac I partially made up mind to tender my professional services as surgeon in one of the regiments... At this period I was furnished by General McClellan with passes to go and come where and when I pleased. I mixed with the officers of his staff, was cordially received-trusted... My sojourn in the city of Washington, which embraced a period of over two years... [Author emphasis added]

Francis Tumblety certainly was deceptive in his writings, but his lies were mainly directed towards his reputation as a successful Indian herb doctor and his interactions with prominent people. He was an incessant traveler, and the locations he claimed to

have been to and their dates are quite accurate, including his time in the capital. We know Tumblety's 'over two-year' sojourn ended with his departure in May 1863 to Philadelphia, because Tumblety ended the discussion in his by explaining how President Lincoln wrote a letter for him in June 1863:

*About this period I experienced a decline of health, which induced me to seriously contemplate a trip to Europe. In the meantime my relations with the President were of the most gratifying character, and, as I informed him of my projected trip, he kindly furnished me with letters, one of which was an introduction to that distinguished English nobleman, Lord John Russell: PRESIDENT LINCOLN'S LETTER. WASHINGTON, **June 12, 1863.** Dear Sir—The bearer of this, Francis Tumblety, M. D., an esteemed friend of mine, is about to visit London for the first time, and will consequently be a stranger in your metropolis. Any attention which you may extend to him will be greatly appreciated by, Your friend and humble servant, A. LINCOLN.[Author emphasis added]*

Tumblety's reference to a two year sojourn in Washington DC thus refers to the second half of 1861, March 1862 up to the August Second Battle of Bull Run, and his two months in March to May of 1863. Note during this sojourn, Tumblety frequently left the capital on business. This conflicts with an argument Riordan used to claim Tumblety must have been in New York until September 1861, because Tumblety paid for a major advertising campaign in the *Harper's Weekly*. This campaign actually went from July 13 to October 19, 1861, yet Tumblety paid for a concurrent advertising campaign in the *Baltimore Sun* from September 14 to September 23, demonstrating he being physically present was not a prerequisite. General McClellan standing up a major army at the capital was front page news, and it is logical to assume the ubiquitous Tumblety would exploit this business opportunity at the earliest moment and be where the action is. Baltimore was indeed between New York and Washington DC, making a train ride between all three locations a very logical and lucrative business decision.

Tumblety actually stated his sojourn was '*a period of OVER two years*'. Interestingly, there is evidence of a *two-plus* year sojourn. Joe Chetcuti reported on Casebook.org in 2003 that, "*Another researcher kindly shared a document with me which had Tumblety's attorney writing out a statement to a Board of Commissioners in*

DC. The statement declared that Tumblety's stay in Washington began on April 13, 1861 and ended May 15, 1863."

There is additional evidence that suggests Tumblety was indeed in Washington DC just after the First Battle of Bull Run at the end of July 1861, just as Dunham claimed. The following *St. Thomas Weekly Dispatch* article dated March 20, 1862, places Tumblety's arrival to the capital around August 1861:

DR. TUMBLETY IN TROUBLE AGAIN

*Dr. Tumblety, who has been cutting large figures **about Washington for the past six or eight months**, and who was reported at one time to holding the position of Senior Surgeon on the staff of General McClellan — an idea that was probably created by the superb air of distinguished importance that the fellow knows how to wear — has come to grief, it appears, and is having his pretentious charlatany exposed.[Author emphasis added]*

With respect to Dunham even meeting Tumblety, there is no question they were both in the capital in November 1861 based upon numerous corroborating sources.

In the *Cleveland Morning Leader*, November 18, 1861, Tumblety was reported to have been flourishing in the capital:

DR. TUMBLETY REDIVIDUS. The Buffalo Courier has it from good authority that the original Dr. Tumblety is flourishing about Washington with the original dog, as large as life and a good deal more natural. Also, that he had been attached to Gen. McClellan's Staff as a Surgeon. The first part of the story is correct, and the last is perhaps a good joke. The Dr., dressed in a sort of half military suit, with his great hound behind him, gallops up Pennsylvania avenue in a style that causes half the people in town who don't know better to mistake him for one of the foreign Princes. The Dr. is a living illustration of what small means, joined to faith, can accomplish.

