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**Something Abides:  
General Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain  
and the Memory of the American Civil War**

by

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In great deeds, something abides. On great fields, something stays. Forms change and pass; bodies disappear; but spirits linger, to consecrate ground for the vision-place of souls. And reverent men and women from afar, and generations that know us not and that we know not of, heart-drawn to see where and by whom great things were suffered and done for them, shall come to this deathless field, to ponder and dream; and lo! the shadow of a mighty presence shall wrap them in its bosom, and the power of the vision pass into their souls.

- Joshua L. Chamberlain, Address at  
the Dedication of the Maine  
Monuments, Gettysburg, PA, 1895

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## Chapter 1 Introduction

The capacity to live in the past by memory also emancipates the individual from the tyranny of the present. He can choose, if he wants, to reverse a present trend of history in favor of some previous trend. He can, if he wishes, seek asylum from present tumults in a past period of history, or use the memory of a past innocency to project a future of higher virtue.

– Reinhold Niebuhr, *Faith and History*, 1949<sup>1</sup>

Walking the field of Gettysburg is like reading a living document. Maps are inadequate to fully capture the rolling fields and rocky hills that served as the background for the bloodiest battle of the American Civil War. Though the topography of the hill has changed, enough has been preserved at Little Round Top to get a sense of the site of one of the most desperate parts of the battle.

The area has been changed by the addition of roads – ironically, the biggest changes to the shape of the hill were due to the installation of Chamberlain Avenue – and by the appearance of monuments, mostly erected by the veterans themselves. For the visitor the monuments mark the course of the battle, and the inscriptions provide

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<sup>1</sup> David Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2001), 255.

a sense of both the armies' movements and the enormity of the losses suffered.

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I began the research for this project over a summer spent as an intern at Gettysburg National Military Park. I spent my days off cramming in as many ranger talks and battle walks as was physically possible, sometimes spending the entire day hiking and acquiring several major sunburns. In the evenings my fellow interns and I would go back out on the field to walk it and talk. One of our favorite places was the crest of Little Round Top at sunset. Interestingly, at dusk, Little Round Top and the fields it overlooks are also favorite spots for ghost hunters. The tourists shining flashlights on the rocks without stopping to get out of their minivans were missing the point of visiting the battleground. However, there is a sense that the men who fought on the field wanted to tell their stories. Those who survived erected monuments for themselves and for those who fell so that the world can never forget what they did there. If you take the time to listen and make yourself open to them, veterans' voices are clamoring to be heard.

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One of these voices became the soul of this project. Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain's eloquent speeches and memoirs tell his story well. In all his writing, he is clearly driven to tell his point of view and demand recognition for the actions of his men. He used his voice, as a

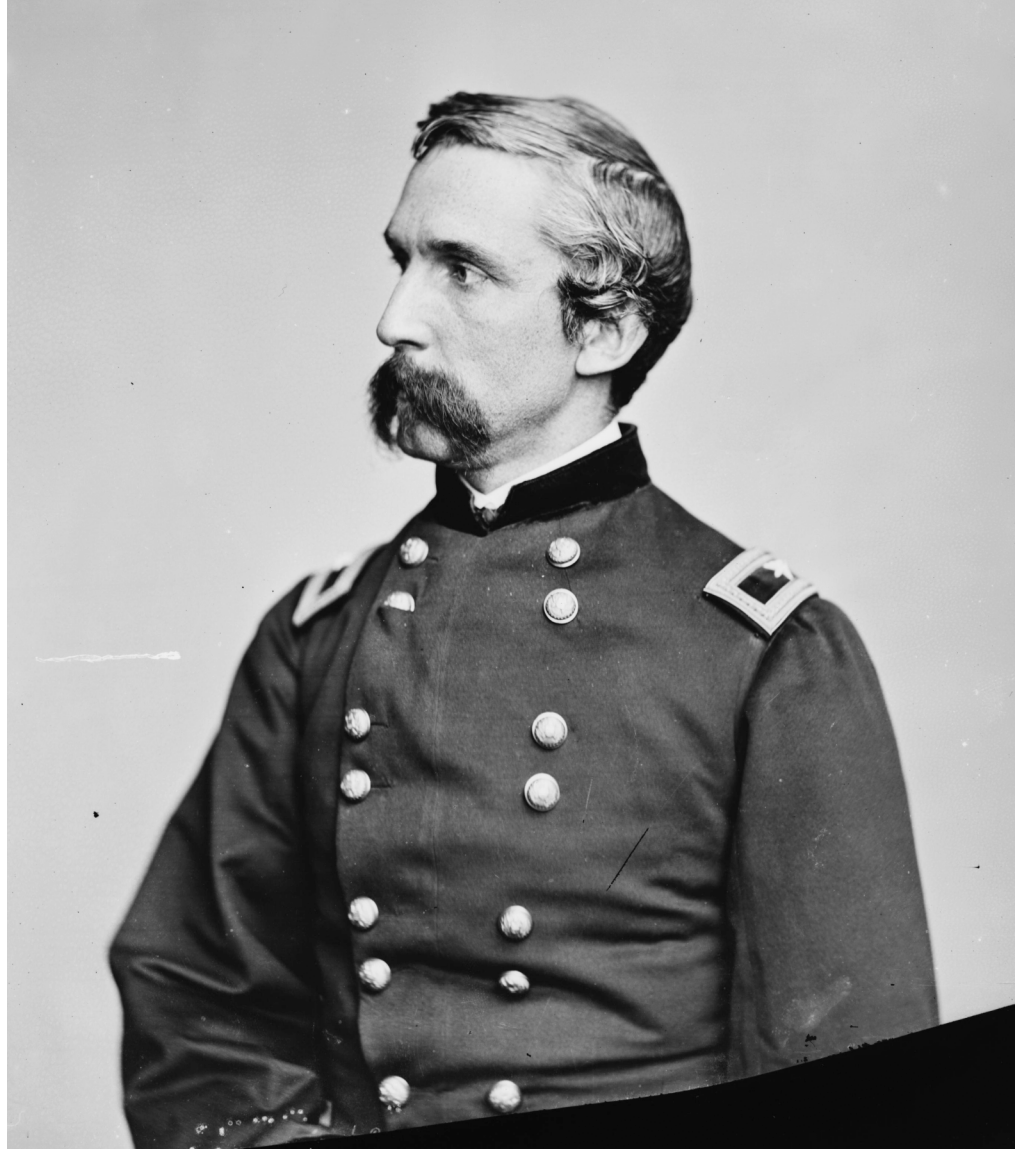


veteran, an academic, and a public figure, to protect the memories of the war that he held dear.

At Gettysburg I was struck by the differences of opinion on Chamberlain – people either love him or hate him. Bookshops have shelves devoted to him, tourists love him, but attempts to discuss him as a scholar – more than as the star of *Gettysburg* and *The Killer Angels* – are often brushed away. Tourists come away crushed, because their battlefield guide dismissed Chamberlain and the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine on Little Round Top. Rangers are dismayed that he's begun to get all the glory; that nobody remembers Strong Vincent, Gouverneur Warren, and Patrick O'Rorke, all heroes of Little Round Top as well.

It is not my intention in this paper to provide an exhaustive history of either the battle of Gettysburg or the history of the war, in which these names must figure prominently. Rather, the focus here is on Chamberlain's memory, in which they appear as figures from his past. Beyond the memory of his own exploits and of his Union compatriots, I am interested in how the war between brothers became a shared experience and how battles became controversies over monuments and memories.

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**Brig. Gen. Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain (LOC)**

Born in 1828, Chamberlain was settled with a wife and two young children as well as in a prestigious academic position at the beginning of the Civil War.<sup>2</sup> As Professor of Rhetoric at Bowdoin

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<sup>2</sup> As this study deals with Chamberlain in the Civil War, most of his pre-war experience has been left out. For excellent biographies, see Trulock, Longacre, and Nesbitt. Trulock's book, *In the Hands of Providence*, could be considered the definitive Chamberlain biography. Longacre's *Joshua Chamberlain: The Soldier and the Man* takes a more critical approach to Chamberlain's traditional heroism. In *Through Blood and Fire*, Nesbitt places biographical context alongside Chamberlain's correspondence. Chamberlain's 1903 autobiography, *A Sketch*, focuses on his childhood and war experience.

College in Brunswick, Maine, he watched many of his students leave to take up arms. In the late summer of 1862, his sense of duty and his desire to be part of the action overwhelmed the objections of his wife and some of the conservative Bowdoin faculty. He wrote at the time to the governor, "I feel it to be my duty to serve my Country. Your call to a post of honorable service finds me as a good citizen to come forward without delay & without excuse."<sup>3</sup> In his autobiography he again explained his reasons for enlisting in terms of duty. He claimed that he left Bowdoin because "...the serious reverses of the Union army and the critical condition of the country at that time seemed to him a call to service in another field." This statement echoes his sense that he could do more for the country as a soldier than as a teacher.<sup>4</sup> Although he also stated that he "preferred the command of volunteers, whose motive and thought of service he sympathized with more deeply," there is no mention of slavery as either his cause or the cause of the war.<sup>5</sup> Chamberlain's sentiments on slavery are unclear; while he attended readings of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* at Harriet Beecher Stowe's house as an undergraduate, in his public life he consistently avoided the subject.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Mark Nesbitt, *Through Blood & Fire: Selected Civil War Papers of Major General Joshua Chamberlain* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1996), 14.

<sup>4</sup> Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain, *A Sketch: the Original 1905 Biography of Joshua Chamberlain*. (Brewer, ME: Brian L. Higgins, 1995), 11-12.

<sup>5</sup> *Sketch*, 16.

<sup>6</sup> Charles C. Calhoun, *A Small College in Maine: Two Hundred Years of Bowdoin*. (Brunswick, ME: Bowdoin College, 1993), 157.

Inspired by his sense of duty to the Union, Chamberlain offered his services to Maine's Governor Washburn in any position where he could be useful. Although his military education was limited to a brief time at a military school,<sup>7</sup> he believed that, "what I do not know in that line I know how to learn."<sup>8</sup> This offer foreshadowed the professor's relationship with the army; Chamberlain epitomized the ideal of the citizen-soldier in a volunteer army. He received a commission as Lieutenant Colonel of the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine regiment, the second in command to Colonel Adlebert Ames, a West Point graduate and a veteran of First Bull Run.<sup>9</sup> In August 1862, Chamberlain reported with his new regiment, made up of men from all across Maine, to Camp Mason near Portland, Maine. After only a month of training to turn farmers and fishermen into soldiers, the regiment headed south to join the army in the field.<sup>10</sup>

Although impatient to get into battle, the regiment was held in reserve at Antietam and was under smallpox quarantine during the battle of Chancellorsville.<sup>11</sup> The first real battle the regiment encountered was at Fredericksburg, Virginia, on December 11 to 15, 1862. There, after charging up a hill toward a stone wall, Chamberlain spent the night "between two dead men among the many left there by

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<sup>7</sup> Sketch, 3-4. Alice Trulock, *In the Hands of Providence: Joshua L. Chamberlain & The American Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 32.

<sup>8</sup> Nesbitt, 9.

<sup>9</sup> Nesbitt, 17.

<sup>10</sup> Nesbitt, 17-19.

<sup>11</sup> Trulock, 72, 110-112.

earlier assaults... [with] another crosswise for a pillow.”<sup>12</sup> This “bivouac with the dead” was a grisly introduction to battle, and the image stayed with him for the rest of his life.<sup>13</sup>

In late May 1863, Colonel Ames received a promotion, and Chamberlain moved up in the chain of command, becoming Colonel of the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine. Soon after, the Army of Potomac chased down Lee’s invasion of the North at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. Here, Chamberlain received orders to hold the far left flank of the Union Army, and in doing so, led a bayonet charge down the slope of Little Round Top, a moment which has been immortalized and popularized in the book *Killer Angels*, in the movie *Gettysburg*, and in Ken Burns’s documentary *The Civil War*. Although his heroism at Gettysburg has shaped his image in popular memory, Chamberlain served honorably throughout the war, and was considered for the Medal of Honor for actions in three different battles.<sup>14</sup>

At Petersburg, Chamberlain received a wound that left him incapacitated for five months and affected him for the rest of his life. On June 18, 1864, Chamberlain’s brigade led an attack on the

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<sup>12</sup> Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain, “My Story of Fredericksburg,” *Cosmopolitan Magazine*, January 1913. Reprinted in Abbot Spear, *The 20<sup>th</sup> Maine at Fredericksburg: The Conflicting Accounts of General Joshua L. Chamberlain and General Ellis Spear*. (Union, ME: Union Publishing Company, 1989), 29.

<sup>13</sup> Chamberlain titled one section of his 1913 article “A Bivouac With the Dead,” an interesting reference to Theodore O’Hara’s poem, “The Bivouac of the Dead.” The poem, originally written to honor American dead in the Mexican-American War, was widely adopted by Civil War veterans: it was read at GAR encampments and it appears on plaques at the Gettysburg National Cemetery.

<sup>14</sup> Thomas H. Hubbard, Application for Medal of Honor, March 1, 1893. Pejebscot Historical Society.

defensive works outside the city; this attack marked the beginning of the nine-month siege of Petersburg. As Chamberlain directed his men, he was “shot through by a minié ball... from hip joint to hip joint – from right to left, just in front of the joints.”<sup>15</sup> The wound broke his pelvis and severed urinary organs; although this type of wound was generally fatal, two doctors from the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine conducted surgery, probably inserting a catheter.<sup>16</sup> Still not expected to live, he was eventually transported to Annapolis Naval School Hospital, where “he lay in a tent in unspeakable agonies for two months, his surgeons daily expecting his death. Almost miraculously gaining strength enough to move about, in two months more he asked to be returned to duty in the field.”<sup>17</sup> Because the severity of the wound indicated that it would be mortal, Chamberlain received the unusual honor of a personal promotion by General Grant and the dubious honor of reading his own obituary.<sup>18</sup> While Chamberlain lay in surgery, Generals Warren and Griffin of the Fifth Corps telegraphed a request for his promotion to General Grant. On June 20, Grant replied to this request by issuing Special Orders No. 39, appointing Chamberlain Brigadier General of Volunteers “for meritorious and efficient services on the field of

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<sup>15</sup> Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain, “The Charge At Fort Hell June 18, 1864,” in Diane Monroe Smith, *Chamberlain at Petersburg* (Gettysburg: Thomas Publications, 2004), 65.

<sup>16</sup> William J. Harmon and Charles K. McAllister, “The Lion of the Union: The Pelvic Wound of Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain,” *The Journal of Urology*, 163, (March 2000): 713-716. VF-GNMP.

<sup>17</sup> *Sketch*, 16.

<sup>18</sup> Chamberlain, *Passing of the Armies*. p. xi.

battle.”<sup>19</sup> In November 1864, Chamberlain, still in pain from the wound, returned to the army at Petersburg to serve out the remainder of the war.

The war ended for Chamberlain at Appomattox Court House, where General Lee surrendered the Army of Northern Virginia to General Grant. On April 12, 1865, Chamberlain oversaw the ceremony for the surrender of arms by the defeated Confederates. Before returning home, the Union army gathered in Washington, DC for a grand review. Over two days, almost 200,000 men of the headquarters staff, infantry, cavalry, artillery, and ambulance corps all paraded down Pennsylvania Avenue, past a reviewing stand in front of the White House.<sup>20</sup> Although the war was over, it would be kept alive through memory and ceremonies such as this throughout Chamberlain’s life and beyond.

After the war, Chamberlain returned to Maine. From 1867 to 1871 he was elected to four terms as Governor of the state. At the capital in Augusta, Chamberlain promoted veterans’ causes, the organization of a volunteer militia, education, and economic improvement in both manufacturing and agriculture.<sup>21</sup> Although he belonged to the Republican party and for the most part supported the party’s policies, he preferred a more conservative approach to

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<sup>19</sup> Trulock, 214-215. Grant, quoted in Trulock, 215.

<sup>20</sup> *Armies*, 246-249, 338.

<sup>21</sup> Edward Longacre, *Joshua Chamberlain: The Soldier and the Man* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 1999), 262-263.

Reconstruction. His opposition to black suffrage and to Johnson's impeachment eventually cost him the support of his party.<sup>22</sup>

Returning to Bowdoin, he taught and served as President from 1871 to 1883. His tenure as President was marked by change. He introduced reforms of the science curriculum and considered the admission of women; however, the biggest changes involved his introduction of military ideas on the campus, including the imposition of a mandatory drill for all students.<sup>23</sup> This effort led to conflict with the students, culminating in a student protest of the drill. In May 1874, according to a letter addressed to the students' parents, "the greater part of the Sophomore and Freshman classes refused to report for duty. During the day it became known that a majority of the Junior, Sophomore, and Freshman classes had bound themselves by a written agreement to resist the drill at all hazards."<sup>24</sup> Most of the students were sent home for refusing to concede; Chamberlain wrote that the option of "an honorable withdrawal from the College" was available for any student who found the drill unreasonable.<sup>25</sup> While all but three of the students returned, the college made the drill voluntary at the end of the year.<sup>26</sup> This episode reflects the impact of Chamberlain's military service on his postwar life; he believed that instituting military drill was important for preventing and preparing for

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<sup>22</sup> Longacre, 264-265.

<sup>23</sup> Longacre, 270, 274.

<sup>24</sup> Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain to parents, May 28, 1874, BC.

<sup>25</sup> Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain to parents, May 28, 1874, BC.

<sup>26</sup> Trulock, 347.



another war, and he saw the students' refusal through a military lens, treating them as deserters.

Chamberlain maintained a more active memory through participation in veterans' organizations, including the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR) and the Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States (MOLLUS). He served as the Maine commander for both these organizations, as well as participating on a national level.<sup>27</sup> In speeches for these groups, more local events, and reunions of the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine, he interpreted the war through his personal experiences. As histories of the war placed more emphasis on the battle of Gettysburg, Chamberlain became "the hero of Little Round Top." In 1893, this heroism was formally recognized with the Congressional Medal of Honor, awarded for "daring heroism and great tenacity in holding his position on the Little Round Top against repeated assaults, and carrying the advance position on the Great Round Top."<sup>28</sup>



Chamberlain died in 1914 from the wound received at Petersburg half a century earlier. The wound had remained painful and disabling, as well as subject to frequent infection; it "subdue[d] his

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<sup>27</sup> Grand Army of the Republic, *Proceedings of the 27th Annual Encampment of the Department of Maine* (Waterville, ME: Waterville Sentinel Print, 1904). Robert Girard Caroon to John J. Pullen and Steven J. Wright, n.d., PHS. Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain, Special Orders, No. 4. February 15. 1868. PHS.

<sup>28</sup> Committee on Veterans' Affairs, United States Senate, *Medal of Honor recipients, 1863-1973: "In the name of the Congress of the United States"* (Washington: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1973), 55.

youthful vigor and cast its shadow on the rest of his life.”<sup>29</sup> Like the wound, the memories of the war stayed with Chamberlain and festered. Even at home, he surrounded himself with physical reminders. His library and study in Brunswick were crowded not only with books, but with flags, guns, swords, and paintings.<sup>30</sup> A view of only one corner of the library shows a Confederate battle flag, crossed swords above the door, a bust of General Grant in front of three rifles, and a large flag suspended from the ceiling. In these pieces of memorabilia, Chamberlain literally carried home the memory of the war and preserved it as sacred.



**View of Chamberlain's Library (Pejebscot Historical Society)**

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<sup>29</sup> Trulock, 316-317

<sup>30</sup> Trulock, 349-350. Allan M. Levinsky, *At Home with the General: A Visit to the Joshua L. Chamberlain Museum* (Gettysburg, PA: Thomas Publications, 2001), 20.

## Chapter 2 Mnemosyne

No wonder you rise in the middle of the night  
to look up the date of a famous battle in a book on war.  
No wonder the moon in the window seems to have drifted  
out of a love poem that you used to know by heart.

- *Forgetfulness*, Billy Collins

In Greek mythology, Mnemosyne is the goddess of memory. With Zeus, she is also the mother of the nine muses, including Clio, the muse of history.<sup>1</sup> In the introduction to a special issue on memory, the editors of *Representations* pointed out this relationship and its significance in describing the relationship for historians.<sup>2</sup> In some respects, the comparison is apt, because memory does plant the seeds of history. However, history is not nurtured by memory alone; the historian criticizes and contextualizes memory in order to recreate the past. History, then, is the past as reconstructed by the present.

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The issue of memory is important to the study of history. Memories make up the foundation of the historian's sources; historians place trust in primary sources because they represent the testimony of those who were present. But primary sources do not always agree,

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<sup>1</sup> Mark Morford and Robert Lenardon, *Classical Mythology* (New York: David McKay Company, Inc, 1972), 56-57.

<sup>2</sup> Natalie Zemon Davis and Randolph Starn, "Introduction, Special Issue: Memory and Counter-Memory" *Representations*, 26 (Spring 1989), 1-6, p. 1.

and one person's memory can change over time. The historian's task is to identify the facts based on multiple, consistent accounts, and to identify whose memories are most trustworthy.

What criteria make an account trustworthy? The first task is to compare the account to existent evidence, such as written orders or death certificates. A second question concerns the temporal separation from the event; does an account written later lose details or gain perspective? The publisher of Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain's biography in 1995 stated in his introduction:

I personally prefer original works to their updated equivalents because the earlier accounts of events maintain a specific historical perspective that later reports do not.

Memories sweeten through the ages. In *A Sketch*, there still remains a whiff of the real blood, sweat and tears that seasoned the fascinating life of Joshua Chamberlain.<sup>3</sup>

In his opinion, reading Chamberlain's own words is better than reading histories written by others not present at the events. However, within Chamberlain's lifetime, his memory "sweetened" and changed; the memoir written near the end of his life has a much more romanticized version of the surrender at Appomattox Court House than the letter written to his sister in April 1865. On the other hand, Abbot Spear, the grandson of Ellis Spear, claimed that later reports have more validity, because "the greatest perils to historical accuracy reside in the fact the

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<sup>3</sup> Brian L. Higgins, ed. in Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain, *A Sketch: the Original 1905 Biography of Joshua Chamberlain* (Brewer, ME: Brian L. Higgins, 1995), Publisher's Note.

first reports, particularly of battles, usually are subject to all of these factors [of error] but are the most widely circulated and are usually fully credited.”<sup>4</sup> In writing history, both the benefits and liabilities of early and later accounts must be considered.

As Pierre Nora defines them, “memory and history, far from being synonymous, appear now to be in fundamental opposition.”<sup>5</sup> Though closely related, the ideas are two sides of one coin. In his essay on French sites of public memory, Nora clearly defines the differences between the two concepts:

Memory is life, borne by living societies founded in its name. It remains in permanent evolution, open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting, unconscious of its successive deformation, vulnerable to manipulation and appropriation, susceptible to being long dormant and periodically revived. History, on the other hand, is the reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete, of what is no longer.<sup>6</sup>

Memory in this sense is active. The historian of trauma Martha Minow prefers the verb form instead of the name: “not memory but remembering, not retrieval of some intact picture but instead a dynamic process of both tying together and distinguishing fragments of past and present.”<sup>7</sup> This activity and relation to the present keeps memory alive;

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<sup>4</sup> Abbot Spear, Address to the Warren County Historical Society, c. 1966, PHS.

<sup>5</sup> Pierre Nora. “Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Memoire*,” *Representations*. No. 26 (Spring 1989): 7-25, p. 8.

<sup>6</sup> Nora, 8.

<sup>7</sup> Martha Minow, *Between Vengeance and Forgiveness* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998), 120. Much of the current historical work on memory comes from traumatic events from the relatively recent past, such as the Holocaust and the Truth and

while memory, as a concept, is preserved as sacred, it is also shaped by the present as it is remembered by individuals and society.

History and memory are both fluid and subject to change. However, the processes that lead to change are distinctly different. History is changed through revision based on the appearance of new evidence or a reinterpretation of the existing evidence. The changes are made consciously by scholars, and the study of historiography is devoted to tracing changes in historical interpretation. For example, the “consensus history” of the 1950s has largely been replaced by more comprehensive work; in contemporary histories, women, minorities, and the lower classes are given voices. Memory, on the other hand, is deeply personal, even when an individual is shaping the public memory. It can be subject to alteration by wishful thinking, a political agenda, or simply a desire to find causality. This change can be unconscious or intentional, but in either case, it influences an individual’s experience of events.

Memory is certainly involved in the creation of and study of history; historians study the memory of the past through collecting oral histories and reading letters and memoirs from archives. Nora sees the two modes in conflict: “History is perpetually suspicious of memory, and its true mission is to suppress and destroy it.”<sup>8</sup> In his view, by subjecting memory to analysis and attempting to “establish critically a

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Reconciliation movement in South Africa. However, many of their conclusions are fairly universal and can be applied more broadly to historic events.

<sup>8</sup> Nora, 9.

‘true’ memory,” the historian destroys the integrity of the memory.<sup>9</sup> This rather extreme claim, however, does a disservice to both types of knowing. Each is essential for the other to exist, and writing history does not erase active memory. “Memory motivates historical activity; historical research utilizes memory. ... The enterprises are interdependent; nevertheless, they are not identical.”<sup>10</sup> The Soldiers National Monument at the center of the Gettysburg National Cemetery has four marble figures around the base. In front, an elderly soldier represents War, telling his story to the scribe History. In many ways, sharing memory is a catalyst for the writing of history, and good history should include the history of memory as well as seek to identify the truth.



The phenomenon of memory sets humans apart from Nietzsche’s unhistorical beast; although man envies the beast’s apparent happiness, the retention of the past is what allows man to converse and create.<sup>11</sup> Nietzsche conceives of memory as a burden, which “returns like a specter to trouble the quiet of a later moment,” and stifles creativity with conservatism.<sup>12</sup> Although he recognizes that “man can only become man by first suppressing this unhistorical

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<sup>9</sup> Nora, 9.

<sup>10</sup> Charles S. Maier, “A Surfeit of Memory? Reflections on History, Melancholy and Denial,” *History & Memory: Studies in Representation of the Past*. 5: 2 (1999), 136-152, p. 143.

<sup>11</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Use and Abuse of History* (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1957), 5.

<sup>12</sup> Nietzsche, 5.

element in his thoughts,” man only moves forward by embracing the unhistorical and using “his power of turning the past to the uses of the present.”<sup>13</sup> Whatever the dangers of too much memory, it is the capacity to remember and call upon the past that makes humans unique.

Our consciousness and our actions are shaped by our experiences. And our experiences shape us only because of their lingering consequences, which we term, collectively, *memory*. Memory is, of course, not the sole determiner of our experience and behavior. But in bridging the past and the present, memory serves a central coordinating role.<sup>14</sup>

Without any memory, there is nothing to separate humans from the unhistorical beast. The coordinating role of memory keeps it active in the present, and distinguishes it again from history. While history takes a critical approach to the past, memory uses experience to shape perceptions and to push forward.

Memory is based on connections; it is retrieved not by calling it back from a specific neuron but by tracing a chain of associations. In the seventeenth century, John Locke proposed the idea of associationism, where complex ideas were built from simpler building

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<sup>13</sup> Nietzsche, 8.

<sup>14</sup> James L. McGaugh, “Modulation of Memory Storage Processes,” in *Memory: Interdisciplinary Approaches*, ed. (Solomon et al. New York: Springer-Verlag, 1988), 33.



blocks.<sup>15</sup> After Locke, association became a way of thinking, based on breaking down and recombining concepts to form novel ideas.

Several neurobiological studies have suggested that the brain stores everything that it encounters and is only limited by the ability to recall.<sup>16</sup> Recall is affected by several factors, most importantly by the connections between and around memories. An emotional connection to a memory, such as fear, excitement, or surprise, makes the memory stronger and easier to access. The amygdala, a group of neurons designated as a structure of the brain, is active in processing emotional memories and creating stronger long-term memories of these events.<sup>17</sup> This results in a skewed sense of the past, because the emotionally intense moments of battle are more likely to be vividly remembered than the long hours of marching and boredom that made up most of a soldier's life. Memory can also become unreliable because of confabulation, "the making up of narratives and details, or the filling in of gaps in memory."<sup>18</sup> To some degree, this process occurs every time a memory is recalled; the brain calls up parts of the memory but fills in details or background through inference.<sup>19</sup> Over time, the memory can become corrupted as insignificant changes accumulate.

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<sup>15</sup> George R. Goethals and Paul R. Solomon, "Interdisciplinary Perspectives on the Study of Memory," in *Memory: Interdisciplinary Approaches*, ed. Solomon et al. (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1988), 2. Yadin Dudai, *Memory from A to Z: Key Words, Concepts, and Beyond* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 20-21.

<sup>16</sup> McGaugh, 34.

<sup>17</sup> Dudai, 13.

<sup>18</sup> Dudai, 54.

<sup>19</sup> Maurice Halbwachs, trans. Lewis A. Coser, *On Collective Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 47.

Many of the same issues of memory can be applied to collective memory. A culture's collective memory is housed in many individual, independent brains; it is shared among many people and can be passed down through generations. As individual memory is an essential part of being human, collective memory is an essential component of culture. Although the social memory is held by many individuals, "by selecting ongoing information that is relevant to the group, filtering it, retaining it, and dispersing it in society, each individual could potentially alter the collective memory of the group."<sup>20</sup> The formation of collective memory after the war was organized through veterans' groups such as the Grand Army of the Republic, discussed in Chapter Four.



The Reconstruction period was an exercise in creating and adapting collaborative memory. Immediately after the war, expressions of memory were quiet, as veterans and their communities coped with the trauma and loss of the war. Walt Whitman famously wrote, "the real war will never get in the books," because the details of soldiers' lives would be left out.<sup>21</sup> However, with more distance from the war, memory became more public, and "by 1880 American culture, especially the publishing industry and its growing legions of readers, began to welcome soldiers' stories. **Some of the real war, and much**

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<sup>20</sup> Dudai, 51.

<sup>21</sup> Walt Whitman, "Specimen Days," quoted in Louis Masur, *The Real War Will Never Get in the Books* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 281.

**of an imagined one, was already getting into the books.**<sup>22</sup> The generals on both sides wrote their stories: Grant's memoirs, published in two volumes in 1885, became an all-time bestseller, and Longstreet's popular account of the war appeared in 1896. Veterans and towns erected monuments to honor their dead and the men who served. As both Northerners and Southerners gave voice to their experiences, "Countless private memories began to collide, inexorably, with the politics of collective memory."<sup>23</sup> