

Treasures from the Sherman Room

An Introduction to Brimfield History from the Library's Historical Collections

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Civil War Memorial Dedication

This Address was delivered at the dedication of the Soldier's Monument at Brimfield on July 4th, 1866 by Francis D. Lincoln.

MR. PRESIDENT AND FELLOW CITIZENS:

A little more than five years ago we came together in yonder Hall, to give to each other our most solemn pledges that, cost what it might, we would do what we could to defend the Government against the efforts which rebellion with its hosts were making for its destruction. We threw that banner to the breeze to show every passer-by that, however others might stand, the people of this town were loyal to the core. For the first time in the lives of most of us, the "flag" was truly the ensign of loyalty. We come here to-day to dedicate the stone which shall be as a key to the record that shall tell all future generations how faithfully we kept our pledges. What more proper, at this time, than a brief review of the circumstances under which we were then placed, of the acts of the town, and the individual acts of those who may be said to have taken a more prominent part in the great struggle through which the nation has just passed.

Here as elsewhere when the rebellion first broke out, there was found no little diversity of opinion as to the best course to be pursued. Some there were who believed, that the South had been goaded into taking up arms by the taunting speech and aggressive measures of those whom they were pleased to call Northern fanatics. Others saw clearly that the rebellion was the legitimate fruit of the institution of slavery, which our fathers had neglected to crush out when they founded the Government – a righteous punishment upon the children for the sins of their parents. Some were in favor of what they called a compromise, which should guarantee to the South the right to take slavery into the territory which our fathers had solemnly dedicated to freedom; while others saw that every concession thus far made to slavery had resulted, as concession to wrong ever does in multiplying difficulty. Some believed that it would be useless for us to try to suppress the rebellion with arms, quoting the much vaunted theory of the South, that history did not speak of an instance where eight millions of people had ever been conquered, forgetting that the history of the world to that time has no record of a rebellion to destroy freedom and establish slavery. Some believed in that feeble, old woman's idea, that ours was a degenerate age, and it would be impossible, therefore, for the Government to obtain the *men* to maintain a fighting army. I well remember hearing a conversation between two of our more prominent citizens, in which one, who held this idea, endeavored to push the other to the wall by asking, "Who would go to the war from this town?" And when answered, "Anybody who is able and worthy to be called an American citizen," pressed the question with, "Aye, but who? Will your son go?" And I shall not forget to my dying day the indignation expressed in the answer, "If this war continues and my son won't go, I never will own him as my son again." A little more than two years later that son [George C. Homer] was with me, a volunteer to defend the city of Baltimore against an attack which it was supposed General Lee intended to make upon it; and although of body frail as a child, I have good reason to believe that had that attack been made, he would have shown an energy in

the fight that would have staggered many a strong man. Need I tell you that the son of the other of these disputants, when called on by his comrades to go with them to the war, showed his teeth, not *at* the rebels, but to the surgeon.

A few there were – and I thank God I am able to say but a few – whose hatred of the party which then had control of the Government – hatred of the right, love of slavery, one or all of these – wrought them to a point from which they did not hesitate to say that they hoped the South would succeed, and if it should be that they were obliged to fight, they would fight on its side. But the great majority of the people of the town saw clearly that the war was to be the last desperate struggle of slavery against freedom, and rejoiced, if it *must* come, it had come in their day; that there was no course left for a good citizen but to fight till the death blow of slavery should be struck, and the Government should triumph over its enemies.