In an interview with a *Chicago Daily Inter Ocean* newspaper reporter on Nov 20, 1888, William Pinkerton corroborates the report in the *Cleveland Morning Leader*, even his habit of galloping up and down Pennsylvania Avenue wearing a military-style uniform:

I'LL SHOW YOU, AND TRAIL HIM down, too, for you from that long ago, and then you can judge for yourself whether or not it is not the same man. I first knew that man – this Dr, Tumblety or Tumbledy or Twombly, (I think the last is it) – in Washington during the latter part of '61... He wore a sort of military dress. He made himself as conspicuous by his dress as he did by his immense coal-black mustache. He wore a military cap, a black velvet coat, and lavender colored pants... At that time my duties in Washington were connected with the secret service of the army, and my attention was naturally drawn to him a good deal by his military appearance. But had that not been the case I could not have failed to noticed him... In passing up and down Pennsylvania avenue, he was the most conspicuous figure on the street... [Author emphasis added]

Out of character for Tumblety was not having a major newspaper advertising campaign concurrent with him making a public spectacle of himself in the 1861 period of his sojourn. He certainly did advertise in April 1862 when he came back to the capital. The answer lies in what every one of his newspaper ads were promoting – his Indian Herb Doctor practice. Just after the First Battle of Bull Run in July 1861, Tumblety was promoting himself as a candidate for a surgical position under General McClellan. The reason why Dunham was invited to Tumblety's medical symposium/lecture was the same reason why he invited the crowd of officers under General McClellan's command. He was attempting to show he was a legitimate surgeon. Not having a real medical diploma, he did the next best thing; illustrate his lecture with anatomical specimens. In the nineteenth century, all surgeons had a personal anatomical collection. Doctor A.W. Bates, PhD, MD, at the Department of Histopathology in the Royal Free Hospital, London, England, states in his article, "*Indecent and Demoralising Representations*": *Public Anatomy Museums in Mid-Victorian England* (*Medical History*, V. 52 (1): 1-22, Jan 1, 2008):

Anatomy teachers assembled their own collections or “museums” of material with which to illustrate lectures.

Michael Sappol is the curator-historian at the National Library of Medicine, Bethesda, Maryland. In his dissertation, *“Morbid curiosity”: The Decline and Fall of the Popular Anatomical Museum (Common-Place, A Cabinet of Curiosities, Volume 4, Number 2, January 2004)*, he states:

Doctors were known to keep a few specimens or a cabinet of material on display in their offices as trophies and, more broadly, as objects that advertised a medical vocation (as did diplomas, weight medical tomes, medicines, and instruments).

Interestingly, after Tumblety left Washington in late spring 1863 and was forced out of Philadelphia by June 1863, he began his practice in Buffalo, New York, and even socialized with John Wilkes Booth. According to the *Buffalo Courier*, Tumblety gave medical lectures:

*One particular week that will ever remain notable in local history was in July, 1863. The city was celebrating the recent northern victories [Civil War].. [John Wilkes] Booth made a very singular acquaintance while in Buffalo. In fact quite an intimacy sprang up between him and a Dr. Tumblety – or Tumulty. He drove around selling cure-alls for everything; **giving lectures with Thespian emphasis.** [Author emphasis added]*

Finally, the following August 21, 1861, *Vanity Fair* article discovered by Howard Brown in 2012 shows Tumblety with images of anatomical specimens at his New York office in the very same year Dumham claimed to see the actual collection:

A CASE FOR THE POLICE – IF POSSIBLE

*...But if one quack is thus happily thwarted in his attempts to outrage decency and insult the public, why should another be quietly suffered to hang out his disgusting banners in our very midst? In a central part of Broadway – **we forget the exact Spot**, there are so many there to confuse the eye – the passers by are daily **outraged by the exhibition of certain anatomical pictures, which look as if they might once have formed part of the collection of a lunatic confined in a leper hospital...** He is generally accompanied by a large greyhound – a well-bred animal, but wearing a dejected look, as if ashamed of the company into which it has fallen. The man's name is **TUMBLETY...** [Author emphasis added]*

In the 1888 interview, Dunham claimed to have visited Tumblety's offices at "H-Street I believe," and Riordan stated that Tumblety was staying at the Willard Hotel – not on H-Street. He even claimed on the board that Tumblety was in the 1862 directory at Willard, while his newspaper ads state his offices were in the Washington Buildings. Riordan is mixing up Tumblety's 1861 period in the capital with his 1862 period. Tumblety's offices indeed were in the Washington buildings, and he may even have resided in the Willard Hotel, but at the time he was attempting to gain General McClellan's attention for the purpose of gaining a general's free pass, there is absolutely no evidence he resided in the Willard Hotel and had his offices in the Washington Buildings. This does not mean Tumblety never stayed at the Willard Hotel at any time in 1861, but Riordan's evidence used rejecting Tumblety residing on H Street was actually of his 1862 period.

Besides Dunham's comment that Tumblety's offices were on H Street, there is further evidence where Tumblety lived and practiced in the capital in 1861. Ontario's *St. Thomas Weekly Dispatch* reported on March 20, 1862:

*The Washington Republican, reporting the trial of the case, says:- "The Doctor stated that he had already been injured in his business, one of his patients (a lady) having ordered him to leave her house, and that he had been treat (sic) with **disrespect at his boarding house...** [Author emphasis added]*

The Willard Hotel was a high-end hotel and was likely not referred to as a boarding house. In both Washington DC newspapers, the *Evening Star* and the *National Republican*, every day from Monday, December 2, 1861 to the following Monday, December 9, the Canterbury Hall's ads published a comedy act titled, TUMBLETY OUTDONE. This was playing at a time Tumblety was not living in the Willard Hotel.

