



“Death Is Every Where Present”

New interest has been focused recently on the meaning and impact of death, mourning, and memorial practices that resulted from the nearly 700,000 fatalities during the Civil War. How did Vermonters deal with these circumstances both on the battlefield and at home?

By J. DAVID BOOK

Private Hazen B. Hooker, 3rd Regiment, Company G of the Vermont Volunteers, wrote these words to his parents in Peacham on April 2, 1864, in response to the news that his cousin, Sergeant Sanford Hooker, had succumbed to pneumonia at Mansfield General Hospital, Morehead City, North Carolina:

I was very sorry to hear of the death of Sanford. It is a sad thing for his folks. He was a good boy. I always thought a great deal of him. *Death is every where present*, on the field of battle, in the camp and at home but it will not do for soldiers to think of such things, that is to dwell upon them, for if he does he will be miserable all the time. But he ought to think enough of it to cause him to live an upright honest life.¹

Only a month later, Hazen Hooker was killed at the horrific Battle of the Wilderness, May 5, 1864.² Hooker’s words clearly suggest the intimacy and nearness of death familiar to most of the nearly 35,000 men and boys from Vermont who traveled south to support the Union cause,

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and the hundreds of thousands who experienced the bloodiest conflict in American history.

Vermonters were well acquainted with death prior to the Civil War. Childhood mortality was extremely high. Smallpox, scarlet fever, and diphtheria took a huge toll. Those who managed to survive the early years of life could expect to live only into their late thirties. Thus, death became an integral part of the social fabric of home and community. Family members were close at hand to minister to the immediate needs of the sick and dying. At death neighbors gathered to assist the family in washing and clothing the body. The corpse was “laid out” in the home of the deceased. Interment in a grave dug by the hands of those who knew the deceased, often in a family plot, usually occurred the day after the death as family, friends, and neighbors accompanied the remains to a nearby village cemetery. In most instances, death became a shared community experience, a time to “rally around” the bereaved families with concrete gestures of care and concern.³ This close and personal awareness of human mortality, however, did little to prepare Vermonters and other Americans for the carnage of the Civil War.

The military, political, economic, and social ramifications of that era have been the subject of many studies. Recently, new interest has been focused on the meaning and impact of death, mourning, and the memorial practices that resulted from the nearly 700,000 fatalities.⁴ How did Vermonters deal with these circumstances both on the battlefield and at home? In Vermont, 34,238 men enlisted, more than 10 percent of the population of the state when the war began. Of this number, 5,237 died.⁵ How did Vermonters cope with the catastrophic loss of its men who died so far away from the quiet villages and farms of the Green Mountains?

There is no doubt that death was very much on the minds of Vermont volunteers. Their letters and diaries are permeated with references to death. A few reflected a cavalier attitude toward their own mortality. Henry Marsh, 4th Regiment, from Cabot, wrote his mother the ironic words, “tell the folks that the ball is not made to kill me.”⁶ He died as a result of a wound suffered at the Wilderness.⁷

Another Cabot volunteer, Wallace Paige, 3rd Regiment, commented with a trace of humor to his sister in a letter from Camp Griffin, Virginia, “you tell mother to keep up good courage fore I shall be at home sometime if I don’t get killed and I guess I shant if they don’t do better since they have been out here and they will keep us here till we all dye.”⁸ Daniel White of Cavendish, a captain in the 2nd Regiment, displayed a philosophical struggle with death in a letter to a friend.

Some ideas occurred to one of us who read your question “isn’t it awful to die?” And under these circumstances I would not speak of it. People fear a natural death at home where all the comforts of life are to be had and a large circle of friends to administer to your every want but it is with us here we may be hit mortally wounded and lie flat in the cold ground with no pillow under the aching head and no one to administer one single act of kindness . . . I can’t say that I fear being killed in battle still I may but it don’t seem so but a dread of death naturally takes possession of one and it secures that a natural death would be only a pleasure [i.e., compared to the horrid death on the field] but see on dying from wounds so common that most all turn instinctively away without uttering a word.⁹

Orlando Burton, a Manchester corporal in the 5th Regiment, complained about the peril of death by disease, the frequency of which came as a surprise to many. “We have already buried five of our Company [from disease] may they be the last. We had rather die by the bullets of the enemy than by disease, but we cannot choose.”¹⁰ Burton had experienced neither a battle nor its resulting devastation when he lamented death from disease.

Wilbur Fisk, private in the 2nd Regiment and prolific correspondent to the *Green Mountain Freeman* published at Montpelier, reflected a very different perspective after viewing the carnage at the “Bloody Angle” near Spotsylvania Courthouse.

In some places the men were piled four or five deep, some of whom were still alive. I turned away from that place, glad to escape such a terrible, sickening sight. I have sometimes hoped that if I must die while a soldier, I should prefer to die on the battlefield, but after looking at such a scene, one cannot help turning away and saying, any death but that.¹¹

Fisk also realized that after soldiers were around death so often, they became insensitive to it, although he never seemed to be so himself. After the first day’s fighting at Fredericksburg he wrote:

The men fell fast on right and left. It is difficult to realize in the time of an action, the extreme peril one’s life is in. Death there seems of less consequence than anywhere else, one gets so used to it. Let a railroad accident happen, or a factory tumble to the ground, mangling a great many, and terrifying numbers more, and the whole country shudders, but the same numbers may be killed and maimed in a brisk skirmish, and the affair is very “brilliant.”¹²

Private William Cheney concurred: “a man soon becomes hardened so he has not but little feeling for himself.” He observed that corpses were treated “just the same as you would load a piece of beef.”¹³ Peacham’s Hazen Hooker wrote his mother from the field near Bell Plains, Virginia, December 28, 1862, regarding the death of a friend back home.

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Marm you cannot imagine how different my feelings are from what they were when I left home. I cannot look upon death as I did at home. It makes me feel bad to see and hear of the death of my friends and school mates, but I have become so hardened that it does not have but little affect on me to what it used to have.¹⁴

While on picket duty in St. George's County, Virginia, Wilbur Fisk reflected further on the killing:

We are between two hostile armies, both of them drilling and exercising their men, and teaching them, as fast as they can, the arts of killing each other, and practicing those that are already learned, that they may not forget them. Brethren once, born under the same flag, reared under the same beneficent Government and prosperous by the same happy Union, now at deadly variance, seeking to imbrue our hands in each other's blood and striving by all means we can command to injure and destroy each other. Already has mourning been spread throughout the land, and poverty, suffering and desolation scattered everywhere.¹⁵

Regardless of the ever-present danger of death, most soldiers believed they would survive the conflict and return home. And if they were destined to die, they would be giving their life for a noble and just cause. Lt. Col. Samuel Pingree of the 3rd Regiment expressed this sentiment well in a letter to his parents, May 13, 1864: "If I survive I shall consider myself of singular luck. If not I am sure I shall have died in a cause which commends itself to both judgment and conscience."¹⁶ However honorable the cause, a disturbing word of prophecy was written by Rufus Kinsley of Fletcher, serving in Ship Island, Mississippi, to his father, May 29, 1864. "I think there are many men alive now, who must be killed before the war can die; and that the courage needed just now is courage to kill, rather than courage to die."¹⁷

The men of Vermont's regiments were constantly reminded that death was the work of war, but what systems were in place to deal with the mounting death toll? How were bodies identified and how were family and friends notified?

If a soldier was ill in a field or general hospital, in all probability his identity would be known to hospital staff and his whereabouts known to his regiment. However, on the battlefield the possibility of becoming an anonymous casualty greatly increased. No specific plan had been designed by the federal government to provide official identification, as "dog tags" were not issued to the military until 1899.¹⁸ To avert being listed among the "unknowns," American soldiers for the first time in any war made a deliberate effort to ensure that their identities would be acknowledged should they die. Many wrote their name and regiment on pieces of paper and pinned this crude "ID" to their clothing.

However, because of natural deterioration and the fact that many corpses were stripped of their clothing by Rebels, this method was less than foolproof.¹⁹ Some troops carved their names onto pieces of wood, boring a hole in one end in order to insert a string that could be worn around the neck. *Harper's Weekly Magazine* offered by mail-order "Soldier Pins" made of silver or gold which could be engraved with the soldier's name and regiment. Enterprising vendors, who often set up their wares near encampments, sold ornate identification badges just prior to major battles.²⁰ Many Vermont soldiers made such a purchase.²¹ "If a soldier could not save his life, he hoped at least to preserve his name."²² In spite of individual attempts to maintain personal identity, 141,106 Union men, more than 40 percent of those who died, are "unknown."²³

Not surprisingly, neither was there an official department established to notify families regarding the status of their fighting men. Two voluntary organizations endeavored to fill the gap created by the lack of military and governmental resources by attempting to provide information about soldiers to inquiring families. The Christian Commission and the Sanitary Commission in the later years of the war made communication with soldiers' families a priority.²⁴ However, the volunteers of these two organizations were severely limited in their ability to access information. Often located far from battlefields and hospitals, they had to rely on reports that were inaccurate and unreliable. Charles S. Cushing, a delegate from the Christian Commission, wrote Mrs. Mary J. Hinkson in Worcester, Vermont, regarding the status of her mortally wounded son, Calvin Hinkson, a member of the 2nd Regiment, U.S. Sharpshooters:

Dear Mother,

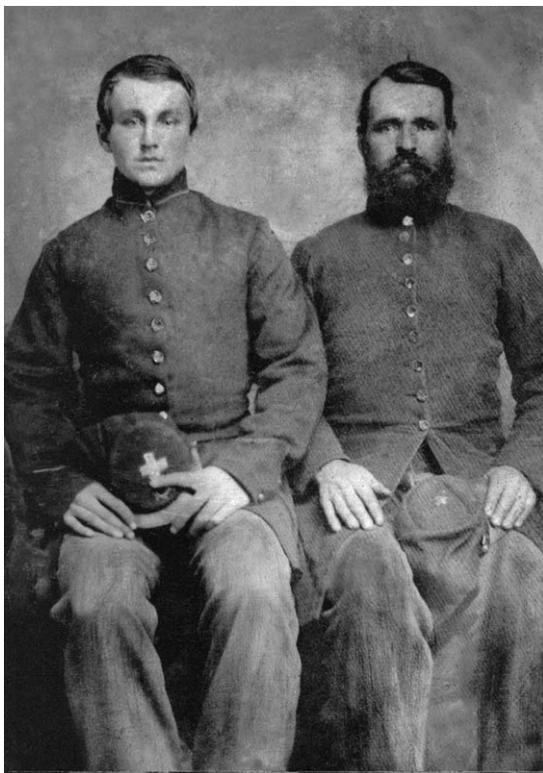
I am requested by your son Calvin C. Hinkson to write you a line to inform you that he is here in Hospital slightly wounded in the back of the head. His wound is quite painful at present though not probably dangerous. He wants you to pray for him and says he has tried to be a good boy since he has been in the army and prays for himself.

We will make him as comfortable as we can.²⁵

Sometimes initial news that a death had occurred was gleaned from lists of casualties that were usually printed in local newspapers several days or even weeks after a major battle; but most often, a letter written by the chaplain, friends or relatives in the same regiment, or the soldier's immediate military superior, brought the sad news back home.

Most regiments had a chaplain for part of their service, but not consistently. Chaplain N. M. Gaylord wrote Lydia Marsh of Cabot on the occasion of her son's death and her husband's disabling wound from Campbell Hospital, Washington, D.C., on May 15, 1864:

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James and Henry Marsh of Cabot, father and son, prior to the Wilderness tragedy. Photo courtesy of Veronica Hamel Kivela.

Dear Madam,

I write you because it is my duty and because I feel an interest in your husband and sympathy for you both in your present great trials. I know how fearful a blow to you was the sad tidings of your poor son's death. . . . think how the heart of the poor Father must have been as he lay helpless on his own bed looking into the face of his dying son. . . . And now what shall I say to you for yours is a double sorrow, that for the dead son and for the absent husband. . . . He will in a few days go home on furlough. He will see you and when you have shared your grief together you will find the burden less heavy. He will return here after his furlough expires and I promise you to do my utmost to have him retained on duty in this place.²⁶

The father, James Marsh, was mustered out and returned to Cabot where he was able to draw a pension for his disability.²⁷ His son, Henry O. Marsh, was interred at Arlington National Cemetery not far from where he died.²⁸

Friends and even relatives often served together in the same regiment and company. Families particularly appreciated receiving details of the last breaths of their soldiers as related by trusted friends or relatives who were present then and there. Such was the case of the letter written to Mrs. Bennett upon the death of her son, Willard, by Henry Styles of Company A, 2nd Vermont Regiment, on July 5, 1862.

I write you today because I promised Willard I would do so, you have no doubt heard of the sad fate of Co. E at the battle of Savage Station Sunday evening June 29. My co. was deployed as skirmishers and were scattered somewhat. We were on the left of the fight but towards the close of the fight I passed to the right to find my Regt. Pausing a moment amid a shower of bullets, I heard someone speak and I knew it was Willard's voice. I asked him if he was hurt and he said he was fatally wounded in the center of the bowels. I then went up to him to help him from the field but he wished me to leave him for he said it is no use—I cannot live. I urged him to try to get away to the Hospital. He finally concluded to try. I helped him to his feet and leaning upon me he walked a short distance and said he could go no further. The order then came for the brigade to form a new line. He said he would try to go back of the line which I assisted him to do and then went for a stretcher but could not find one. I procured a piece of canvas and with the help of three others, carried him some distance when we met men with a stretcher. We laid him on it. He was then carried to the hospital. As soon as he was placed on the stretcher I went to assist in carrying the others from the field. I did not see him again. I understand the surgeon could do nothing for him. The ball did not pass through him. I promised I would write you—his great care seemed to be for his mother. He did not wish to live for himself but for his mother. Said he “Oh what will my poor mother do, what will my poor mother do.” The hospitals are now in the hands of the rebels. When we hear from them we can learn of Willard's fate. I do not think it possible that he could live but a short time but perhaps he is alive.²⁹

According to another's recollection, Willard lived but eight hours. Not many families would be so well informed regarding the fate of their loved ones. Most would never learn about those final circumstances.

In Tunbridge, Vermont, Mrs. Frances Bixby received a letter from Lt. Henry Hayward of the 2nd Vermont regarding the death of her husband, Captain Orville Bixby.

Mrs. Bixby,

It becomes my painful duty to inform you of the death of your husband Capt. Bixby although I understood the Chaplain of the 2nd Regt. has written to you before this. He was mortally wounded in the 5th of May by a ball in the head. We supposed him killed instantly. I took his watch Diary Pocket book containing \$63, several letters and other things all which I gave to Mark Sergeant for safe keeping until I

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could send them to you. Finding him still alive I sent him to the Hospital where he died that night. His trunk is with the train at Fredericksburg which I will send to you the first opportunity if you will write to me where to send it.³⁰

As the war progressed, the telegraph became the quickest and most efficient means to notify family of a casualty. However, someone, a friend, superior officer, or chaplain, had to initiate the dispatch. Sometimes in the chaos and discord of a pitched battle when so many uncertainties existed, i.e. wounded, captured, or missing, the telegram was not feasible, and it might not have been affordable for some.³¹ Hundreds of Vermonters would have to wait months after the war concluded to learn the fate of their soldiers. Many would never know for certain. Such situations intensified mourning and made closure extremely difficult.

The system for the disposal of bodies was equally disorganized. It was certainly the intention of the federal government to give every soldier a dignified and respectful burial. The chances of that happening were much greater if a soldier died at a general hospital than if death occurred at a field hospital or on the battlefield. The former had greater resources to deal with proper disposal and, often, interment took place on the hospital grounds or in nearby civilian cemeteries where better records were kept. The prospects for an identifiable and decent burial were even better in some instances if one died in a prison setting. The 9th Regiment was on parole duty at Camp Douglas near Chicago, guarding Confederate prisoners during the winter of 1863. Commanding officer Edward Ripley noted the mounting toll from smallpox in the camp.

Every afternoon the undertaker who has the contract for burying us all, Secesh [derogatory nickname for secessionists] and Union all alike, comes and gets his load, and puts them in very respectable pine stained coffins, and buries them in the United States Army Cemetery about 8 miles out from here. Each coffin and grave are numbered, and he keeps a big book, containing the descriptive list on each one, copied, so it is kept very straight and proper.³²

As the war grew in intensity and mortality, the disposal of bodies became more problematic. Most of the Union soldiers who were killed in battle were quickly buried, often in mass graves, marked with only crude wooden headboards. After the war, a massive effort was undertaken to locate those graves and reinter the dead in national cemeteries.³³ Wilbur Fisk was witness to some of these mass burials. "I saw as many as a dozen buried side by side in one grave, all from one company. Perhaps in other places there were even more than that."³⁴ On occasion, a truce would be called to remove the dead and wounded from the battlefield. Fisk's observations regarding the nature of the fighting at the Wilderness reveal circumstances that did not permit that kind of recovery:

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Our dead comrades lay on the ground, just as they had fallen, many of whom we recognized. We would have gladly fallen out to give them a decent burial, but we had no time to think of that. . . . We had to leave our dead and wounded, and without much ceremony or order retreat out of that place, leaving all that we had gained in the hands of the enemy.³⁵

An unknown correspondent from the 12th Regiment wrote of his sad experience while walking the battlefield of Chantilly, Virginia, on Christmas day, 1862. The battle had taken place four months before.

We were not long in discovering the traces of the conflict. Only a short distance from the woods in a narrow gully, a number of bodies had been rudely thrown, with nothing but a scant covering of earth which the rains had already washed away, leaving their bleached skeletons partially exposed. We gave such burial as our means afforded and passed quickly on. A little further on in the edge of the woods, we found the skeleton of some poor fellow lying at the roots of an old oak tree, wholly unburied. His accouterments were beside him, even to his shelter tent. His musket stock had been shot away, and lay beside him. It furnished the only identification, being marked "J.B.H." Alone and unhonored he died; who shall answer for it? A bountiful supply of mother earth was all we could give him and we passed on.³⁶



Soldiers' burial at Camp Griffin, Virginia. Mass graves were common. Photo by George Houghton, courtesy of Vermont Historical Society (Houghton, #29).

