VERMONT IN THE CIVIL WAR

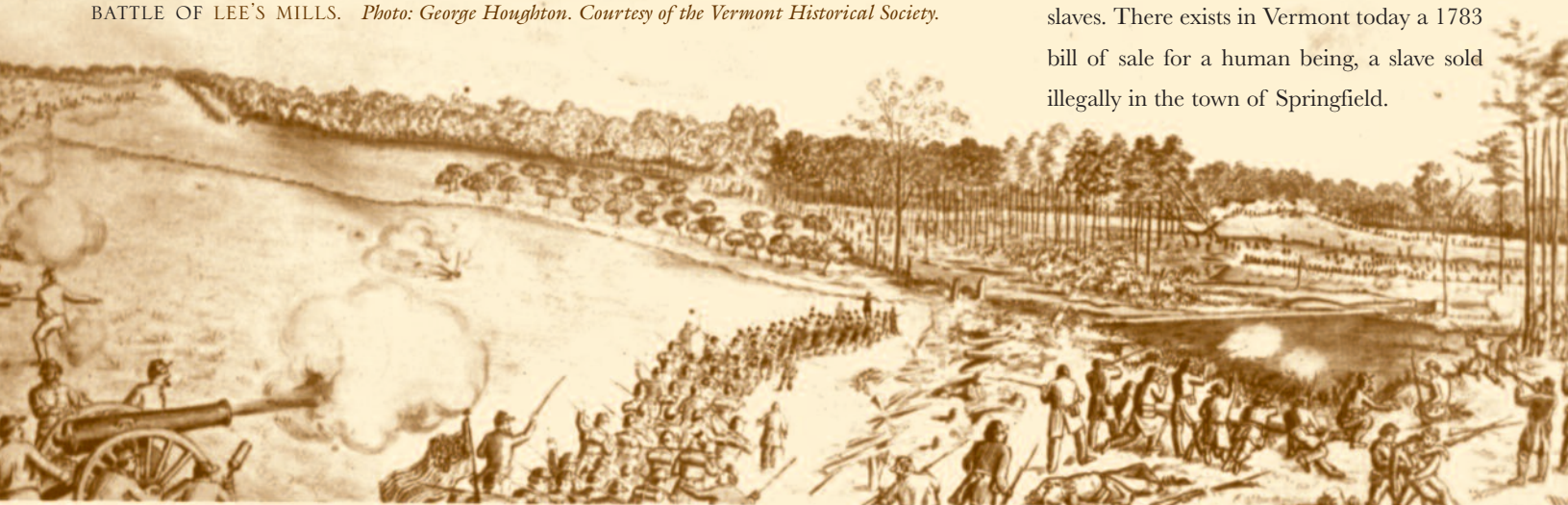
HOWARD COFFIN

VERMONT

"... all men are born free and independent and have natural, inherent, and inalienable rights."

was born with this statement of human freedom: "…all men are born free and independent and have natural, inherent, and inalienable rights." So said delegates from the land between New York and the Connecticut River who met at a Windsor tavern in July 1777 to form an independent republic called Vermont. They wrote and approved a document containing the above words that became the first Constitution in America to outlaw slavery. If it only freed men 18 and older, and women over 21, still it was a significant step forward. And there were, indeed, people to be freed in Vermont at that time, for a few Vermonters did hold slaves. There exists in Vermont today a 1783 bill of sale for a human being, a slave sold illegally in the town of Springfield.

BATTLE OF LEE'S MILLS. *Photo: George Houghton. Courtesy of the Vermont Historical Society.*



VERMONT BECAME THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA'S FOURTEENTH STATE IN 1791, 14 YEARS AFTER THE WINDSOR CONVENTION, AND IN SUBSEQUENT YEARS ITS REPUTATION AS AN UPHOLDER OF HUMAN FREEDOM WAS ENHANCED.

The state's strong opposition to the national fugitive slave laws was emphasized by Vermont Judge Theophilus Harrington who declared in 1836, when asked to order a slave returned to its owner, that he would accept nothing less than "a bill of sale from God almighty." The Underground Railroad operated in Vermont as escaped slaves, probably by the hundreds, made their secret way to freedom through the state. Anti-slavery societies were established throughout Vermont and major figures of the abolition movement, including Frederick Douglass and William Lloyd Garrison, came here to speak. In Bennington, for a few months in 1828, Garrison published an anti-slavery newspaper The Journal of the Times.

Still, as civil war neared, like most northern states Vermont was poorly prepared militarily. In the summer of 1860, when the governor ordered a militia muster at Montpelier, only 900 men appeared. And the state listed as its military property just 957 aged muskets, six cannon, and 503 old Colt revolvers.

Abraham Lincoln took office as the nation's 16th president in 1861 after defeating Democratic U. S. Senator Stephen Douglas, of Illinois. Though Douglas was born and raised in Brandon, Vermonters voted 5-1 for Lincoln, candidate of the new Republican Party that opposed the expansion of slavery.

With southern slave-holding states seceding from the Union in response to the Republican victory, war broke out on April 12, 1861, when Rebel cannon fired on federal Fort Sumter in the harbor of Charleston, S. C. President Lincoln immediately sent a telegram to Vermont Gov. Erastus Fairbanks inquiring as to what the national government might expect of Vermont. Fairbanks replied that Vermont would do its "full duty," and called the state Legislature to Montpelier for a special session at the new State House, completed in 1859. On April 23, 1861, Fairbanks asked legislators to appropriate a half million dollars for a state war effort saying, "The United States government must be sustained and the rebellion suppressed." After brief deliberations, lawmakers doubled the war appropriation to a full one million dollars.

Primarily to protect Washington, Abraham Lincoln quickly called on the country for 75,000 soldiers. Vermont responded by sending south the First Vermont Regiment, 782 men who took pride in attaching a hemlock sprig to their caps in remembrance of the Green Mountain Boys of the American Revolution. The regiment served for just 90 days and got in just one fight, the war's first

FIRST VERMONT REGIMENT CAMP IN BRATTLEBORO. *Photo: George Houghton. Courtesy of the Vermont Historical Society.*

battle, fought at Big Bethel on the Virginia Peninsula. The 500 Vermonters engaged, led by Lt. Col. Peter Washburn of Woodstock, were the only Union soldiers to cross a stream behind which the Confederates entrenched. Still, Big Bethel was a Rebel victory.

Soon the Second Vermont Regiment was sent to the war zone, enlisted for three years as part of the Army of the Potomac, the largest of all Union armies. On July 21 the regiment fought in the first major battle of the Civil War, along a stream called Bull Run some 25 miles southwest of Washington. The Vermonters were briefly in action, on Chinn Ridge at the exposed right end of the long Union battle line. The Vermonters took casualties, among them Pvt. Urban Woodbury, later elected governor, the first Vermonter to lose a limb. The

regiment stood firm under fire until ordered to retreat as the Union line gave way.

Soon joining the Army of the Potomac, commanded by George Brinton McClellan, were the Third, Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth Vermont Regiments, and the First Vermont Cavalry Regiment. The four new infantry regiments, along with the Second Vermont, were formed into the First Vermont Brigade, a favor granted against War Department policy by General McClellan to an old friend, Brig. Gen. William Farrar "Baldy" Smith, brigade commander. The "Old Brigade," as it became known, was the only Union brigade composed entirely of men from one state to serve throughout the war, and it was made part of the Army of the Potomac's Sixth Corps.

One member of the brigade, William Scott of Groton and the Third Vermont, soon became the most famous private in the Union armies when he was arrested and sentenced to death for having been found asleep at his sentry post near Washington. The "Sleeping Sentinel" was spared execution by firing squad at the last minute, with Abraham Lincoln's help.

The Vermont Brigade spent the war's first winter at Camp Griffin, just south of the Potomac River, part of a vast Union encampment. Vermonters there took sick en masse with hundreds dying, probably because country boys lacked immunities to many of the diseases to which city boys had much earlier been exposed.

CAMP OF THIRD VERMONT VOLUNTEERS AT CAMP GRIFFIN
Photo: George Houghton. Courtesy of the Vermont Historical Society

4 GENERAL MCCLELLAN'S HEADQUARTERS ON THE DAY OF THE BATTLE AT LEE'S MILLS.

Photo: George Houghton. Courtesy of the Vermont Historical Society

In April, General McClellan finally moved his 100,000 man army by ship to the Peninsula of Virginia, planning to move against the Confederate capital of Richmond from the south and east. The Vermont Brigade suffered its first heavy casualties in a skirmish at Lee's Mills on April 26. The Vermonters were ordered by McClellan to wade the dammed Warwick River and attack Confederate entrenchments on the far side. The Vermonters, led by Col. Samuel Pingree, did as told, captured some earthworks, but unsupported and with Rebel reinforcements arriving were forced to retreat. "The water fairly boiled around us with bullets," a Vermont soldier wrote, as the brigade suffered 44 dead and 148 wounded. Among the slain was the famous Sleeping Sentinel. Musician Julian Scott, 16, who crossed and recrossed the Warwick to bring back wounded was later awarded a Medal of Honor.

At Savage Station on June 29, the Fifth Vermont took the heaviest losses of any Vermont regiment in a single day of the war moving across an open field against Confederates supported by artillery. The Equinox Guards, a company from Manchester, was decimated and among the dead were four brothers and a brother-in-law of the Cummings family. Another brother died years later, apparently of wounds sustained that same day. Probably no other family North or South suffered such a loss in the Civil War. Vermonters fought well at White Oak Swamp protecting the Union retreat down the Peninsula retreating from heavy attacks directed by Robert E. Lee. When the army finally came to rest at Harrison's Landing, it was discovered that 12 year old Willie Johnson of St. Johnsbury was the only drummer boy in an entire division to come through the campaign with his drum. Secretary of War Edwin Stanton awarded Johnson a Medal of Honor.

Meanwhile, back home, Frederick Holbrook of Brattleboro had taken office as Vermont's second Civil War governor. Holbrook promptly asked the War Department in Washington for permission to open soldier hospitals in Vermont, believing that sick and wounded soldiers would recuperate best back at home. After months of discussions, Holbrook won permission to build a medical facility, the Sloan Hospital, on a hilltop overlooking Montpelier, and another on the drill field outside Brattleboro where many Vermont regiments assembled. He was also permitted to expand the federal military hospital at Burlington. Later in the war, all three facilities were filled to capacity with wounded soldiers.

Also at home, the Legislature elected Peter Washburn, veteran of Big Bethel, as adjutant general. Washburn promptly set up offices in his home town, making Woodstock the administrative center of the Vermont war effort--in effect the Pentagon of Vermont.

▲ SLOAN GENERAL HOSPITAL, MONTPELIER *Location: on a site known as the fair grounds, one mile east of the state house. Operated June - December, 1865; treated 1,670 patients 8,574 total number of patients; only 175 died while under treatment.*

▶ BURLINGTON HOSPITAL *Baxter General Hospital: treated 2,406 patients; operated between May 1862 - July 1865 Location: 2 miles south of Burlington on Shelburne Road. Became home for destitute children.*

▶ BRATTLEBORO HOSPITAL: *U.S. General Hospital; Location: at campgrounds and barracks buildings in Brattleboro. Site now occupied by Brattleboro High School. 4,402 patients–operated between June 1, 1863 - October 5, 1865.*

Hospital Info: Michael Sherman, Gene Sessions, and P. Jeffrey Potash, Freedom and Unity: A History of Vermont. 262 - 267.

MARY COLLAMER, HEADING UP THE WOMEN'S EFFORTS TO HELP WITH THE WAR.
Courtesy of Howard Coffin.

Though Vermont generally retained a look of peace, the war was having an increasing impact on the people at home. Soldier funerals were becoming frequent occurrences, and the trains from the front were bringing more and more sick and wounded soldiers. The women of Vermont organized in most towns to sew and knit items for the loved ones at war. As holidays approached, large boxes containing turkeys, maple sugar, and other treats were shipped south. Woolen mills produced blankets, uniforms, and other items for the army. A factory in Windsor manufactured thousands of rifle-muskets, using a pioneering precision manufacturing process. With many able-bodied men at war, women, young people, and the elderly operated the state's 30,000 farms. Some women also went to work in factories. "Vermont women enlisted for the duration," a Vermont historian later wrote.

AS WASHINGTON ISSUED STILL MORE CALLS FOR TROOPS, GOVERNOR HOLBROOK SOON ORDERED THE SEVENTH, EIGHTH, NINTH, TENTH, AND ELEVENTH VERMONT REGIMENTS FORMED. The Seventh and Eighth made a long sea voyage around the tip of Florida to join Benjamin Butler's forces that had captured New Orleans. At his headquarters near that city, Col. John Phelps, of Brattleboro, insisted that black men be taken into the Union armies saying, "They might become a beneficent element of governmental power." Butler refused to back Phelps, who resigned in disgust. The Seventh Regiment was sent to Florida, for unpleasant duty at hot Fort Barancas, after Butler unfairly accused it of cowardice at the Battle of Baton Rouge. The Eighth Vermont, commanded by Col. Stephen Thomas of West Fairlee, had several skirmishes with rebels in the bayou country of Louisiana. In one, Thomas steadied his men with the words, "Stand firm. Old Vermont is looking at you." The regiment soon joined the Union assault on Fort Hudson, a prominent Rebel fortification along the Mississippi River south of Vicksburg.

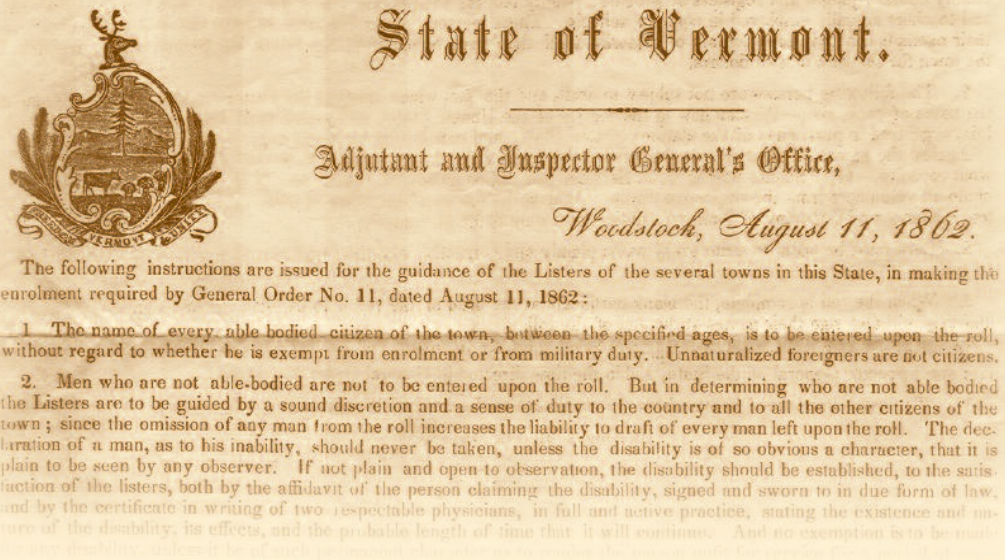
The Ninth Vermont, under Col. George Stannard, was forced to surrender en masse at Harper's Ferry, on September 15, 1862, just prior to the Battle of Antietam. The Ninth spent the winter in a prison camp near Chicago, until an exchange was arranged for a like number of Confederate prisoners and the regiment was returned to service. The Vermont Brigade fought at South Mountain on September 14, 1862, helping clear the way for the Army of the Potomac to converge in front of Lee's army gathering along Antietam Creek near

STEPHEN THOMAS OF WEST FAIRLEE.
Courtesy of Howard Coffin

Sharpsburg, Maryland. On Sept. 17, the bloodiest single day of the war, the brigade fought only briefly in the Battle of Antietam. That Union victory prompted Lincoln to issue his Emancipation Proclamation that declared all slaves in the seceded states free.

The Tenth Vermont Regiment, like the Vermont Brigade, became part of the Army of the Potomac's Sixth Corps. The 1,500 man Eleventh Vermont, the largest regiment the state sent to war, became an artillery unit assigned to the defenses of Washington, manning forts north of the city. The First Vermont Cavalry, the state's only cavalry unit, saw extensive action early in the war. The Regiment did battle with Stonewall Jackson's Confederate horsemen in the Shenandoah Valley, then fought the guerilla cavalry of John Singleton Mosby in the countryside south and west of Washington.

Fighting in 1862 ended with the bloody Union repulse at Fredericksburg, Va., along the Rappahannock River. The Vermont Brigade missed the suicidal day-long attacks launched against Confederate-held Marye's Heights and the Sunken Road, but still took more than 150 casualties fighting south of the city. The battered Army of the Potomac then went into winter camp at Falmouth, across the Rappahannock from Fredericksburg, with pickets in clear sight of Rebel soldiers on the river's south bank. Through the cold months, soldiers from both sides sometimes crossed the water to converse and swap coffee, tobacco, and other prized soldier items.



State of Vermont.

Adjutant and Inspector General's Office,

Woodstock, August 11, 1862.

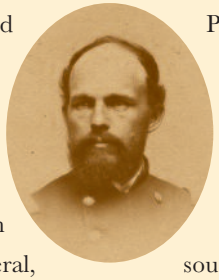
The following instructions are issued for the guidance of the Listers of the several towns in this State, in making the enrolment required by General Order No. 11, dated August 11, 1862:

1. The name of every able bodied citizen of the town, between the specified ages, is to be entered upon the roll, without regard to whether he is exempt from enrolment or from military duty. Unnaturalized foreigners are not citizens.

2. Men who are not able-bodied are not to be entered upon the roll. But in determining who are not able bodied the Listers are to be guided by a sound discretion and a sense of duty to the country and to all the other citizens of the town; since the omission of any man from the roll increases the liability to draft of every man left upon the roll. The declaration of a man, as to his inability, should never be taken, unless the disability is of so obvious a character, that it is plain to be seen by any observer. If not plain and open to observation, the disability should be established, to the satisfaction of the listers, both by the affidavit of the person claiming the disability, signed and sworn to in due form of law, and by the certificate in writing of two respectable physicians, in full and active practice, stating the existence and nature of the disability, its effects, and the probable length of time that it will continue. And no exemption is to be made

IN THE SUMMER OF 1862, NEEDING MORE TROOPS, PRESIDENT LINCOLN had called on the states to furnish his armies with 300,000 soldiers to serve for just nine months. Vermont's quota was set at 4,898 men to fill the new Twelfth, Thirteenth, Fourteenth, Fifteenth, and Sixteenth Vermont regiments. Those five units constituted the Second Vermont Brigade, whose command was given to dashing and careless Edwin Stoughton of Bellows Falls, the youngest brigadier general in the Union armies. The Vermonters went south in October and spent the winter patrolling the outer defenses of Washington, in northern Virginia. Their generally quiet winter was interrupted on the night of March 8 when Confederates, disguised as Union soldiers, rode into the village of Fairfax Court House where Stoughton had his headquarters well

away from his brigade's main lines. John Mosby, the famed guerilla, entered Stoughton's second floor bedroom and spirited the sleepy young general away into the night as a prisoner of war. Upon being told, Lincoln said in disgust, "I can always make another brigadier general, but I sure hate to lose all those horses." To the Second Brigade as commander soon came the quiet, competent Brig. Gen. George Stannard *(inset)*, formerly of the Ninth Vermont.



Fighting in the spring of 1863 began at Chancellorsville, when the new Army of the Potomac commander Joseph Hooker marched up the Rappahannock intent on outmaneuvering Robert E. Lee. In the resulting fierce fighting, Lee and Stonewall Jackson routed the Union army and sent it in retreat across the river. The Vermont Brigade made an heroic stand to protect the retreat of the Sixth Corps. Lee promptly set his victorious army in motion, marching for the northern states. The Army of the Potomac, placed under the command of Maj. Gen. George Meade, moved north keeping between the Rebels and Washington.

Lee marched all the way into southern Pennsylvania with the inevitable collision coming on July 1 just outside the town of Gettysburg where many roads met. At the end of the first day's fighting, the Army of the Potomac was forced back to the high ground of Culp's Hill, Cemetery Hill, and Cemetery Ridge south of the town. The Second Vermont Brigade, now a part of the army's First Corps, reached the field the evening of July 1after a six day march of 120 miles. Nearing Gettysburg, two of the brigade's five regiments were ordered to guard wagon trains, depriving Stannard of two-fifths of his fighting force. On July 2, the Confederates attacked from the south, along the Emmitsburg Road. The presence of Rebel troops facing the southern end of the fish hook-shaped Union line had been discovered just before the assault by Union sharpshooters, including Vermonters. The Green Mountain State sent three sharpshooter companies to the Union armies, having more marksmen in the federal ranks per capita than any other state. When the fighting began in late afternoon, the Vermont long riflemen in their green uniforms played a key role in slowing the initial Rebel onslaught.

Fighting erupted at Devil's Den, Little Round Top, the Wheat Field, and the Peach Orchard. At evening, the Confederates made a try at breaking the Union line on Cemetery Ridge. Stannard's undermanned Second Vermont Brigade was called into action atop the ridge, from which it advanced to recapture a Union battery. Then Co. A of the 13th Vermont went forward to make prisoners of 80 Confederate soldiers firing from a house along the Emmitsburg Road.

CONFEDERATES, DISGUISED AS UNION SOLDIERS, RODE INTO THE VILLAGE OF FAIRFAX COURT HOUSE WHERE STOUGHTON HAD HIS HEADQUARTERS. JOHN MOSBY, THE FAMED GUERILLA, SPIRITED THE YOUNG GENERAL AWAY AS A PRISONER OF WAR. UPON BEING TOLD, LINCOLN SAID IN DISGUST, "I CAN ALWAYS MAKE ANOTHER BRIGADIER GENERAL, BUT I SURE HATE TO LOSE ALL THOSE HORSES."

INSET: GEORGE J. STANNARD. *Courtesy of the Vermont Historical Society*

July 3, 1863 became the most famous day in all the Civil War. At 3 p. m. that afternoon Lee attacked the Union line's center, aiming for a breakthrough at the now-famous Clump of Trees on Cemetery Ridge. After a two hour artillery barrage, some 13,000 Rebel infantrymen moved across the valley from Seminary Ridge in what history would know as Pickett's Charge. As the mile-wide assault neared Union lines, its southern end bore directly in on the three regiments of the Second Vermont Brigade. As the Vermonters rose to fire, the attack suddenly swung north, crossing the Vermonters' front. In minutes, the Confederates were converging on the Clump of Trees. Recognizing a golden opportunity, and leaving his 14th Regiment in place facing to the front, Stannard ordered the 13th Vermont and 16th Vermont to attack the Rebel assault from the south. Obeying his order to "change front forward on first company," the two regiments' 900 men swung out from Cemetery Ridge like a great door to face the exposed Rebel right flank. The Vermonters each fired about a dozen rounds, inflicting heavy losses as they moved ever closer to their nearly defenseless foes. The flank of Pickett's charge was crumpled. As his men rounded up prisoners, 16th Vermont commander Col. Wheelock Veazey noticed a second Confederate attack advancing, toward the 14th Vermont. Veazey realigned his regiment, pivoted it 180 degrees to face south, and struck the 1,500 Confederates in the flank. The second attack was routed. By 4 p. m. Lee's final try for victory at Gettysburg had ended in a bloody repulse. Later, the Confederates said it was the unexpected fire from the right that did them in.

Near Round Top after the repulse of Pickett's Charge, Brig. Gen. Judson Kilpatrick ordered a cavalry attack on the southern end of the Confederate line. Despite protests from subordinates that the venture was suicidal, it went forward with Maj. William Wells of Waterbury one of its leaders. Some 300 members of the First Vermont Cavalry were among the blue-clad horsemen who briefly broke through Rebel lines, with the Vermonters losing 60 men before returning to safety. The attack accomplished nothing.

MOTT'S BATTERY IN POSITION. *Photo: George Houghton. Courtesy of the Vermont Historical Society.*

Azariah Grant from a page in the notebook of Dr. Henry Janes.
From the University of Vermont, Special Collections.

The Second Vermont Brigade, its nine months enlistments having expired days after the battle, returned to Vermont and a heroes' welcome. Also present at Gettysburg had been the First Vermont Brigade, having arrived at evening after the second day's fighting. The brigade had led the Sixth Corps' long march from Northern Virginia to Gettysburg, covering more than 30 miles on the final day in sweltering southern Pennsylvania summer heat. Hastening the brigade toward the battlefield, Sixth Corps Commander John Sedgwick gave his famous command, "Put the Vermonters in the lead and keep the column well closed." On the field, the Old Brigade was assigned to protect the southern end of the Union line, behind Round Top. The brigade did not fight at Gettysburg.

In the aftermath of the Civil War's most costly battle, more than 25,000 wounded Union and Confederate soldiers lay on the bloody Gettysburg field. Assigned to supervise their care was Maj. Henry Janes, of Waterbury, an experienced army surgeon. Janes had gained a medical reputation for his reluctance to amputate wounded limbs, a common Civil War practice. Janes ably handled the most challenging medical assignment ever given an American surgeon, treating both Union and Confederate casualties. On November 17, 1863 when Abraham Lincoln dedicated the national cemetery at Gettysburg, Janes was honored by being one of the dignitaries who shared the speakers' platform with the president. Thus, he heard Lincoln's Gettysburg Address.

On the Fourth of July, 1863, a day after Gettysburg ended, along the Mississippi River another major Union triumph was achieved as Confederates manning fortified Vicksburg surrendered to Ulysses Grant. Then on July 7, the final major Confederate stronghold along the big river was forced to surrender. The 8th Vermont Regiment had been part of the besieging army that finally forced the capitulation of Port Hudson. Hearing the news that the Mississippi fortifications had fallen, Abraham Lincoln said, "The father of waters once again flows unvexed to the sea."

The Army of the Potomac camped the winter of 1863-1864 at Brandy Station, along the upper Rappahannock in northern Virginia. While that army rested, far to the south, in Florida, a vicious little battle took place on February 20 near the railroad town of Olustee. One of the regiments involved

was the famed 54th Massachusetts, made up of black troops, that had been organized and commanded by Col. Robert Gould Shaw. Vermont troops were in the 54th's ranks at Olustee as the regiment fought well in protecting the Union retreat after a Confederate victory. Not until 1863, when Congress authorized the use of black troops in the federal armies, were black regiments formed. Eventually, 200,000 African American men served in the Union armies. In his book on Vermont Afro-Americans in the Civil War, James Fuller states that 152 black Vermonters wore Union blue, out of a black population of 709. Thus, a far higher percentage of black men served in the Union armies from Vermont than did white men.

In March, 1864, Lieutenant General Grant arrived at Brandy Station, having been appointed by Lincoln as commander of all the Union armies. Grant said he would make his headquarters with the Army of the Potomac, led by Gettysburg victor George Meade.

Grant began his spring offensive in the darkness of May 4, moving south against Lee's Army of Northern Virginia and bound for the Confederate capital of Richmond. The clash came south of the Rapidan River as Lee struck the long federal columns in a jungle-like area known as the Wilderness. At mid-day on May 5 Grant learned that the vital intersection of the Orange Plank Road and the Brock Road was undefended. To prevent his army from being cut in two, Grant rushed the 6,000 man Sixth Corps division of Brig. Gen. George Washington Getty to the point of danger, a division that included the 2,800 men of the Old Brigade, now commanded by Brig. Gen. Lewis Grant. Getty's men arrived just in time, stopping a Confederate advance that had come within yards of the intersection. At 4 o'clock orders came for Getty's command to advance. The Vermont Brigade moved west on the south side of the Plank Road, entering the thick greenery of the Wilderness. Within moments a massive volley exploded from a hidden Rebel battle line that, Lewis Grant said, killed hundreds

CAMP OF THE 4TH VERMONT BAND. *Photo: George Houghton. Courtesy of the Vermont Historical Society.*

NOT UNTIL 1863, WHEN CONGRESS AUTHORIZED THE USE OF BLACK TROOPS IN THE FEDERAL ARMIES, WERE BLACK REGIMENTS FORMED. EVENTUALLY, 200,000 AFRICAN AMERICAN MEN SERVED IN THE UNION ARMIES

"He is dead I shall never see him again. Oh I cannot have it so all my hopes in life are o'er."

Margaret Scott, from a letter to her sister Harriet upon hearing the fate of her husband, Erastus Scott at Spotsylvania

of his men. The fighting went on into the darkness, with the Vermonters losing 1,000 men killed, wounded, or captured. Next morning, the Vermonters were part of a heavy Union attack that drove the Confederates nearly a mile. The advanced position was held until Vermont soldiers saw Rebels moving behind them, part of a surprise flank attack launched by Confederate Maj. Gen. James Longstreet. The Vermonters withdrew to entrenchments along the Brock Road, where they helped fight off repeated assaults. At the end the two day Battle of the Wilderness the Old Brigade had suffered 1,234 casualties. But Grant's battered army remained intact.

The fighting then moved south to Spotsylvania Court House where Grant's army faced entrenched Confederates. The Vermont Brigade was part of the 4,000 man "Upton's Attack" on May 10 that briefly broke the Confederate lines. Then on May 12 Grant launched a massive assault on a seemingly vulnerable portion of the Rebel works known as the Mule Shoe Salient. The result was the 24-hour Battle of the Bloody Angle with the two huge armies fighting in a pouring rain, in places separated only by a line of earthworks. Some Vermont soldiers were seen to stand atop those earthworks and fire down into the Rebel lines until they, themselves, fell. The brutal, indecisive fighting at Spotsylvania cost Vermont another 350 casualties.

Grant sent his 8,000 wounded, a thousand of whom were Vermonters, into the battered Confederate town of Fredericksburg, already the scene of two battles. Virtually every building in the town became a Union hospital. On learning that 1,000 wounded Vermonters were at Fredericksburg, Vermont Governor John Gregory Smith rounded up 15 Vermont doctors and arrived in Fredericksburg within days. Smith himself worked as a nurse with the physicians who, a Vermonter said, "came like angels of mercy."

Word of the heavily casualties of the Overland Campaign began to reach Vermont by mid-May. Soon newspaper front pages were filled with the names of dead and wounded Vermont soldiers. On receiving word of the death at Spotsylvania of her husband Pvt. Erastus Scott of Cabot, Margaret Scott began a letter to her sister Harriet: "He is dead I shall never see him again. Oh I cannot have it so all my hopes in life are o'er."

In Woodstock, the local paper noted that the daily arrival of the mail was being greeted by an increasing number of rowdy boys, who climbed on the mail coach, or asked pennies and candies as rewards from the driver for their help in delivering packages. Obviously, with fathers away at war, and mothers consequently even more busy, the youngsters were enjoying more freedom than they had ever known.

