

OSCAR M. LIEBER

Born in Boston, Oscar Lieber was the oldest of Francis Lieber's three sons. The family moved to Columbia, South Carolina in 1835 when Dr. Lieber began his 21-year academic stint at South Carolina College, the present-day University of South Carolina. At age nine, Oscar joined relatives in Hamburg, Germany, where he attended private schools for six years. On returning to South Carolina, he assisted the state geologist Michael Tuomey with a geological and agricultural survey of the state. In 1847 he departed again for Germany where he remained for three years, studying theoretical mathematics and chemistry at the universities in Berlin and Göttingen and practical metallurgy and mining at the School of Mines in Freiberg, Saxony. While a student in Germany, he supported the abortive democratic revolutions there, participating for some days in street actions in Berlin and Dresden.

During the 1850s, Oscar Lieber worked as a geologist. He assisted the state geologist of Mississippi, and engaged in a geological survey of Alabama. In 1855, the South Carolina legislature authorized a new four-year geological survey of the state and elected Lieber "Geological, Mineralogical and Agricultural Surveyor." In that office, he published four annual reports devoted chiefly to characterizing potential mining areas in the state. In 1860 Lieber served as geologist for the two-month U.S. Coast Guard Geodetic Survey expedition to Labrador to observe a solar eclipse.

After South Carolina seceded from the United States in December 1860, Oscar quickly enlisted in the Confederate army, cementing a widening rift with his family. His father was committed to the Union cause and had abolitionist sympathies, and both of his younger brothers, Hamilton and Norman, served in the Union army. Oscar was critically wounded in the Battle of Williamsburg in May 1862 and died about seven weeks later in Richmond. Several months earlier, his brother Hamilton had lost an arm fighting on the Union side in the Battle of Fort Donelson, the Union's first great strategic victory. Hamilton retired in the rank of captain after the war.

Oscar's best known publications are *The Assayer's Guide* (1852) and *The Analytical Chemist's Assistant* (1852). The former work, which was continually reprinted for four decades after the author's death, is a manual for assayers, miners, and smelters in the testing and assaying of ores, coins, and alloys. *The Analytical Chemist's Assistant* is a similar guide for analyzing natural and inorganic compounds. Ostensibly a translation of Friedrich Wöhler's well-known volume of 1849, *Beispiele zur Uebung in der analytischen Chemie*, Lieber's guide is a considerable expansion of the German original.

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