

Samuel Morse Felton, Railroad President and Civil War Hero

Samuel Morse Felton, West Newbury's most unlikely Civil War hero, was born in a house near the corner of Coffin and Main Streets on July 17, 1809, two years after his brother [Cornelius Conway Felton](#), whose historic marker is on Main Street not far from Felton Street. His mother, Anna Morse, had deep Newbury roots as the daughter of [David Morse and Abigail Bailey](#). His father, Cornelius Conway Felton, Sr., was [a carriage maker](#). Around 1815, he moved the family south, becoming a toll-keeper in Chelsea.

According to [Currier's Ould Newbury](#), Samuel Felton followed his brother to Harvard, where he graduated with high honors in 1834. After two years studying law, Felton trained as a civil engineer. He laid out and supervised construction of the Fitchburg Railroad, and in 1845 became general superintendent. In 1851, he was elected president of the Philadelphia, Wilmington & Baltimore Railroad.

Felton's railroad served as the vital link connecting Union states to Washington, D.C. When in early 1861, newly elected President Lincoln planned a 2,000-mile whistle-stop tour from Springfield, IL to his inauguration, Felton became concerned. Maryland, a slave-holding state, was a hotbed of confederate sympathizers.

Excerpted in [Smithsonian Magazine](#), the book *The Hour of Peril: The Secret Plot to Murder Lincoln Before the Civil War*, described Felton as a "stolid, bespectacled blueblood whose brother was president of Harvard," who grew alarmed at rumors that "secessionists might be mounting a 'deep-laid conspiracy to capture Washington, destroy all the avenues leading to it from the North, East, and West, and thus prevent the inauguration of Mr. Lincoln in the Capitol of the country.'"

And so Felton called on Allan Pinkerton to investigate. Pinkerton and his team of agents arrived in Baltimore in early February, 1861, assumed anti-Union identities, and began infiltrating groups of southern sympathizers. When Lincoln's travels were announced, in Baltimore the death threats against the new president became serious, and, thanks to the Pinkerton team's undercover operations, specific: Lincoln would be shot and killed when greeting crowds at Baltimore's Calvert Street train station.

Pinkerton told Felton of the plot, adding that if it succeeded, the railroad would be destroyed to prevent retaliation from the north. With help from Felton in rearranging train schedules and from Pinkerton agent Kate Warne, who acted as decoy to take possession of a sleeper car, Lincoln passed through Baltimore in secret in the dead of night on February 23, 1861.

On April 19, just after outbreak of war, a secessionist mob in Baltimore attacked the 6th Massachusetts regiment during a change of trains. Four soldiers and twelve rioters were killed in the first bloodshed of the Civil War. Felton was credited with conceiving and opening a new train route through Annapolis, preserving the Capitol and allowing passage of troops and supplies to points south. He also chartered vessels and secured supplies for the Union cause.

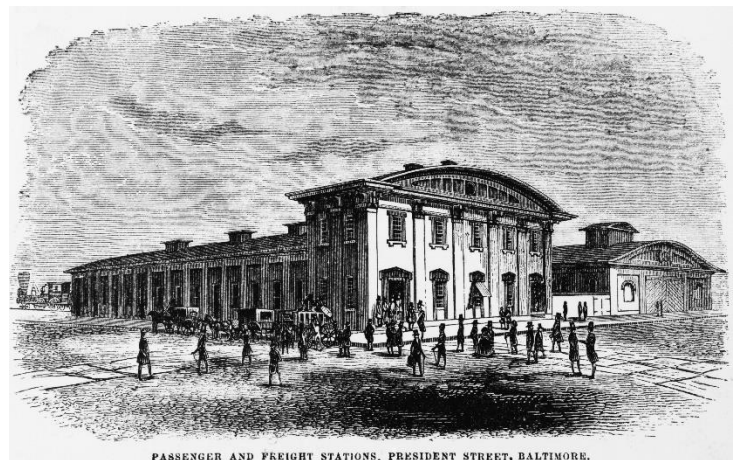
In 1865, Felton suffered a paralyzing stroke, which was attributed to the strain of his service during the war. He retired from the railroad but recovered after a few months' rest. He then became president of the Pennsylvania Steel Company. Samuel Morse Felton died on January 24, 1889 at his home in Philadelphia.

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BIRTHPLACE OF SAMUEL MORSE FELTON.

Source: Old Newbury, by John James Currier



PASSENGER AND FREIGHT STATIONS, PRESIDENT STREET, BALTIMORE.

Philadelphia, Wilmington & Baltimore RR Station
in Baltimore *Source: Wikipedia.com*

Samuel Morse Felton
Source: Ancestry.com