The first call for troops met with but little response from the town. Insured as we were to peace and its blessings, accustomed as we had been to see difficulties which seemed at times as though they might destroy our Government, pass quietly away, we could hardly persuade ourselves that the South would push its mad efforts so as to cause what would be worthy of the name of war, but trusted fondly in the thought that when it saw that the people were ready to support the Government with men and money, the rebellion would die out, as had other efforts of our Southern brethren to establish a government of their own. Very few of us believed that there would be even one hard fought battle. We had no men to spare for holiday excursions, dressed in military trappings, and this first call for men seemed like a call for such duty. But when it was seen that the enemy really meant war, and that something more than a show of men in arms was necessary, our people did not hesitate to enlist so as to fill the quotas made. The first action taken by the town to encourage enlistments was had in June, 1861. Previous to this time there had gone from the town forty-one men to “the front,” who went as inclination or sense of duty led them. Perhaps not another town in the Commonwealth had a smaller number of what is called floating population, in proportion to its whole number of inhabitants, than ours had. Very few had as small. A large share of our people are landholders, who have a fixed home. We have very few idlers, and I pray God we ever may have. We have no manufacturing companies that could encourage men to enlist by promises to provide work for those who would enlist on their return, and to assist their families while gone. The sons of most of our farmers had been in the habit, years before the war commenced, of leaving the homestead, and often the town, as soon as they arrived at majority, and frequently before that time. We did not even endeavor by public meetings to raise an excitement which should stir men to enlist, who, in their more sober moments would regret the step they had taken; but the whole community showed that it was a stern, sad duty they were called upon to do, and the citizen bade the soldier good bye with a tone and manner which showed that he was moved as is the brother who says the last farewell, yet was proud that he had a friend who would voluntarily take upon himself such a duty. But in spite of all these circumstances, we raised, from first to last, one hundred and fourteen men for the war, (five more than was necessary to fill the quotas on all the calls made,) and of these ninety-eight were our citizens beyond all dispute, and some five or six more claimed this town as their home. It is worthy of remark that, among them will be found the names of a goodly number of those families which, from the early settlement of the town, have borne a prominent part in its proceedings. Those of Gardner, Parker, Stebbins, Lumbard, Hitchcock, Brown, Bliss, Homer, Sherman, Charles, Morgan, the last five of which sent the only representatives remaining among us capable of bearing arms. The whole number of males in town between the ages of eighteen and forty-five in 1864, including those in the army and foreigners, was one hundred and eighty-four. Taking this as a basis on which we may make an estimate, and it will be seen that we sent to the war a number greater than one-half of all the males in town of the age to do military duty. Deduct for unnaturalized citizens and those exempt on account of disability, and I doubt not that three-fourths, and perhaps four-fifths, of as many men as we had liable to be taken, *went* to the war. A few of these would have been exempted from a draft, perhaps, but I see not how that detracts from the credit due the town for furnishing them. Of these, three went for one hundred days, and thirty for nine months; most of the rest for two and three years. Seventeen reenlisted; one only deserted, and his desertion consisted in failing to return on a furlough given for disability, which I think is hardly as bad as to run away, especially when the enemy is in front.

Had I the data which would enable me to give you anything like a history of the movements in which our soldiers were engaged, you would not have the time, if the patience, to listen. Sufficient be it to say, that some of them were in almost every battle fought this side of the Alleghanies – Bull Run, Roanoke, Newbern,

Plymouth, Little Washington, Kinston, Whitehall, Goldsboro, Antietam, Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville, Fair Oaks, Malvern Hill, Gettysburg, all through the Valley with Sheridan, at Balls Bluff, Drurys Bluff, Cold Harbor, before Petersburg, and in the final struggle which ended in the capture of Gen. Lee and his army. I must necessarily be brief also in the history of those of whom we are accustomed to speak as being lost, though in no sense can they be counted as lost, for to my mind no man ever uttered a sentence which contained more beauty and truth in as few words, than the father of Capt. Howe did, in reply to friends who called to console him in the loss of his only son. "Lost!" said the father, "I had rather have my *dead* son than the living son of any man in Monson." The first who fell was Marcus H. Smith, of Co. I, 27th Regiment, who died in the hospital on Roanoke Island, March 6th, 1862. He was sick on board the transport for several days previous to the famous battle of Roanoke; but when the time came for his Company to disembark for the battle, he expressed a determination to go with them, which his comrades endeavored in vain to dissuade him from. Was with them in the cold rain through the night, struggled with them through the terrible swamp to the very breastwork of the enemy, joined them in their hurrah for victory, sank immediately after, as many a brave soldier has done, and died in a few days. Edward E. Parker, of the 21st Massachusetts died June 6th, 1862, of wounds received in the battle of Camden, N. C. He was in the battles of Roanoke and Newbern. George W. Paige joined the 7th N.Y. Cavalry, at its organization, in the Fall of 1861, was with it in camp at Alexandria till the spring of 1862, when it will be recollected Gen. McClellan expressed the opinion, or uttered the dictum that, "this war was to be an artillery fight," in consequence of which the 7th New York, with other cavalry regiments, was disbanded, and young Paige returned home to stay a few days. His friends endeavored to persuade him that he had better not rejoin the army for a while, unless some opportunity should open up for him to go in some capacity suited for his talents;