The prospect of loved ones dying far away from home and being buried in Southern soil was not comforting for Northern family and friends, many of whom considered that soil to be profane. This possibility caused even more anguish and outrage because it ran counter to the accepted social norms in American culture when death was experienced in a family and community setting. This topic was addressed directly in a speech delivered before the Reunion Society of Vermont Officers in the hall of the house of representatives at Montpelier by George T. Childs on November 5, 1874:

One of the keenest sorrows of our soldiers, and one of the hardest trials of the brave at home, was the fear that they or their loved ones might sleep in unknown graves, where no loving mother's tears might water them; no children came to bend above a father's grave; and I think there are thousands of homes that would be less desolate, tens of thousands of hearts whose anguish would be less bitter, if only they might know where their heroes were lying.³⁷

A similar sentiment is expressed in letters from soldiers in the field. Wilbur Fisk bemoaned the death and burial of a comrade by strangers:

Stranger hands bear him to his long home, and stranger hands bury him from mortal view. . . . Somewhere among the wild hills of Vermont there are dear friends of this man, whose hearts will be pierced with sorrow when they see that name mentioned among the dead. And to know that he died among strangers, with no friendly hand to minister to his last wants, will be the keenest pang of all.³⁸

Every effort was made to send a body back to Vermont for final burial at home. As a result of this desire all across the Union, a new approach to treating the dead appeared and gave birth to the modern funeral industry and a new role for the undertaker.

Although centuries old, embalming was not a common practice in America prior to the Civil War. Thomas Holmes, a highly respected member of the College of Physicians and Surgeons at Columbia University in New York, is credited with developing inexpensive and effective embalming fluids and procedures.³⁹ The cost of embalming varied, more expensive for officers than the enlisted man. The general expense was \$50 for officers and \$25 for enlisted men. Later, prices increased to \$80 and \$30, respectively.⁴⁰ Embalming was especially necessary if the body would be shipped during the hot summer months.

The embalmed bodies were placed in coffins which were shipped by rail in long wooden boxes along with appropriate papers and personal effects. The federal government sent no coffins to the front, although they were available at large assembly points and at general hospitals. The undertaker usually had an additional vocation of either cabinet-maker or furniture maker. The undertaker could, therefore, make his

own coffins, constructed with wood, most commonly pine, which typically sold from \$4 to \$7 each.

Shipping the body home was no simple or inexpensive task. It is impossible to determine the number of Vermont's dead who were returned to the Green Mountains for final burial. Demand was adequate for the following notice to be published in the *Burlington Free Press*:

SENDING HOME SOLDIERS' REMAINS—We are permitted to make the following extract from a letter from Frank F. Holbrook, Commissioner for Vermont in Washington, to the Adjutant General:

In regard to sending the remains of soldiers home, when desired by the friends. It is necessary for them to arrange with the express agent at their place or the nearest point, and have the agent guaranty the express charges to the companies here, either Adams' or Harneden's, and advise by Telegraph, as they will in no case forward the remains of a soldier without said guaranty, unless the express charges are prepaid.

He further says that the bodies are embalmed at the Campbell and Armory Hospitals free of expense, but if done elsewhere it costs from \$18 upwards, according to the ability of the parties to pay, while it is not so well done as at the hospitals. The undertaker charges for an outside case and for delivering to express company, \$6, and \$8 for disinterring one body. By way of advice he adds:

Whenever friends desire to have the remains of a soldier sent home it is best for them to advise the surgeon in charge at the hospital as soon as possible, by telegraph, and have the body embalmed at the hospital, if possible.⁴¹

Unfortunately, embalming was not available in many places, especially near a battlefield, effectively prohibiting the return of the remains.

Costs of embalming and shipping varied from place to place. The letters of several soldiers make reference to that expense. Jabez H. Hammond of West Windsor wrote on June 22, 1863, "D. Parker died last Sunday morning with typhoid pneumonia. the orderly went to Ax. with his remains & got them embalmed & started for home yesterday. the cost of embalming & for transportation to Proctersville was \$59.63."⁴² Chester Leach responded to his wife, who asked the expense of shipping a friend home:

You asked in your last letter about the expenses of sending Samuel home and I forgot to say. The whole expense including the telegraph dispatch was \$57.28. The undertakers charge was \$26.00, and the express \$30, telegraph 1.28. Smith went to Georgetown with the corpse and the undertaker took it to the express office.⁴³

Leach would have a more personal experience a few years later when his older brother, William H. Leach, died of typhoid fever in a regiment hospital near Brandy Station, Virginia. Chester's letter of March 26, 1864, reports the details of the effort he made to send the body home.

I started as soon as possible to make arrangements to send his body home. I learned that there was an office for embalming at Brandy Station so I got an ambulance & went there Thursday afternoon, got a coffin to take the body in & sent it to the Station that night. Yesterday (Friday) I went down again and selected a coffin, although I did not have much choice as the one I got was the only one there except some that were not lined at all, & the body is to be sent this morning. . . .

The expenses, including telegraph dispatch, were ninety-eight dollars & eighty cents (\$98.80), 45 for coffin, 36 express charges, 15 for embalming & 2.80 telegraphing.

I would very much liked to have taken the body home myself but I knew there was no use to try, therefore I have done all that I can do, & hope it may reach home without accident. There will be some of his clothes in the box, & if I had thought about it before I went to the Station I should have sent everything he had that was worth sending, as it would cost nothing, & help hold the coffin steady in the box.⁴⁴

In subsequent letters, Chester indicates that the body had arrived safely in Fletcher prior to April 9, and further laments, "I would have given most anything to have been present at the funeral but that was impossible."⁴⁵

There are numerous indications that many bodies were embalmed and sent home regardless of the cost. However, if that were the norm, it would not have been noted as often as it was. Aldace F. Walker, captain in the 11th Vermont, from Middlebury, wrote his father on August 23, 1863, regarding the effort to return the body of Lt. Col. Chamberlain after he died from wounds.

Chaplain Little, his friend and classmate, was with him all the time, and is making strong efforts to take the body home. There are no facilities for embalming here, and the railroad will not take a corpse without that process, so I fear he will not succeed.⁴⁶

Captain George Quimby was killed at the battle of Fredericksburg, December 13, 1862, at the age of twenty-seven. Extra effort was necessary to get his body home.

The second lieutenant, Charles Kinsman...gathered some men, who carried the body to a nearby hospital and placed it in the care of the Fourth's chaplain. The next day, just after the chaplain secured a permit to transfer the remains to Washington, enemy fire hit the hospital. The chaplain was ordered to evacuate, leaving Quimby's body behind. When he returned it was gone. During his absence, a detail of soldiers, unaware of the situation, shuttled the body across the nearby Rappahannock River and buried it. The chaplain acted quickly, "I immediately sent across the River for an Ambulance, had the body disinterred, and by 3 of the o clock it was on its way to Washington" in care of a corporal. He brought the remains to an embalmer, who removed Quimby's worn, mud-splattered and blood-soaked uniform and prepared the body. Afterwards, it was transported via train to his mother and father in Lyndon, Vermont.⁴⁷

E. F. Palmer relates in his history of the 2nd Brigade that when the first lieutenant of his company died of typhoid, the members of the company met and voted to pay the expense of sending his body home.⁴⁸ A few months later, Palmer claimed that nearly all the bodies of those who had died in his brigade had been embalmed and sent home “at the expense of the companies to which they belonged.”⁴⁹

The 5th Vermont, Company E, was composed of eighty-seven men whose home was the northern section of Bennington County, who came to be known as the Equinox Guards. Many of their number died during the three years the regiment served. After Charles Tufts succumbed to disease, the Guards decided to pay for his body to be sent home. The bodies of Selden Hall, an eighteen-year-old Guard from Rupert, and Abel Tarbell of Mount Tabor, were both sent home at the expense of the Guards upon their deaths.⁵⁰ One of their members, Cyrus Hard, recommended a different policy. He suggested that each town should pay for sending their men home.⁵¹ There is no indication that any town implemented that suggestion.

The expense of shipping remains home was significant, and certainly not all were so fortunate to have comrades-in-arms who could afford the cost. Private Willard M. Thayer of Warren wrote to his wife, Esther, of such a situation:

the first one that died or the one that died the 14th was sent home his home was in Ludlo and was a young fellow just married the one that was buried here his foalks lived in the north part of the State the Co could not rase money enough to send him thare he had a brother in the same Co O he felt bad I tell you and who wouldnt.⁵²

In a few sad cases, there was no one at home to receive the remains. Isaac N. Watts, Peacham, 11th Regiment, reported such a situation. “We lost another man last week and he was buried yesterday as he had no particular friends at home to be sent to.”⁵³

Although it is unlikely that existing records could reveal the number of Vermont soldiers whose bodies were embalmed and shipped home, an examination of the Revised Roster for the nineteen towns of Washington County, discloses interesting data: 2,679 men from Washington County served in the various regiments of the Vermont Volunteers; 601 of those men died from all causes, 403 from disease and 198 from battle.⁵⁴ Cataloging the burial sites for these 601 casualties affords some perspective. Two hundred and thirty-nine men are interred in Vermont cemeteries, 203 are buried in national cemeteries, and 159 rest in “unknown” graves.⁵⁵ There are many variables not considered in these numbers, i.e., soldiers who were already in Vermont when they died, those returned to Vermont having been disinterred and identified after

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Burial site of 3rd Vermont soldiers killed at Lee's Mills. Photo by George Houghton, courtesy of the Vermont Historical Society (Houghton, #14).

the war concluded, etc. Although no firm conclusions can be surmised, the numbers reflect the desire of the survivors of Vermont's fallen to have them buried at home whatever the cost.

Due to the anguish resulting from the prospect of loved ones dying far away from home and being buried there without the traditional funeral or even a simple gravestone, some Vermonters and other Northern families either made the trip south themselves or paid someone to locate, retrieve, and ship the body home. Cyrus Hard, the member of the Equinox Guards who had suggested that towns should bear the recovery cost, died of disease near Yorktown on May 13, 1862, and was buried in a rough pine box in Virginia "with a headboard with proper identification." The grave was located by his father within a few weeks of his burial, and his body was returned to Manchester for funeral services at the Congregational Church on June 5, 1862.⁵⁶

A number of agents made their services available to locate and return the remains of soldiers from the South to their families in the North. The William Church family engaged the services of J. S. Foof to locate and return the remains of Corporal Church of the 13th Regiment, killed at Gettysburg on July 3, 1863. Ralph Orson Sturtevant, historian of Company K, 13th Regiment, described the initial burial of Corporal Church.

After the battle was won, and the victory was ours, and we were returning to a position in the front line, a hostile shell hit him and burst causing almost instant death. Among all the bodies that I had seen

on this gory field, his was the most horribly mangled. On the following day we carefully gathered up his remains, moved them to the brow of a hill where we had dug a shallow grave and lovingly and tenderly placed him in it and at the head we set a mark that the place might be found should occasion require it.⁵⁷

Letters from Mr. Foof and David Wills, the newly appointed superintendent of Gettysburg, the first national cemetery, reveal the difficulties and confusion that could thwart the recovery process. Mr. Foof reached Gettysburg in early November 1863, and wrote Mr. Melvin Church regarding his lack of success.

I looked until so dark I could not see to read any more and returned to the hotel a little disappointed in not finding it. I found the log barn and a great many graves near and about it. I should judge one half or more of the graves were marked that had not been disturbed. They seemed quite busy about the fields in moving those not marked to the National Cemetery; and on the North side of the old log barn the field has been ploughed and sown to winter wheat up even with the barn and in the evening at the hotel I saw Mr. Miram Warren the man that wrote you. He told me he could not find the grave for some of the board had been moved since he wrote you, and we both started this morning and looked steadily until two o'clock P. M. Went out again at half past 3 o'clock and came in at 6, and I am sorry to say quite discouraged. The board is since gone either by the cattle in the field, the cemetery trams driving through or by other persons finding the board down and using it to mark other friends graves, which or how we never came to know. I am afraid; I find that Mr. Fry and Mr. Mann in the same business of Mr. Warren has precisely the same location and field and barn of the grave of Corporal Church and Regiment. He also tells the board has been moved or torn down somehow, and it is useless to look, but I shall go out in the morning again with Mr. Fry but have very little hopes of success and will write you again tomorrow night. There are several at this hotel that have looked the whole week in vain but they did not know the location so nearly as I do of your son's grave.⁵⁸

After several more days of searching, Foof reported to Melvin Church in a letter dated November 9, 1863, that his efforts have been futile. The probable reason that Foof was unsuccessful in finding the remains of Corporal Church was that they had already been recovered by Captain Blake who had assisted in the initial burial on July 4. Sturtevant's history of the 13th Regiment recorded:

In a short time Captain Blake after he had mustered out returned to that great battlefield where many thousands had been buried, and guided by the mark we left, readily found the grave, opened it, and found the body, and brought it to Vermont, and he was buried in the Church street cemetery at Swanton Falls, and a modest headstone now marks his last earthly resting place.⁵⁹

By comparing Vermont casualties at Gettysburg with the battlefield cemetery records and the records of burials recorded in Vermont, an approximate estimate can be determined of those who were brought home. Ninety-three Vermonters died at Gettysburg. Sixty-one bodies rest in the soldier's cemetery there. According to records, nineteen Vermonters lie in unknown graves at or near Gettysburg. If this documentation is accurate, the remains of thirteen soldiers were returned to Vermont for burial.⁶⁰

An analysis of the burial statistics from the town of Cabot, where more than 50 percent of the adult male population served in Vermont regiments, provides further perspective. Of the forty-five men who died from the 135 participants, fifteen were buried in Vermont. Three of the fifteen died from disease in Vermont shortly after being discharged due to disability. Only two of the remaining twelve died in action, the remainder from disease.⁶¹

In the town of Worcester, twelve men of eighty-one in the service died. The remains of eight were returned home. Three are buried at Chalmette National Cemetery near New Orleans and the other is an "unknown." Of the eight who are buried in Worcester, four died as a result of battle, four from disease.⁶² This limited data from Cabot and Worcester does not support any trend or particular conclusion but does give credence to the practice still prevalent today to return the body home for burial.

It is not possible to determine the exact number of successful recoveries from the southern fronts. Certainly there were failures. Wilbur Fisk, in an oration delivered on "Decoration Day" at Alden, Minnesota, in 1894, bemoaned the unsuccessful attempts to recover an unnamed cousin from the battlefield of Fredericksburg. On three different occasions his widowed mother employed agents to recover the body, "but the difficulties in the way of getting him through the lines were so great that they could not get him though they found the body and identified it."⁶³

Unusual measures taken by Captain Edwin J. Morrill of the 11th Regiment, Company A, led to the successful recovery of his remains after the war concluded. Morrill, native of Cabot, was captured along with 435 members of the 11th at the debacle known as the Weldon Railroad, June 23, 1864.⁶⁴ Four days later, having survived squalid conditions and meager rations, the Union prisoners arrived at the Richmond depot for transport to Georgia; the officers were sent to Macon, the enlisted men to a place near Americus called Andersonville. Captains Morrill and James Eldridge, Company H, were assigned to the same car, where they plotted an escape attempt. Within a month of

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their partially successful effort at liberation, Eldridge described the plan and its outcome in a letter written to newspapers in Vermont.

When we got two miles out of Appomattox Station, and about 25 miles east of Lynchburg, Captain Morrill of Company A, 11th Regiment, and myself tried to make our escape by jumping out of the car window when they were running about twelve miles an hour. The guards which were at the top at each end of the car saw us and fired, and I think gave Capt. Morrill a mortal wound. I got him back to the station and stayed with him there until daylight, and then left him in the care of the station master and some Negroes. I think he could not have lived but a short time.⁶⁵

Captain Eldridge successfully made his way to Union lines and was later brevetted for his bravery. Captain Morrill died from his wounds, but before he succumbed, he wrote in the flyleaf of his Bible instructions for the disposal of his body and his possessions. The New Testament was sent to his family in Cabot after his death. He wrote:

I wish that my body to be buried so that my family can get it after the war. I have \$75 greenbacks and \$30 Confederate to purchase a coffin. One of my watches sent to my mother as a relic. The other to my friend Mrs. Robertson for her kindness to me. My memorandum Book to be sent to my father and my ring to my sister. E. J. Morrill, 1st Vt. Art.⁶⁶

After the hostilities had ceased, Abel Morrill, Sr. engaged Chaplain J. L. Roberts, 4th Regiment, to locate the body of his son. Roberts was from Chelsea, and served as one of two chaplains in the regiment between 1862 and 1865.⁶⁷ He was successful in this undertaking and summarized the results in a letter from Washington, D.C., dated March 20, 1866, to Abel Morrill in Cabot.

Dear Sir:

I have received of Mes. Col. Kimball the sum of ninety-seven dollars (\$97.00) in full for expenses in money paid out in obtaining the remains of your son Capt. E. J. Morrill and forwarding the same to Vermont.

My disbursements are as follows:

Fare for self from Petersburg to Appomattox	\$6.00
Disinterment of body	\$10.00
Supper, lodging and breakfast at Appomattox	\$5.00
Man and team to take body to depot	\$10.00
Rough case for enclosing coffin	\$5.00
Supper, lodging and breakfast in Petersburg	\$5.00
Fare from Appomattox to Petersburg	\$6.00
Express remains to Montpelier, Vermont	\$50.00
TOTAL	\$97.00

The foregoing bill is near the Southern standard, since the war, it would be quite moderate during the rebellion. I was happy to learn

that the remains were safely received.—I will here state what may be of interest and I trust consolation to friends to know.

I was informed that your son received all the attention which could under the nature of surrounding circumstances be afforded him.

I was informed by a Mrs. E. H. Lee who was present from the time he was wounded until he died, that he was kindly treated—that his sufferings were intense, but endured with great patience—that he asked her to send word to his mother that he had died happy, that he served God and his Country, that he believed the fatal shot was accidental, that he requested one John Robinson to take charge of his burial and made him a present of a watch, that the body was neatly attired, etc.

There is an incident in the history of his sad fate interesting indeed—it is this: he was the first who fell at Appomattox on either side, he was shot below the station, that is south and brought back to the station where he died; he was then taken for burial within three rods of the place where he fell, and buried in a mound made of the excavations of rail road on which he was being transported south; the mound is a high point overlooking the place where he died, which place was subsequently the closing battlefield of the rebellion, also the only point in the vicinity from which Lee and his army could be seen at the time of his surrender to Gen. Grant—he was the first to fall in this vicinity yet the spot where he rested is now surrounded with the graves of the fallen on both sides, but none were buried on the mound, he seemed to rest there not only the first martyr in the neighborhood, but enthroned above them all. . . .⁶⁸

I am informed that his coffin cost \$50.00, his Robe and burial \$80.00. I therefore judge that his effects were principally used in his internment.⁶⁹

When the ground thawed in the spring of 1866, allowing the gravesite to be prepared, the remains of Captain Edwin Morrill were laid to rest in Cabot's Durant Cemetery. Abel and Margaret Morrill had fulfilled their son's desire to bring his remains back to Vermont.