There is an excellent reason why Tumblety would have chosen to have his practice on H Street in 1861, as opposed to Pennsylvania Avenue. Even though Riordan referred to H Street as an "undeveloped residential neighborhood", the man Tumblety was attempting to gain his notice lived on H Street. Major General George B. McClellan. According to Civil War researcher John O' Brian, General McClellan frequently wrote to his wife, Ellen, in Cincinnati, Ohio, several times a week (<http://www.lincolninwashington.com/>). McClellan stated in his letter dated August 13, 1861:

"I am living in Com. Wilkes's house [on H Street], the northwest corner of Jackson (sic) Square, close by where you used to visit Secretary Marcy's family. It is a very nice house."

The Philadelphia Inquirer reported in his August 9, 1861, issue:

Gen. McClellan has taken for two months for himself and his staff, the handsome private dwelling to the eastward of Lafayette Square, of Commander Wilkes, of the Navy, and formerly occupied by Mrs. Madison. The business headquarters of the General will be on Pennsylvania Avenue, corner of Nineteenth street, as usual.

O'Brian also reported that on November 8, McClellan wrote to friend Sam Barlow, stating his new house, the former residence of Bayard Smith on H Street at 15th [now the site of the Sofitel Hotel] was ready to accommodate him.

Tumblety began his major newspaper campaign months later in mid-March 1862 and ended it at the onset of the Second Battle of Bull Run in August 1862. This ad campaign was classic Dr. Tumblety, the Indian herb doctor, and had nothing to do with his surgical experience. Tumblety swamped the Washington DC newspapers with the full-column ads, which included multiple testimonies of prominent Washington DC residents claiming cures from being under his herbal care, beginning with a testimony from a US capital official John A. Laird sworn to Washington Mayor William T. Dove dated March 14, 1862. Laird is quoted, *"I applied to Dr. Tumblety, the Indian Herb Doctor. My coughing, spitting blood, pain in chest, are all gone... As I experienced so much benefit from the use of Dr. Tumblety's medicines, I feel as though I could not say enough in their favor."*

Tumblety's large, full column ads in the Washington papers ended just before the second Battle of Bull Run, fought from August 28 to 30, 1862, suggesting he left when the Army left. In September and October 1862, Tumblety did place mail order ads in the Washington papers. In early March 1863, Tumblety announced his return to DC from Frederick, Maryland, the opposite direction of the location of the major battle. This time, Tumblety only stayed in the capital for just over two months. Interestingly, on the night of March 30, 1863, Tumblety and his 'colored servant' Rezin Alexander were robbed by two men. According to the *Evening Star*, April 1, 1863, the two men stole a ten and a five dollar Treasury note and fifty cents postal currency from Alexander and a flute and a revolver from Tumblety. Both men were immediately apprehended and jailed.

In May, Tumblety left and set up an office in Philadelphia, but left in the cover of darkness to Buffalo, New York, after the mayor issued an arrest warrant on July 1, 1863. The charge was perjury, since he lied in court. He claimed a Joseph Aspinwall stole his \$800 gold medal awarded to him by the citizens of Montreal. The Montreal authorities informed Philadelphia's police chief that they gave Tumblety no such award.

The time period in Francis Tumblety's two-plus year Washington DC sojourn, pertinent to the question of whether Charles Dunham had lied to the *New York World* reporter or not in 1888, can be narrowed down to the first period; just after the First Battle of Bull Run in late July 1861 up until December 1861. Both, Tumblety and Dunham were clearly in the capital during this time period, especially in November 1861. Tumblety making periodic business trips from New York to Baltimore and then to Washington DC between July and December 1861 makes business sense. The evidence used to counter Dunham's claim of Tumblety living on H Street is actually irrelevant, since it refers to Tumblety's second, 1862, time period, not his first. Tumblety did not

place a newspaper advertising campaign in the capital while he did so in Baltimore and New York, but this makes sense since his agenda was slightly different. In 1861, his Washington DC agenda was to promote his legitimacy as a surgeon to General McClellan and his staff and not his usual 'cure all' Indian herb doctor agenda. By 1862, though, his Washington DC agenda was indeed his Indian herb doctor business and he began his advertising campaign in the capital. In view of this, it makes sense that Tumblety would have chosen an office on H Street in 1861, since his target for attention was General McClellan, who lived on H Street. It also makes sense that at this very time, Tumblety would give a medical lecture – illustrated with anatomical specimens – to the General's officers, keeping in mind he performed lectures and possessed images of anatomical specimens in other cities, yet within the same Washington DC two year sojourn time period.