but he had a settled conviction that duty called him to go, even if he went as private, and accordingly he returned to Washington, and was soon after made store-keeper in McDowell's division. A little later, he was so worn out by his efforts in completing the arrangements for the removal of the stores in his care, that he was obliged to fall back to Washington to recruit for a few days, as he wrote to his friends, when he was taken with a violent fever, of which he died on the 24th of July, 1862. To you, who knew him well, it would be folly for me to speak at length of his character; but I can hardly forebear saying that few young men gave as fair promise as did George W. Paige. Henry W. King, of the 2nd Massachusetts Regiment, died in the hospital at Urbana, Md., September 22nd, 1862. Wm. Kinney died December 8th, 1862, at Alexandria. He was a member of the 34th Regt

Regiment. Lyman P. Parker died at Newbern, March 24th, 1863. He belonged to Co. G, 46th Regiment; went with his Company on the expedition to Goldsboro, was in the battles of Kingston, Whitehall and Goldsboro, and although young, he showed a spirit and determination which only the good soldier has, and in his last sickness manifested such a kind disposition as to make him beloved even by the stranger nurses. Charles E. Alexander, of Co. G, 46th Regiment, died at Newbern, April 6th, 1863. Henry Wilson Robinson also died at Newbern, in April, 1863. He was a recruit to Co. I, 27th Regiment. George W. Allen died of wounds received in the battle of the Wilderness. Edgar A. Manning, of the 34th Regiment, was killed in the battle of Peidmont, Va., June 5th, 1864. Rufus A. Parker died, at Gettysburg, July, 1863. He belonged to the 2nd Massachusetts regiment; was at home on a furlough a short time before the battle of Gettysburg; had been in a number of battles, and wounded before that time; returned, in order to join his Company, before the great battle of the war was fought, which proved, alas! to be his last battle. Alonzo Latham died in the hospital. Patrick Barry, of Co. D., 34th Reg., died of wounds received in one of Sheridan's battles in the Valley, August 4th, 1864. James Crosby, Silas Phelps and George H. Dimmick, of Co. I, 27th Regiment, were taken prisoners at Drury's Bluff, and died in Milan prison during the month of October, 1864. Crosby, although of an age which exempted him from military duty, took such an interest in the war as to lead him to enlist in the summer of 1861; was discharged on account of what was considered permanent disability; cane home, and on recovering of his illness, reenlisted. Alexander Manning was in the navy, and died at sea. John Cronin, was lost in the last battle before Petersburg.

Follow me for a few minutes, while I endeavor to give an idea of the part which the town as a town has taken in relation to its soldiers. By an act approved May 23d, 1861, the Legislature of the State authorized any town to raise money for the aid of the wife and children of soldiers in the service, and provided for the reimbursement from the State treasury to towns which should raise money for the above named purpose, a sum not exceeding one dollar per week for the wife, and one dollar for each child dependent on the soldier for support at the time of his being called into the service of the United States; provided, that the whole sum so reimbursed should not exceed twelve dollars per month for all the members of any one family. By authority given in this act, and under a warrant dated 22d, one day less than a month from the passage of the act granting the power, the town voted that the Selectmen be authorized to draw from the town treasury such sums of money as they shall deem proper, not exceeding two dollars per week for the wife, and one dollar and fifty cents for each additional member of the family dependent for their support on any of the citizens of the town who has, or may be enlisted into the service of the United States. It will be noted that the town used the power granted by the law, to expend one dollar per week for the wife, and fifty cents for each additional member of the family more than it could draw from the State treasury. July 31st, 1862, the town voted to pay a bounty of one hundred dollars to each man who has or may enlist from the town as one of the Massachusetts volunteer militia, and is mustered into the service of the United States. August 28th, 1862, the town passed the following resolve and votes, which I copy in full, as expressing what I would say on the point, in better language than it would be easy for me otherwise to use: "*Resolved*, That as a partial remuneration to those who may thus volunteer, (this was under a call of the President for nine months' men) for the loss incurred by so abruptly leaving their business avocations, and also to enable them to provide for the present and future necessities of their families and friends dependent on them for support, it is proper that they should receive a compensation in addition to that paid by the government, and for this purpose it is voted, that the Selectmen be authorized and directed to pay a bounty of one hundred and fifty dollars to each man who has or may enlist from this town, as one of the Massachusetts volunteer militia, and is accepted and mustered into the service of the United States as one of the quota of the town of Brimfield." Let me remark that there had, at the time of the passage of this vote, enough enlisted to fill the quota therein named, under the supposition that they should receive a bounty of one hundred and twenty-five dollars; so that the vote of the town was not only a gratuity of twenty-five dollars to each man, but a surprise to all that had enlisted; and also, that the vote was passed unanimously. Also, "voted, that in case any of the volunteers from this town are sick or wounded while in the service, and in need of care and attention that is not or can not be furnished by the Government, that the Selectmen be authorized and directed to furnish such aid and assistance, by nurses or otherwise, as in their discretion seems proper." I know not how many towns of this Commonwealth have passed such a vote as this last, but this much I do know, that wherever it has been done the citizens have good reason to be proud of their record. Philanthropists will, centuries hence, point to such a vote as evidence of the magnanimity of the people who passed it. September 22d, 1863, the town "voted to

furnish State aid to families of persons who have been or may be *drafted* into the service of the United States.” April 4th, 1864, the town voted to pay one hundred and twenty-five dollars to each volunteer who should be enlisted into the service on the quota of two hundred thousand called for by the President; and finally, May 31st, 1865, it was voted to raise, by taxation on the polls and estates of the town, the sum of \$4,606, to refund to individuals the several sums contributed by them for the benefit of those who volunteered to fill the quotas of the town under the call from the President during the year 1864, and that the same be assessed and paid over to the town treasurer on or before the tenth of February following. Whatever may be said of the strict justice of this last vote, when it is remembered that it passed by a nearly unanimous voice, it can not be looked upon in any other light than that of a disposition on the part of the town to try to make the great burden which the war created fall as equally as possible on its property-holders, and there were but few instances among us where it seemed to fall unjustly.