Frances Bixby, widow of Captain Orville Bixby of the 2nd Regiment, persisted in her efforts to locate and recover the remains of her husband, who had died on May 5, 1864. She learned that he had been buried near a Union field hospital which had served the Wilderness battle not far from the Brock and Plank Road intersection in Virginia. She located a soldier who had been in the same hospital where her husband had died, who drew for her a map of the location of his grave. The remains of Captain Bixby were disinterred in the spring of 1865 and shipped home in an "air tight casket." Frances Bixby never remarried and was laid to rest beside her husband fifty-one years later.⁷⁰

By far the most common and socially acceptable form of grieving and remembering the dead was a public funeral. Such a service, usually religious in nature, would take place both on the front and at home, even if the remains were not present. E. F. Palmer described a typical funeral.



Captain Edwin J. Morrill, courtesy of the Vermont Historical Society.

In the afternoon there was a funeral. The soldier died last night at the village, and wished to be buried there, saying that his wife could not endure the sight of his dead body. The chaplain, musicians, his company, and such as chose to from the regiment, follow him to the grave. His is placed, before leaving the hospital, in a government coffin, made of boards painted black—with the clothes on that he wore when alive. He is now laid in the ground four feet deep; twelve of his comrades fire their farewell shots; the chaplain speaks consoling words, offers a prayer to God and pronounces a benediction; and we turn away, not as when we came, with a slow and measured tread—the drummers beating the dead-march—but with quicker steps, a livelier air—Yankee Doodle.⁷¹

Martin J. McManus reported the funeral of Private Benjamin Underwood of Bradford, who was an early victim of disease at Fort Monroe, May 20, 1861.

The funeral of our comrade, Underwood, took place about four o'clock May 20th, and the occasion was very impressive as we followed his remains to the place of burial along the coast of Old Virginia, the boisterous waves dashed with majestic swell, and broke in mournful sound beneath the wheels of the ambulance which conveyed his remains to

their last resting place. The usual salute was fired over the grave of the young hero, and the grave quickly filled by brother soldiers, whose eyes were moistened with the soft tears of sorrow, and all was over. Then again the martial airs of music filled with animating liveliness the grove in which he rests and drowned, to a great extent, the feeling of gloom and sadness.⁷²

Wilbur Fisk was a witness to many funerals on the front. They always seemed to move him. He wrote of them, "Funeral scenes are always sad, but the saddest of all, it seems to me, is the soldier's funeral. There are seldom any mourners here to follow him to his grave, and no tears of sympathy and grief fall on his coffin, as it is lowered into the silent tomb."⁷³ Chester Leach concurred. He complained about the lack of mourners for the funeral of a Sergeant George Allen, who had drowned while bathing in a river near Harrison Landing, Virginia.

What a difference between a soldier & a citizen. Should a citizen be drowned in that way, the inhabitants would turn out for miles around. But here where hundreds were sitting around within 50 rods & none thought of going to see him, even after his body was taken out. He was buried near the church, no ceremonies excepting a prayer made by some chaplain of this brigade, I don't know which one.⁷⁴

Burials in the midst of battle, of course, were not accompanied by the usual observances. Private Eugene Mead wrote his family in Rutland describing the death and burial of his brother, Charles. "He died at half past eight. . . . With the aid of three others, detailed to assist him, a place is selected, a strong box made, and when the darkness will allow, the body is brought away, and at the hour of ten is deposited in its lonely grave."⁷⁵ Often, even this individual attention to a soldier's remains was made impossible by the imminent danger of capture or an order to retreat. No doubt, as the carnage accelerated, the opportunity for a proper funeral declined.

Back in Vermont, funerals were common and frequent, with or without the remains present. The remains of Captain Charles Dudley of Manchester, killed at Savage Station, were present in the Congregational Church in that town when his funeral was described in the *Manchester Journal*. A flag and sword were placed upon his coffin and the Reverend R. S. Cushman officiated. The church was "so crowded that some were unable to obtain an entrance and a large concourse of people attended the remains to the graves."⁷⁶

Don Carlos Walbridge, 7th Regiment, of Cabot, died at General Hospital in Pensacola, Florida, from "disease of the lungs," November 27, 1862. He was buried at Barrancas National Cemetery in Pensacola. Funeral services were held in Cabot at the Congregational Church on

December 28.⁷⁷ Lieutenant Albert A. Crane, a correspondent to the *Rutland Herald*, was killed in action during the Wilderness fighting, May 5, 1864. He was interred with 15,000 other Union soldiers at the Fredericksburg National Cemetery. His family held a funeral service in memory of their son at the Bridport Congregational Church on June 12. A marble stone, carved with crossed flags and swords, was erected in Central Cemetery in memory of Crane.⁷⁸ Many such cenotaphs exist in Vermont cemeteries, often inscribed with the sad words, “Buried on the Battlefield.”

Resolutions were a device frequently employed to express grief and respect to the fallen soldiers. The *Burlington Free Press* printed resolutions from the 9th Regiment upon the death of Major Amasa Bartlett of Irasburg, who perished March 16, 1864, from “brain fever.”⁷⁹

WHEREAS, It has pleased Almighty God, to remove by death our esteemed friend and gallant brother-in-arms, Maj. Amasa Bartlett, while engaged in the active discharge of his duties in defence of his beloved country; and

WHEREAS, it is ever becoming to pay just and suitable tribute to departed worth. Therefore,

Resolved, that while we mourn with most sincere sorrow the untimely death of Maj. Bartlett, we tender to the relatives and friends of the deceased our heartfelt sympathy and condolences; for as they weep the loss of a noble and affectionate son, brother and friend, we mourn the loss of a sincere patriot, and a brave and zealous soldier. And we ever cherish his memory with sincere respect. . . .

Resolved, That copies of these resolutions be sent to the family of the deceased, and to the *Orleans Independent Standard* for publishing with request that other Vermont papers copy. J. C. Baker, Secretary, Newport Barracks, N.C., March 17, 1864.⁸⁰

The extent to which mourning clothes were worn in Vermont to express grief is difficult to determine. The practice is seldom mentioned in letters or other documents beyond an occasional reference. The “usual badge of mourning” was probably a black arm band worn around the left arm, the arm nearest the heart.⁸¹ It appears to have been a common practice for soldiers to wear “a badge of mourning” for a thirty-day period.⁸² It is probable that bereaved women sometimes wore some of the black attire associated with mourning. The custom of wearing mourning apparel was roundly criticized in a letter to the editor of the *Cabot Advertiser*, September 2, 1868. The writer, C. Bond, minced no words in condemning the practice: “It is but a foolish and useless custom, we ought to abandon it surely; and if not, give a reason for its continuance.”⁸³ Obviously, some features of the tradition must have been in vogue at the time for the subject to have been addressed.⁸⁴

Grief often took the form of written expression. Margaret Scott, newly married to Erastus H. Scott of Cabot, lamented with deep sorrow to her sister-in-law at the news of the death of her husband.

He is dead. I never shall see him again. Oh I cannot have it so all my hopes in life are o'er. There is nothing but disappointment and trial in this World. He was shot in the head and died instantly. Oh how like a knell it rings in my ears. I lay in a fainting condition most all night and am so weak in body and mind have pity on me to think he lays in the Battlefield so far away without one moments warning and could not send no message to the wife he loved so well. My poor Mother is almost beside herself they all loved him so well. I can't write anymore—write your Father.⁸⁵

William Henry Herrick, Cabot musician diarist, had mustered out of the Brigade Band in 1862. His boyhood friend, Charles Perry, served in the 4th Regiment and died at Cold Harbor, June 3, 1864. Herrick and Perry had maintained their friendship, had visited each other while in the military service, and had corresponded frequently. Herrick learned of Perry's demise from the newspaper and made this entry in his journal:

After tea I opened the Journal and looking down a long list killed and wounded almost the first name that arrested my attention was that of C. H. Perry—died of wounds received June 3rd. I sat for a moment utterly stupefied and incapable of taking in the truth of which the types declared—unable to realize that among that noble army of martyrs' was the friend that I had known and loved so well; then as the bitter truth became plain, I cried out in bitterness of spirit. . . . I know not how he died, but of this I am sure—it was doing his duty manfully, and faithfully.⁸⁶

The following day was cold and bleak and the grieving Herrick wrote, "I looked over my letters and picked out all that I had received from Charlie since I came back from the army. . . . I cannot get reconciled to his death as if he were my one brother."⁸⁷ Herrick's journal continues to reflect deep remorse at the death of his friend. On July 2 there was a sad meeting with Elijah Perry, Charlie's father, in Cabot. "Mr. Perry met me but could hardly speak, and I was quite broken down, the thoughts of Charlie and his sad death coming so freshly to my mind in that place." On July 4 he reread a large bundle of the letters Charlie had written to him while he was in St. Johnsbury, "and looked them all through with mother sitting in the parlor—went up to Chas Perry's this morning to get Charlie's pictures which they want copied." A journal entry of August 21, 1864, brings final perspective to the loss suffered by family and friends.

August 21, 1864 in Cabot. . . . Then I went up to see Helen and carry Charlie's pictures—had a very pleasant talk with them all, and finally

alone with Helen; she talked very freely of her engagement to Charlie, saying she felt perfectly free to talk to me, who knew and loved him so well, and seemed to feel better from talking to someone of it—poor girl. Her life has brought her not much but sorrow and she has suffered much—she gave me the many letters I have written to him and after I came home I looked them over and read some of them—it has made me very sad—to think that I will never clasp his hand again—never hear his hearty, heartfull voice. A truer friend was never had than he has been to me.⁸⁸

Sometimes, grief altered lives in a more profound fashion. In Cabot, Miss Mary Josephine Lance, engaged to Captain Edwin J. Morrill, 11th Regiment, became a recluse after learning of his death in the foiled escape attempt.⁸⁹ The lives of thousands of Vermonters were dramatically affected by the carnage suffered by the Vermont brigades. William Riley, from Rutland, commented to his brother, Ed, who was stationed near Suffolk, Virginia, regarding the terrible losses of the Second Brigade: “The entire State is in mourning.”⁹⁰

Public memory, defined as the “body of beliefs and ideas about the past that help a public or society understand both its past, present, and by implication its future,”⁹¹ took various forms after funerals subsided and the veterans of Vermont’s regiments returned home. Certainly the formation of the veteran’s organization, the Grand Army of the Republic, was an important vehicle for those who had survived the war to remember those who had not. Thousands of veterans became members of a local post, attended regular meetings, and participated in annual reunions, sometimes traveling to the actual areas of combat. More than 115 posts existed in Vermont, and almost all of them bore the names of local Civil War soldiers who had given their lives for the cause.⁹² Worcester Post #13 bore the name of Captain Edward E. Hall, who was killed during the Battle of Cedar Creek, October 19, 1864.⁹³ Cabot Post #71 honored the Morrill brothers. In every post, the sacrifices of those who had fallen were kept alive.

The most evident indications of the growing tribute to the memory of the Civil War dead and survivors began to be seen on the village squares. The monuments that were commissioned and constructed after the war became part of the public memory of Vermont towns. Derby, near the Canadian border, had the distinction of erecting the first public monument to its soldiers on October 31, 1866. Other communities soon followed. Even before the war’s cessation the Vermont General Assembly in 1863 encouraged such memorials by enacting legislation.⁹⁴ At least fifty Civil War-related monuments were erected between 1866 and 1924.⁹⁵ Most, like Derby and Peacham, listed all participants from their town. A few, like Cabot, only enumerated those who died.⁹⁶

It was not always an easy task to get the community to underwrite the expense of erecting a monument. Peacham is a case in point. According to town historians Mary Morrison and Lynn Bonfield, getting a “war memorial for Peacham was the last major battle of the Civil War for the town’s veterans.” Isaac N. Watts described a town meeting in a diary entry for April 29, 1867. “Fixed fence this A.M. and went to Town Meeting called to see if the town would build a Soldiers monument or Memorial Hall. A majority refused to do anything and never acted meaner about anything.” Peacham citizens finally relented in 1869, stipulating that there should be no cost to the town except \$100 to purchase land for the monument. Private subscriptions in the sum of \$3,000 were pledged to pay for the twenty-four-foot monument of Blue Mountain granite. More than a thousand people attended the dedication on July 4, 1870.⁹⁷

The most centralized place of public memory, the focus of statewide commemoration of the Civil War, was the stately Italian Renaissance structure standing on a hill in Montpelier. In the years following the war, Vermont’s State House “took on the quality of a shrine to Vermont’s war heroes.”⁹⁸ Flags, photographs, bronze tablets, silver plaques, and paintings were all employed after 1865 to ensure a lasting public memory of the cost that Vermonters paid to hold the Union together and abolish slavery. That many of these symbols of victory and sacrifice are still features of the State House décor attests to their permanence as part of the public memory.

As early as 1865, flags from the various regiments began to be displayed from the pillars of the Senate and House of Representatives under authority of Number 52 of the Acts of 1863. The colors would be returned from the field when they were no longer serviceable. On June 14, 1865, the War Department ordered that the colors of all returned regiments be delivered to the governor of the state. In 1870, a joint resolution was adopted by the legislature to place the sixty-eight flags in glass cases in a conspicuous place in the State House.⁹⁹ Two cases were constructed on either end of the foyer of the House of Representatives which was aptly named “The Hall of Flags.” A descriptive report from the adjutant and inspector general gave vivid testimony to the service they had rendered. “Many of them have been pierced by shot and shell, until they are mere tattered remnants of the original . . . some with their staffs scarred by rebel bullets and many of them baptized by the blood of their bearers.”¹⁰⁰ The flags remained there until the summer of 2003, when they were removed for restoration and preservation. They now are stored in protective cabinets at the Vermont History Center in Barre. Replicas of some of the collection are currently displayed in the original glass cases at the State House.

Bronze tablets were installed throughout the State House commemorating Vermont Civil War leaders following 1865. Among those so recognized are Major General William Wells, General Lewis A. Grant, Major General William (“Baldy”) Farrar Smith, Major General George G. Stannard, and General Stephen A. Thomas. A bronze tablet inscribed with Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address was presented to the state by the Woman’s Relief Corps in 1926.¹⁰¹ Ex-Governor John A. Mead, who had served as a volunteer in 12th Regiment, was honored with such a tablet dedicated to the “MEMORY OF THE COMMON SOLDIERS OF THE CIVIL WAR WHO WENT FROM VERMONT TO HELP SAVE THE UNION.” Campaigning in Vermont for the presidency, William Howard Taft delivered an address at the formal dedication of this tablet at the State House on October 9, 1912.¹⁰²

Perhaps the most memorable declaration of Civil War memory made by the legislature was the decision to commission as a permanent State House memorial a painting of Vermont regiments in action against Confederate forces at the Battle of Cedar Creek, which was fought near Winchester, Virginia, October 19, 1864. In 1870, twenty-four-year-old Julian Scott, a native of Johnson, Vermont, a member of the National Academy of Design, and a former drummer/fifer in the 3rd Regiment, was chosen to paint this action, which portrays more Vermont regiments under fire than in any other battle of the war.¹⁰³ Since its completion in 1874, it has been proudly displayed and visited by millions of visitors from all over the world. This largest painting in Vermont highlights the chaos and pathos of Civil War conflict. A critic with an art journal of the period, *The Aldine*, commented, “Mr. Scott has given prominence to the privates, who did the hard work, and has pictured the scene as it really was, a battle in earnest, full of élan, courage and determination, but also full of glory, pomp and horror.”¹⁰⁴ This remarkable work of art occupies the entire wall in the aptly named Cedar Creek Room, the major reception room at the State House.

Two representations of the Civil War are no longer in evidence at the State House. Between 1865 and 1946, the photographs of more than 1,000 Vermont officers were displayed in the hall off the main lobby, an area now known as the Hall of Inscriptions. Those collages are now in the holdings of the Vermont Historical Society.¹⁰⁵ When the flags of the regiments were displayed from the pillars of the Senate and House of Representatives prior to their 1870 enclosure in glass cases, they were accompanied by silver plaques that identified the regiments to which the flags belonged, as well as the specific battles each regiment had seen. These plaques are now in the possession of the State House archives and are in need of restoration.¹⁰⁶



Julian Scott's painting "The Battle of Cedar Creek" can be viewed at Vermont's State House. Photo courtesy of Vermont Historical Society.

Upon entering the front door of the State House one cannot avoid the presence of another reminder of the Civil War. The bust of Abraham Lincoln sits on a pedestal in the hall directly off the lobby. The sculptor was Larkin Goldsmith Mead, a renowned nineteenth-century artist who was a native of Brattleboro, Vermont. This bust was created by Mead as a study for the full-length bronze figure of Lincoln that stands at the Lincoln Tomb in Springfield, Illinois. It was given to the state by Mead's widow in 1910. The presence of Lincoln's likeness always engenders memories of those dark days in American history.¹⁰⁷

In 1878, the legislature by act appointed George Grenville Benedict as state historian for the purpose of writing a definitive account of Vermont's role in the Civil War. He published the two-volume work, *Vermont in the Civil War*, in 1886. It has been the standard secondary source for Civil War scholars since.¹⁰⁸

Through six international conflicts, the depression, cold war, and the communication's revolution, the memory of the Civil War remains vivid and central in Vermont's heritage. The evidence of this memory permeates the culture. Two Civil War Round Tables meet monthly with programs related to the conflict; the Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War has three camps in Vermont; a reenactment group, the Hemlocks, is very active in the state, usually present at fairs and parades; and the 18th Vermont Regiment exists exclusively for the educational and charitable purposes of historic preservation, including raising funds for the preservation of Civil War battlefields where Vermonters fought, the identification and preservation of historical collections, and conducting educational programs to promote and protect Vermont's rich Civil War heritage. Periodically this organization has sponsored the Civil War Expo at the Tunbridge Fairgrounds. Further confirmation that Civil War memory is healthy and sustained today includes the publication in the last two decades of dozens of books, collections of letters, and diaries related to Vermont's involvement in the Civil War. Vermont Civil War Enterprises in Newport has more than thirty titles on its publication list dealing with Vermont's role. The Vermont Council on the Humanities is supporting a project to identify Civil War-related sites on the home front, with the goal of identifying one in every town. The Vermont Historical Society is planning special programs and exhibits for the sesquicentennial of the War, and a statewide commission has been appointed to promote and organize commemorations. The web site Vermont in the Civil War (www.vermontcivilwar.org) is a treasure of valuable information.

To what extent did this enormous expenditure of human resources bring impact and change to Vermont? It is nearly impossible to even

speculate. The sense of grief affected nearly all the population. Many of those who survived the war returned home wounded, maimed, or of broken spirit, weakened by disease and hard conditions, their lives never to be the same. Certainly, those who had experienced travel away from Vermont for the first time were now more prone to migration and westward settlement, as evidenced by the hundreds who did not return to Vermont. There is no doubt that those, especially the women, who remained at home to plant and harvest the crops, raise and teach the children, spin the wool, milk the cows, provide support for the soldiers, and undertake those numberless tasks that had to be completed for society to go on, were extensively and immeasurably affected.

Did the culture's perspective on death change? That is even more difficult to ascertain. There were some obvious innovations. Embalming became more acceptable. Undertakers took on an increasingly active role in providing services. The rise of the national cemetery had tremendous importance to the nation as it grappled with redefining its identity.¹⁰⁹ But in Vermont, social attitudes toward death did not seem to be altered. Certainly the war caused emotional trauma, and family sorrow was real; but the acceptance of death as a normal and familiar part of life already may have lessened the shock and despair that war casualties brought.¹¹⁰

Decades after the last Civil War veterans were laid to rest, Vermonters remain undeniably intent on keeping the memory of their valor and sacrifice fresh and hallowed, being true to the words of one of the resolutions expressed at the funeral of the Morrill brothers:

To the brave and noble living, we accord honor and an enduring remembrance, with sincere and grateful thanks. To the heroic dead, an imperishable record of their valor and virtue upon the brightest pages of history, which shall be transmitted and taught to our children's children to the latest generations.¹¹¹

NOTES

¹Hazen Blanchard Hooker Civil War Letter, Peacham Historical Association. Camp near Brandy Station, 2 April 1864, courtesy of Lynn A. Bonfield. Emphasis added.

²Theodore S. Peck, *Revised Roster of Vermont Volunteers* (Montpelier, Vt.: Watchman Publishing Company, 1892), 94.

³Daniel E. Sutherland, *The Expansion of Everyday Life* (New York: Harper & Row, 1989), 129.

⁴Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (New York: Knopf, 2008). This fresh treatment of death during the Civil War describes in detail the many facets of this concept.

⁵Howard Coffin, *Full Duty* (Woodstock, Vt.: Countryman Press, 1993), 356.

⁶Letter from Henry Marsh at Chain Bridge, Va., to Mrs. Lydia Marsh in Cabot, Vt., dated 28 September 1861. Compiled Military Service Records, Private Henry O. Marsh, Company G, Fourth Vermont Infantry, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

⁷Pension file for Private James Marsh, Company G, Fourth Vermont Infantry, applicant James Marsh, National Archives, Washington, D.C. Henry Marsh is buried at Arlington National Cemetery, Virginia.

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⁸Letter from Wallace Paige in Camp Griffin, Va., to Sister in Philadelphia, 2 September 1862. Compiled Military Service Records, Private Wallace Paige, Company G, Third Vermont Infantry, National Archives, Washington, D.C. Paige died at Cold Harbor, June 3, 1864. His burial site is unknown.

⁹D. S. White Collection, Vermont Historical Society, Barre, Vermont.

¹⁰Brian L. Knight, *No Braver Deeds: The Story of the Equinox Guards* (Manchester, Vt.: Friends of Hildene, 2004). Letter written to *Manchester Journal*, 3 February 1862.

¹¹Emil and Ruth Rosenblatt, eds., *Hard Marching Every Day* (Lawrence, Kan.: University Press of Kansas, 1983), 221. Letter written from the battlefield, 9 May 1864.

¹²Rosenblatt, *Hard Marching*, 79–80.

¹³Jeffery D. Marshall, ed., *A War of the People: Vermont Civil War Letters* (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1999), 10.

¹⁴Hooker Civil War Letter.

¹⁵Rosenblatt, *Hard Marching*, 65.

¹⁶Howard Coffin, *The Battered Stars* (Woodstock, Vt.: Countryman Press, 2002), 226.

¹⁷David C. Rankin, *Diary of a Christian Soldier* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 151.

¹⁸Richard W. Wooley, “A Short History of Identification Tags,” http://www.qmfound.com/short_history_of_identification_tags.htm.

¹⁹Otto Eisenschiml, ed., *Vermont General: The Unusual War Experience of Edward Hastings Ripley* (New York: The Devin-Adair Company, 1960), 216. Vermont Brigadier General Ripley reports claims made by some Rebel prisoners: “All the clothing they boast of inhumanly stripping from our dead and wounded. And they even stripped two of their own men wounded, left behind, expecting them to die. We had the naked Rebs brought in and Dr. Carpenter says they will live.”

²⁰Wooley, “A Short History of Identification Tags.”

²¹John Gibson Collection. Privately owned. See the virtual exhibit of thirty-nine Vermont identification disks at <http://www.vermontcivilwar.org/museum/idthags.php>.

²²Faust, *This Republic of Suffering*, 123.

²³“The Barry Report on National Cemeteries,” www.vermontcivilwar.org/barry/preface/shtml.

²⁴Faust, *This Republic of Suffering*, 107. With only 5,000 volunteers, these organizations could not overcome the backlog or keep up with the massive numbers of requests from families. Not until 1864 did the Commission organize a department that was specifically designed to respond to families regarding the fate of individual soldiers.

²⁵Letter from Charles W. Cushing in Fredericksburg, Virginia to Mrs. Mary J. Hinkson, Worcester, Vt., dated 16 May 1864. Compiled Military Service Records, Private Calvin C. Hinkson, Company L, Eleventh Vermont Infantry, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

²⁶Letter from N.M. Gaylord in Washington, D.C., to Lydia Marsh in Cabot, Vt., dated May 15 1864. Compiled Military Service Records, Private Henry O. Marsh, Company G, Fourth Vermont Infantry, National Archive, Washington, D.C.

²⁷Pension file for Private James Marsh.

²⁸Peck, *Revised Roster of Vermont Volunteers*, 755.

²⁹Knight, *No Braver Deeds*, 195.

³⁰Coffin, *Battered Stars*, 255–256.

³¹Edward J. Feidner, ed., *The Civil War Letters of Chester K. Leach* (Burlington: The Center for Research on Vermont, 2002), 42, 192. Chester Leach, 2nd Regiment, of Fletcher, Vermont, references two telegraph charges incurred in sending bodies home from Virginia. On January 23, 1862, the cost of a telegram was \$1.28. By March 26, 1864, the cost had risen to \$2.80. The salary drawn by the rank and file soldier was \$20.00 per month and that pay often did not come on time.

³²Eisenschiml, *Vermont General*, 73.

³³“Veterans Cemeteries and their Origins,” www.deathcare.com/2009/veterans-cemeteries-and-their-origins.html.

³⁴Rosenblatt, *Hard Marching*, 24.

³⁵*Ibid.*, 216.

³⁶Donald H. Wickman, ed., *Letters to Vermont: From Her Civil War Correspondents to the Home Press*, 2 vols. (Bennington: Images of the Past, 1998), 1: #136.

³⁷George T. Childs, *Addresses Before the Re-union Society of Vermont Officers* (Burlington: Free Press Steam Shop Printing House, 1874), 3.

³⁸Rosenblatt, *Hard Marching*, 242–243. Wilbur Fisk does not identify this fallen soldier.

³⁹Edward C. Johnson, “Civil War Embalming,” *Funeral Director’s Review* (June 1965). Holmes received acclaim for the embalming of Colonel Elmer E. Ellsworth, shot by a disgruntled Southern-leaning innkeeper on May 24, 1861, in Alexandria, Virginia, on the occasion of Ellsworth’s unsuccessful attempt to remove a Confederate flag. Ellsworth was a close friend of President Lincoln, who brought his body to lie in state at the White House. Thomas Holmes’s good work was on

display for all to see and, as a result, his services were in great demand. Most of the undertakers of the day were trained to use his embalming instruments and to purchase the embalming fluid at \$3.00 per gallon.

⁴⁰ www.historynet.com/the-undertakers-role-during-the-american-civil-war.htm/print.

⁴¹ *Burlington Free Press*, 28 March 1864, 2.

⁴² www.vermontcivilwar.org/units/12/hamltrs5.php#44. Original at Vermont Historical Society.

⁴³ Feidner, *Civil War Letters of Chester K. Leach*, 42.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 192.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 195–197.

⁴⁶ Aldace F. Walker Letters, Vermont Historical Society. The chaplain was successful. Col. Chamberlain was buried in St. Johnsbury. Coffin, *Full Duty*, 298.

⁴⁷ Linda M. Welch, www.vermontcivilwar.org/units/4/obits.php?input=4828.

⁴⁸ E.F. Palmer, *The Second Brigade History or Camp Life by a Volunteer*, 1864, as available at www.vermontcivilwar.org. Chapter 2, October 29, 1862.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, Chapter 8, January 19, 1863.

⁵⁰ Knight, *No Braver Deeds*, 110–119.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 97.

⁵² Marshall, *War of the People*, 116.

⁵³ Isaac N. Watts in Fort Slocum, Washington, D.C., to Alice Watts in Peacham, 28 February, 1864, John W. Turner Collection, Peacham Historical Association, courtesy of Lynn A. Bonfield.

⁵⁴ Peck, *Revised Roster of Vermont Volunteers*. Statistics from the towns of Barre, Berlin, Cabot, Calais, Duxbury, East Montpelier, Fayston, Marshfield, Middlesex, Montpelier, Moretown, Northfield, Plainfield, Roxbury, Waitsfield, Warren, Waterbury, Woodbury, and Worcester. Montpelier, Northfield, Waterbury, and Barre had the greatest number of soldiers. Northfield had the highest number of deaths, 51 from disease, 13 from battle. Only Fayston, Duxbury, and Woodbury have more men interred in home cemeteries than elsewhere.

⁵⁵ www.vermontcivilwar.org/rr.php. Revised rosters combined with the Barry Report by town.

⁵⁶ Knight, *No Braver Deeds*, 155.

⁵⁷ Ralph Orson Sturtevant and Carmi Lathrop Marsh, *Historical and Biographical History of the 13th Regiment Vermont Volunteers* (Albany, N.Y.: Albany Engraving Company, 1910), 708.

⁵⁸ Doug Marsh Collection. <http://vermontcivilwar.org/units/13/church1.php>. Letter undated.

⁵⁹ Sturtevant, *History of the 13th*, 708.

⁶⁰ www.vermontcivilwar.org. Several lists are available at this web site including the Barry Report. It should be noted that the Rosters, printed in 1892, lists only 38 Vermonters buried there. The Vermont burial records do not distinguish between actual grave markers and those that may be cenotaphs. Several lists of Gettysburg casualties also vary between 87 and 93 killed. Therefore, this comparison is to be understood as only an estimate.

⁶¹ J. David Book, *It Is Sweet and Honorable to Die for the Fatherland* (Newport, Vt.: Vermont Civil War Enterprises, 2007), 132–135. Thirteen men from Cabot are “unknowns.”

⁶² J. David Book, *Civil War Warriors from Worcester* (Worcester, Vt.: Worcester Historical Society, 2008), 58.

⁶³ Rosenblatt, *Hard Marching*, 357.

⁶⁴ David Faris Cross, *A Melancholy Affair at the Weldon Railroad* (Shippensburg, Pa.: White Mane Publishing, 2003). This annotated treatment of a sad chapter in Vermont’s Civil War service is definitively chronicled by Cross, supplying helpful appendices and brief biographical material about all involved.

⁶⁵ *The Caledonian*, 22 July 1864.

⁶⁶ Morrill’s Bible is owned by Susan C. Walbridge, Montpelier, Vermont. Used by permission.

⁶⁷ Peck, *Revised Roster of Vermont Volunteers*, 437.

⁶⁸ On April 8–9, 1865, the armies of Lee and Grant battled at Appomattox Courthouse. There were an estimated 500 casualties. On the grounds of the National Historical Park is a cemetery where nineteen soldiers are purported to be buried, eleven of them unknown. According to park historians (Patrick A. Schroeder, *The Confederate Cemetery at Appomattox*, 1999) at least one of the unknowns was a Union soldier.

⁶⁹ J.S. Roberts in Washington, D.C., to Abel Morrill, Cabot, Vt., 20 March, 1866. Letter is owned by Susan C. Walbridge, Montpelier, Vermont. Used by permission.

⁷⁰ Coffin, *Battered Stars*, 380.

⁷¹ Palmer, *Second Brigade History*, Chapter 8.

⁷² Wickman, *Letters to Vermont*, 1: 15–16. Underwood was the first death among Vermont troops and died of measles. Roswell Farnham, historian of the 1st Vermont Infantry Regiment commented on Underwood: “His remains still lie in the little cemetery on the shores of the Chesapeake Bay, where his comrades discharged the last volleys over his grave.” *1st Vermont Infantry Regiment History*, www.vermontcivilwar.org. Only six soldiers died from this 90-day regiment; four from disease, one by accident, and one killed in action. Peck, *Revised Roster*, 26.

- ⁷³ Rosenblatt, *Hard Marching*, 183.
- ⁷⁴ Feidner, *Civil War Letters of Chester K. Leach*, 81.
- ⁷⁵ Coffin, *Battered Stars*, 347.
- ⁷⁶ Knight, *No Braver Deeds*, 233.
- ⁷⁷ *Caledonian*, 26 December 1862.
- ⁷⁸ Wickman, *Letters to Vermont*, 1: 202–203.
- ⁷⁹ Peck, *Revised Roster of Vermont Volunteers*, 340.
- ⁸⁰ *Burlington Free Press*, 30 March 1864.
- ⁸¹ Faust, *This Republic of Suffering*, 148.
- ⁸² George G. Benedict, *Vermont in the Civil War* (Burlington: Free Press Association, 1888), 2: #225. Benedict cites the wearing of such garb by the officers of 9th Regiment upon the death of Major Charles Jarvis.
- ⁸³ *Cabot Advertiser*, 2 September 1868. Available at Cabot Historical Society Museum.
- ⁸⁴ Faust, *This Republic of Suffering*, 146–156. Faust outlines the various components of mourning fashion.
- ⁸⁵ Erastus Scott, Civil War Letters, University of Vermont Special Collection, Bailey/Howe Library, Burlington. Letter dated June 2, 1864. Scott had been felled on May 12 in the vicious fighting at Spotsylvania's Bloody Angle.
- ⁸⁶ William Henry Herrick Collection, Journals, Volume 2, Fairbanks Museum, St. Johnsbury, Vermont.
- ⁸⁷ *Ibid.*
- ⁸⁸ *Ibid.*
- ⁸⁹ Fred B. Blodgett, "History of My Generation in Cabot, Vermont, 1874–1951." Unpublished manuscript, Cabot Historical Society. "About the year 1895, a Miss Mary Lance, who since the days of the Civil War had lived the life of a recluse, left the Methodist church the sum of \$1000, as a memorial, for the purchase of a pipe organ. I may as well here, as anywhere, relate the story of Miss Lance. It seems she was engaged to a young soldier by the name of Morrill, whose name appears on the Cabot monument, I think as Capt. Morrill and for whom the G.A.R. Post in Cabot was named. He died, or was killed in the war, and from that time on Miss Lance rarely, and I think I am correct in saying, never was seen in public afterward. She lived and died in the large white house back of the gristmill dam now owned and occupied by Mrs. Earl J. Rogers A picture of Miss Lance now hangs in the gallery of the United church."
- ⁹⁰ Eisenschiml, *Vermont General*, 216.
- ⁹¹ John Bodnar, *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the 20th Century* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992), 15.
- ⁹² www.vermontcivilwar.org. See listing for all the posts in the state and a history of the GAR in Vermont by following the Grand Army of the Republic on the website map.
- ⁹³ Book, *Civil War Warriors from Worcester*, 33–35.
- ⁹⁴ *Laws of Vermont, 1863*, 6.
- ⁹⁵ David G. Rous, "The Soldiers Monument: Civil War Commemoration in Vermont, 1866–1924" (Master's Thesis, University of Vermont, 2000), 5.
- ⁹⁶ Jaclyn Levesque, "Grief or Celebration: Reading Vermont Civil War Monuments and their Commemoration Ceremonies," Thesis, Lyndon State College, December, 2008. The author examines eight Civil War monuments using these criteria: "The first question asked whether the monuments and ceremonies tended to celebrate triumph for the end of the War, or if they tended to express grief for the loss of loved ones and the community. The following question I used looked at whether the monuments and ceremonies changed over time, and if change did occur, what exactly did change." See also Anne Lawless, "Save Outdoor Sculpture! Records, 1992–93," *Vermont History* 62(1994): 166–182, for a thorough report on efforts to document 242 outdoor sculptures in Vermont, including many Civil War monuments, as part of a nationwide survey.
- ⁹⁷ Mary C. Morrison and Lynn A. Bonfield, "The Peacham War Monument," *The Peacham Patriot*, May 1996. The authors suggest that a possible reason for the refusal to fund the memorial was the high cost of paid bounties to the volunteers. \$28,668.72 was paid to eighty-five Peacham volunteers.
- ⁹⁸ Daniel Robbins, *The Vermont State House: A History and Guide* (Montpelier: Vermont Council on the Arts, 1980), 69.
- ⁹⁹ Mary Greene Nye, *Vermont's State House* (Montpelier: Vermont Publicity Service, 1936), 35. Nye lists each flag in the collection by regiment.
- ¹⁰⁰ Adjutant and Inspector General's Report, 1865, 24–25.
- ¹⁰¹ Nye, *Vermont's State House*, 22.
- ¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 29.
- ¹⁰³ Robert J. Titterton, *Julian Scott: Artist of the Civil War and Native America* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Company, 1997). A Vermont author, Titterton gives a detailed account of this amazing work of art.

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¹⁰⁴ Nye, *Vermont's State House*, 70.

¹⁰⁵ Robbins, *The Vermont State House: A History and Guide*, 61.

¹⁰⁶ Nye, *Vermont's State House*, 39–45. Nye records the wording of each plaque.

¹⁰⁷ Robbins, *Vermont State House*, 127.

¹⁰⁸ Coffin, *Full Duty*, 359.

¹⁰⁹ Susan-Mary Grant, "Patriot Graves: American National Identity and the Civil War Dead," *American Nineteenth Century History* (2004), 74–100. See also Garry Wills, *Lincoln at Gettysburg* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992), for analysis of the "rural cemetery" movement and its affect on the development of the national cemetery system, especially Gettysburg. Chapter 3, "Gettysburg and the Culture of Death," 63–89, is particularly insightful.

¹¹⁰ Stephen R. Whalen, "Everything is the Same: The Civil War Homefront in Rural Vermont," (Unpublished doctoral dissertation, The University of Maine, 1999), 325. Dr. Whalen argues that "the Civil War deaths of one and one-half percent of the population were not a great burden to Vermont society in the 1860s."

¹¹¹ *Caledonian*, 19 August 1864.