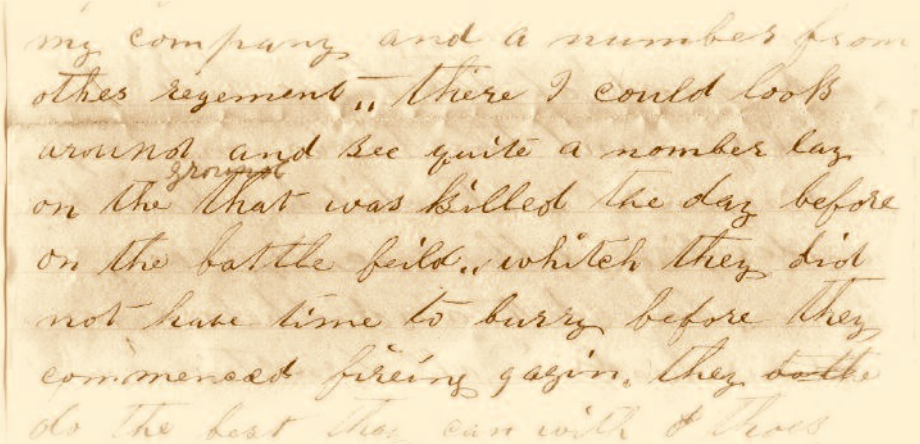
The relentless calls from Washington for more troops prompted more and more Vermont communities to organize war meetings, patriotic rallies usually held at the

town hall to encourage local men to enlist. Bands played and orators spoke of the great cause of the Union, and some of defeating slavery. In winter, heroes of the Vermont war effort came home to speak, including Vermont Brigade commander Lewis Grant and Col. Francis Randall, who had led the 13th Vermont at Gettysburg. To bring lads increasingly reluctant to face the slaughter in the South into the ranks, towns increased their enlistment bonus payments, called bounties. Some communities, which had offered recruits $50 or less as the war began, were now paying $500 and more.

AT THE FRONT, ULYSSES GRANT'S OVERLAND CAMPAIGN MOVED ON, TO THE North Anna River, then to the country crossroads of Cold Harbor just six miles from Richmond. Grant launched a preliminary attack there on June 1, to position his army. On June 3 he attacked along a six mile front, the result being a bloody repulse in which some 7,000 Union soldiers fell in minutes. After nearly two weeks of trench warfare, Grant in the night moved south, stealing a march on Lee. Crossing the James River by boat and pontoon bridge, Grant brought his army in on the vital railroad center of Petersburg, Virginia, 20 miles south of Richmond. But Grant failed to break the Petersburg lines, and a siege of that city began that would last nearly 10 months.

The campaign from the Wilderness to Petersburg, known as the "Overland Campaign," had produced more than 80,000 casualties in Lee's and Grant's armies. Some 3,000 were Vermont soldiers and the three military hospitals in the Green Mountain State quickly filled. But not all the suffering at home was a result of war. In Vergennes, along the Champlain Valley, people were dying of a typhoid epidemic. Still, life at home went on and in Rutland thousands of people turned out in the pouring rain to greet the famous entertainer Tom Thumb and his new bride. Fair time was approaching and though Vermont had sent hundreds of horses to the armies, the mounts on display at the Windsor County Fair in Woodstock were judged to be as fine as ever seen there.

On June 23, Grant sent the Sixth Corps to the west of Petersburg to hit one of the rail lines supplying the city. Lee met the attack in strength and, in the midst of the fighting along the Weldon Railroad, some 1,600 Union soldiers were cut off and captured. Among them were 401 Vermonters, most of whom ended up in the infamous Rebel prison at Andersonville, Georgia. More than half of them died within six months. On July 30, Grant tried a direct


my company and a number from
other regement, there I could look
around and see quite a nomber lay
on the ground that was killed the day before
on the battle field, which they did
not have time to burry before they
commenced fireing again, they do the
do the best they can with them

EXCERPT FROM A COLD HARBOR SOLDIER'S LETTER HOME. *Courtesy of Howard Coffin*

assault on the Petersburg lines as Pennsylvania soldiers tunneled under the Rebel works and exploded a massive charge of gunpowder. An assault directed at the gaping crater in the enemy lines failed after heavy fighting. The newest, smallest, and last Vermont regiment to join the Army of the Potomac, the 17th Vermont, was the only Vermont unit in the "Battle of the Crater," taking heavy casualties.

To relieve pressure on his Petersburg lines, Lee sent 15,000 men under Jubal Early west into the Shenandoah Valley. From there, Early moved down the valley in an attempt to invade Washington. He was met July 9 along the Monocacy River near Frederick, Md., by a hastily assembled force of 6,000 led by Maj. Gen. Lew Wallace that included Ricketts's Division of the Sixth Corps, rushed up from Petersburg. The 10th Vermont Regiment fought bravely in the Battle of the Monocacy, a hopeless attempt to stop Early's advance. A detachment of 10th Vermont skirmishers led by Capt. George Davis fought for several hours on the Rebel side of the river, finally running under fire across a high railroad bridge to Union lines. Later, a Vermont soldier described the final victorious Rebel assault: "The long swaying lines of grey in perfect cadence with glistening guns and brasses." Early was victorious, but the Battle of the Monocacy delayed his progress toward Washington a key full day.

As Early continued his advance, the bulk of the Sixth Corps, including the Vermont Brigade, was rushed to Washington. Abraham Lincoln was at the Potomac River docks when the Vermonters arrived and an officer apologized to the president because no high-raking officers were present to greet him. Lincoln said, "I did not come to see generals, I came to see the Vermont Brigade." In a brisk, brief fight at Fort Stevens, Early was turned away from the city's outskirts. Also sent to defend the capitol was the 19th Corps, just arrived from Louisiana and including the 8th Vermont Regiment. The Sixth and 19th corps were soon made part of a 35,000 army, led by Ulysses Grant's former cavalry commander Maj. Gen. Philip Sheridan, assigned the task of defeating Early's army in the Shenandoah Valley, the famed "Bread Basket of the Confederacy."

While Union and Confederate troops battled in the heat of another southern summer, to Manchester in southwestern Vermont in the summers of 1863 and 1864 came the nation's first lady, escaping the humid warmth of Washington. Mary Todd Lincoln both years rented rooms for several days at the Equinox House, with her son Robert, a Harvard student, along for company one year. Before she returned to the White House after her 1864 visit, Mrs. Lincoln made a reservation for the summer of 1865, for both herself and the president. In Bennington, a tower commanding a sweeping view was constructed atop Mount Anthony, as a lure to travelers. Summer visitors still came to Brattleboro in the summer

"I DID NOT COME TO SEE GENERALS, I CAME TO SEE THE VERMONT BRIGADE."

- Abraham Lincoln

months for the supposed curative powers of the local mineral springs, but the southerners who had visited before the war were absent, including Thomas Jonathan (Stonewall) Jackson and his wife Mary.

In the war zone, the first major fight of what would be known as Sheridan's "Valley Campaign" came at Winchester, Virginia on Sept. 21, 1864. After an hours-long stalemate, the right of the Union battle line began to drive the Confederates after Eighth Vermont commander Stephen Thomas personally led an attack. "Remember Ethan Allen and we'll drive them to hell," Thomas told his men, "Come on old Vermont." Thomas precipitated a major Union attack while Union cavalry, including the First Vermont Cavalry, swept down from the north. The battle known as Third Winchester became a resounding Union victory. Three days later Sheridan again defeated Early at Fisher's Hill, employing a surprise flank attack that spared the Vermonters but a few casualties in a frontal assault. The victorious federals pursued Early 50 miles up the Shenandoah Valley. On its return, the Union army burned the valley's farms, crops, and mills, finally coming to rest on high ground along Cedar Creek.

Jubal Early, though twice defeated, was soon sent reinforcements by Lee and in the predawn of October 19, 1864, advancing across Cedar Creek, he struck Sheridan's army a surprise blow. Sheridan was in Winchester, a dozen miles north, returning from a meeting in Washington when the assault hit. By 9 a. m. the Union army had been driven three miles, its retreat finally ending when the Vermont Brigade made an heroic stand on a ridge just outside the village of Middletown, Virginia. There three Confederate assaults were repulsed before the brigade withdrew to join the rest of the battered army on high ground still farther to the north. Sheridan reached the field in late morning after a 12 mile ride, rounding up stragglers and retreating soldiers along the way. He took several hours to realign his army. Then at 3 p. m. he launched a counterattack, with the Old Brigade near the center. The Eighth Vermont, which had suffered severe losses in attempting to slow the early morning attack, that afternoon became the first Union unit to break Early's battle line. When Confederate resistance stiffened, George Custer with 4,000 Union cavalry, including the Vermont regiment, swept down from the northwest to rout Early's forces.

SKETCH OF THE ST. ALBANS RAID.
Courtesy of the Vermont Historical Society

Cedar Creek was turned from a Rebel victory into a Union triumph that guaranteed Abraham Lincoln would be reelected president. Indeed, the victorious Union soldiers voted in the presidential election two weeks later in their camps amid the wreckage of the Battle of Cedar Creek.

On the day of that important Virginia battle, 600 miles away in Vermont the northernmost land action of the war took place. In the week preceding October 19, 20 Confederate soldiers wearing civilian clothes, escapees from northern military prisons, had quietly arrived in the railroad town of St. Albans, taking rooms at three hotels. Their leader, Kentuckian Bennett Young, passed himself off as a theology

RETURN OF THE 4TH VERMONT ON BRATTLEBORO'S MAIN STREET

Photo: George Houghton. Courtesy of the Vermont Historical Society

student, reading the Bible in his hotel lobby and taking long rides in the country. On the afternoon of Oct. 19, at the same time Sheridan was attacking at Cedar Creek, the 20 strangers emerged from their St. Albans hotels declaring themselves to be Confederates. Entering St. Albans's three banks with pistols drawn, they stole $208,000, escaping on stolen horses north along Main Street in a hail of gunfire. One raider was severely wounded and a civilian onlooker was killed. The raiders galloped into Canada, closely followed by a St. Albans posse. Several raiders were seized next morning by their pursuers in territory of the British Empire, but Canadian authorities took custody of the Rebels. The men eventually were tried in Montreal, but a judge refused to extradite them to the U. S. where they likely faced hanging. Abraham Lincoln feared the incident could draw Great Britain into the war on the Southern side. It did not.

The Petersburg siege dragged on through the winter, with Lee's and Grant's lines lengthening. Several tries by Grant to breach the Confederate defenses failed with heavy casualties, and one mighty strike by Lee against Union fortifications ended in costly failure. Then in the dark early morning hours of April 2, 1865, Grant massed the Sixth Corps west of Petersburg facing what was believed to be a weak point in the Confederate lines. The Vermont Brigade was placed at the front of the attack, and just before dawn 12,000 men rolled forward. The first Union soldier over the works was Capt. Charles Gould, of Windham, who was promptly bayoneted in the face and back. But Gould survived to be known ever after as the man who broke the Petersburg lines, after 10 months of siege. Soon Lee's defenses were overwhelmed and the Confederate commander ordered his army to retreat west.

The abandonment of Petersburg meant that Richmond could no longer be defended. Thus, on April 3, Union troops entered the Confederate capital, with the Ninth Vermont Regiment in the vanguard and Brig. Gen. Edward Hastings Ripley, of Rutland, near the front of the column. Lee moved west, hoping to link his army with a Confederate force under Joseph Johnston moving north from the Carolinas. On April 6, Lee lost more than 8,000 men in a brisk fight along Sailor's Creek. In that battle the Old Brigade fired its last shots of the war. Two days later, Custer's cavalry, including the Vermont regiment, cut off Lee's escape route. Lee met Grant at Appomattox Court House the afternoon of April 9 and surrendered his Army of Northern Virginia. Johnson surrendered to Sherman in North Carolina days later, and the Civil War was, effectively, over. Then on the night of April 14, Abraham Lincoln was shot by Confederate sympathizer, and noted actor, John Wilkes Booth while attending a play at Ford's Theater in Washington. The president died early the next morning without regaining consciousness. Memorial events

ON APRIL 6, LEE LOST MORE THAN 8,000 MEN IN A BRISK FIGHT ALONG SAILOR'S CREEK. IN THAT BATTLE THE OLD BRIGADE FIRED ITS LAST SHOTS OF THE WAR.

were held throughout Vermont. The Congregational Church in Woodstock was draped in black for an interdenominational religious service. In Manchester, where Abraham and Mary Lincoln were expected in the summer, a service concluded with the singing of "America."

SOON MOST OF THE VERMONT TROOPS CAME HOME, WITH THE EXCEPTION OF the Seventh Vermont Regiment which was sent to Texas for another year of duty along the Rio Grande River. The Seventh, which had spent much of the war in southern Florida away from the fighting, in the last days had seen action in attacks on forts that guarded Mobile, Alabama.

When final statistics were tallied at the adjutant general's office in Woodstock, it was determined that 34,238 Vermonters had served in the Civil War. Of them, 5,224 had died. The veterans came home to resume their lives, most as farmers, some as store clerks, railroad men, factory workers, hired hands. Pvt. Wilbur Fisk wrote on his return to Tunbridge, "We have seen home so often like a fairy vision in our imaginings and dreams…that now the ideal is realized it almost seems as if we were dreaming still…A lifetime of experience has been crowded into this fierce term of war. If I was asked 'how it seemed' to be a free citizen once more, I should say it seemed as if I had been through a long dark tunnel, and had just got into daylight once more."

As the years passed, the veterans organized local chapters of the Grand Army of the Republic, the GAR, which became a major force in state and national politics. In 1876 the Legislature retained the services of Julian Scott, who at 16 had won a Medal of Honor at Lee's Mills, to create a huge painting of the Battle of Cedar Creek for the State House. The well known artist finished his major work four years later, a painting that has long been regarded as one of the best the war produced. In 1889, many veterans were present for the dedication of Vermont monuments where the Second Vermont Brigade had fought at Gettysburg.

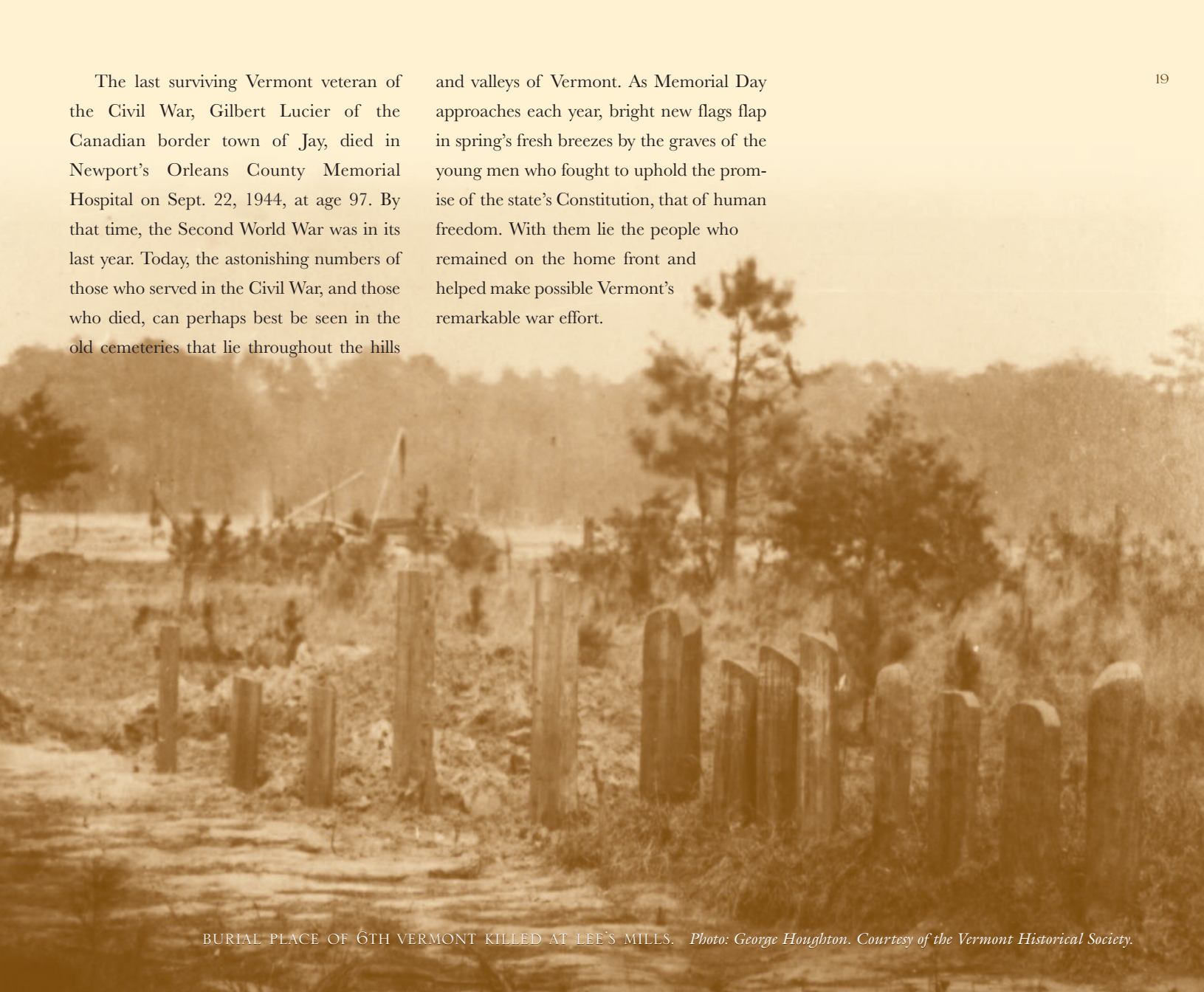
CIVIL WAR VETERANS GATHER ON CENTRAL STREET.

Collection of the Woodstock Historical Society.

State monuments were also placed on the Third Winchester, Cedar Creek, and Antietam battlefields. Many Vermont towns and cities also erected monuments, usually placed on the village green and often topped by the statue of a soldier. In 1899 Varnia Davis, widow of Confederate President Jefferson Davis, arrived in Montpelier for a summer vacation at the home of a friend. Local people enjoyed her company.

IT WAS DETERMINED THAT 34,238 VERMONTERS HAD SERVED IN THE CIVIL WAR. OF THEM, 5,224 HAD DIED.

The last surviving Vermont veteran of the Civil War, Gilbert Lucier of the Canadian border town of Jay, died in Newport's Orleans County Memorial Hospital on Sept. 22, 1944, at age 97. By that time, the Second World War was in its last year. Today, the astonishing numbers of those who served in the Civil War, and those who died, can perhaps best be seen in the old cemeteries that lie throughout the hills and valleys of Vermont. As Memorial Day approaches each year, bright new flags flap in spring's fresh breezes by the graves of the young men who fought to uphold the promise of the state's Constitution, that of human freedom. With them lie the people who remained on the home front and helped make possible Vermont's remarkable war effort.



BURIAL PLACE OF 6TH VERMONT KILLED AT LEE'S MILLS. *Photo: George Houghton. Courtesy of the Vermont Historical Society.*

Written by: Howard Coffin

Cover photo: George Houghton,
Courtesy of the Vermont Historical Society

Graphic Design: Jessica Butterfield