Such, fellow-citizens, is the record of the part you as a town have taken in the war of the rebellion. As so far as the news goes, I do not even now see how it could have been made better. Had I the power, I would strike nor line, nor word, nor letter therefrom. Some things have transpired among us which, but for the small number of persons engaged in them, would smack of disgrace to the community; but of these the *record* is, and is ever to remain silent. Finally, after the war has come to an end, and all our soldiers, except those who had been gathered to the fathers, had returned home, the town, by a much larger vote than is usually had on its appropriations, voted, with only a single dissenting voice, to tax itself twelve hundred and fifty dollars to build a monument to the memory of their soldiers who died while in the service. Bear in mind that this was no clap-trap, such as political wire pullers spring on the unsuspecting; that it was done by no party drill; that but few of the dead soldiers had friends of influence among us; but was a vote taken in full town meeting, whereunto the voters had been duly warned to act thereon; was laid before them at a time when there were as many present as at any time during the day. And after a full hearing, so that no man could misunderstand, passed, as I have said, with but a single dissenting voice! What nobler part than that was ever taken by any town? Who of all its sons and daughters, in view of this vote alone, will not proudly exclaim, Brimfield is my home? And as time rolls on, and we come to reflect on the greatness of the struggle through which we have passed; when the party spirit which our political predilections inevitably create shall die away, and the whole people shall see that this effort was for the very life of the nation, this monument will be universally looked upon as affording the best evidence of the great moral worth of our people. For from time immemorial monuments erected to valor, to patriotic heroism, to virtue, have been counted the surest index of the true greatness of the people who raised them. Webster said, pointing proudly to the stone erected to the memory of the heroes of the Revolution, “Bunker Hill monument is finished!” How well chosen were the words of the great orator to express a double sentiment – that of grateful pride, that the men of his day had paid the full tribute of honor to the heroes of a former generation; of triumph, that a work costing so much time and labor was finally completed. If all new England might justify triumph at the completion of such a work, how much greater is our cause to rejoice over the erection of this stone. For had the capital of New England, nay, of Massachusetts alone been equally taxed to have paid the cost of the monument on Bunker Hill, there were none so poor as to have felt it. We rear this by a tax which few among us, though rich, will not feel. That was built when the State and Nation were free from debt, aye, when the nation had a surplus fund which it was distributing among the States. We build this, knowing that heavy taxes are being continually laid on us to keep the debt of the State and Nation where it is. No statesman of the day, no, not even the “godlike” Daniel himself, had a reputation so firmly fixed that he would dare have risked it, even to hint at a proposition to tax the people to have built that. We as with one accord lay a heavy tax to build this, and no bar-room politician dare risk *his* reputation in opposition. Sing hallelujahs, then, if you will, to the bravery, the patriotism, the justice, the magnanimity, the moral worth of the fathers, and none but an unworthy son will refuse to join in the chorus. But O! in the name of all that is good and great and holy, in the name of common justice and decency, I beg you never lisp it again that ours is a degenerate age. Our monument is finished; but the debt of honor is not paid. We owe it to the soldiers who have returned to us, that we watch narrowly their fortunes through life, and should misfortune overtake any, be ready with grateful hearts and open hands to relieve. We owe it to the dead, that we stamp it on the minds of the rising generation, as with a brand of iron, that the terrible sacrifice of life caused by this war was the necessary consequence of tampering with evil; that their children may not be called upon to

pass through the like. Our monument is finished! It stands here ostensibly in memory of the men whose names are chiseled upon its sides. Worthy indeed are they of such a monument. Had each of them died on the battlefield, they would have been no more worthy; for it was not their deaths but their lives that made them so. Not that they died, but that they volunteered to risk their lives in their country's defense. The citizen might elect if he would become a soldier; the soldier could not choose when, or how he should die. Not these alone then are worthy, but whoever volunteered with them, and went forth with a single eye to due his duty, determined to fight to the death, if need be, and did his duty faithfully without complaint – I care not if for but a single day – is equally worthy. Nor is it only the soldier who is worthy. That father, who voluntarily gave up an only son on whom he had fondly hoped to lean in his old age – who gave up any son, counting it a duty he owed his country – is worthy; for in so doing he showed a spirit, which but for age or infirmity, would have carried him to the front. That mother who, with trembling hands and tearful eye, bade a long farewell to her darling boy, hoping, trusting that whatever might befall him he would do his whole duty, is worthy. That wife, who could end her prayer of agony with a nerveless "Not my will, but thine, O Father, be done," feeling that, terrible as the sacrifice would be, she would rather her husband would die on the battle field than that the great wrong of slavery should triumph over freedom and right, is worthy. The son or daughter, man or woman, old or young, who has done what he or she could to sustain the soldier or his family, to cheer them in the days of despondency, to lighten the burden which bore so heavily upon them, laboring in this field for their country, because there was no other in which they could labor so effectually, is worthy. The difference between these last and the soldier is, that on the record which we have their names are scarcely seen, while his stands in relief on every page. But when the great record on which is noted the motives which govern mortals is laid bare, I doubt not it will be found that many an humble woman has really sacrificed more for her country than some soldiers who have served their three years and received an "honorable discharge;" and that some of those even, whom in our overheated zeal we have branded as copperheads, were real patriots. Well may we then dedicate this stone to our "country's defenders in the war of the rebellion." Shot and shell, saber and bayonet have done their part in the defense of our country, and done it well; but these would have been as the artillery on the battle field without its support, but for the great moral power behind them which was created and kept alive by the pulpit, the press, the common conversation, the every thought and word and action of the loyal people at home, sufficient, perhaps, to repel a single charge, but entirely inadequate to meet that persistent, determined effort which rebels made to destroy our Government. Gaze proudly then on this stone, ye who feel that you have done your part towards creating and keeping alive that feeling of hatred of slavery and wrong, the love of freedom and right and good government, for it is a tribute to your virtue. Gather about it ye who have borne the brunt of this terrible struggle with your dead brothers, who have watched over them in their dying hour with a mother's tenderness, who have buried them in a strange land with a father's sorrow, and receive the blessing which comes only to those who have a proud consciousness that they merit the verdict of "well done," which your townsmen so gladly render you. Look at it, ye whose feelings have been in real sympathy with the Government, but whose hearts have failed you in the days of deep trouble, who have hoped and prayed, I had almost said, without hope! and may it force an abiding conviction on your minds that the poet Bryant was moved by inspiration from on high when he wrote:

"Truth crushed to earth shall rise again,
The eternal years of God are her's;
But error, wounded, writhes with pain,
And dies among its worshippers."

And if there be any of those here who have derided the efforts brave men were making to save a common country from ruin, by saying, whenever success seemed to be with their brother rebels, the South is not whipped yet; who have declared, again and again, that rather than go themselves, or have any of their kith and kin go to the defense of their country, they would sacrifice the last cent of their property they possessed; who have strengthened the hands of rebellion by their infernal clamor against the Government, and about what, in their dignity, they were pleased to term "this n***** war;" who have shed crocodile tears over the loss of life made by the war and the wickedness of the administration, thus doing all they could to discourage enlistments; let

them look at it if they can and read in their own hearts the fulfillment of the prophecy made long ago, "The hopes of the wicked shall perish." Let them look at it, and remember that this stone shall stand till the end of time, and while their poor history lasts, shall speak with a power which no mortal can tell of their shame.

Fellow citizens, this is indeed a proud day for us. We have a right to be proud that we have done our part towards making our country what the great and good men who founded our Government intended it should be – an asylum for the oppressed of all nations; where every man shall be recognized as a man, and protected in his God given rights; where there should be true liberty of speech, freedom of the press throughout its entire domains; in fine, where every man might sit under his own vine and fig tree, and there should be none to molest or make him afraid. We have a right to be proud that we have furnished more men and all the money the Government call on us for with alacrity; that we have *sent* to the war (if such a term may be used when speaking of volunteers,) so large a proportion of those who were really of us; that so much to their honor and so little to their disgrace has been done by our soldiers; that we have looked after and tenderly cared for their families; that we have watched over the sick and wounded in such a manner as to rob bodily pain of half its power; that we have brought home and buried with their fathers so many of those who died in an enemy's land; that we have kept for posterity so complete a record of their noble deeds; that we were among the first to avail ourselves of the privilege which a State jealous of granting such privileges gave us, to build a monument to their memory. And there is a peculiar pride, which I think you must all feel to-day, which comes from the thought that we are here to dedicate a stone which is to be perpetuated through all time. The stake and slab which mark the places where lies the remains of our brothers in Southern soil, shall soon fall to the ground. No friendly hand shall redrive the one or reset the other. The monuments which filial affection have raised at home, over the bodies of friends, shall last a few years longer. The families of the more opulent can hardly hope for their reerection, for each generation has duties of this kind to perform for those of nearest kin. The terrible destroyer of all the works of man shall fix his tooth on this beautiful monument, and it too shall crumble, but in its place shall rise a grander, nobler, but not more beautiful or appropriate stone, and it shall be rebuilt and rebuilt till the love of patriotism shall die out of the hearts of man. Should *that* time *ever* come, then may the heavens be rolled together as a scroll, and the dread angel declare that time on earth shall be no more.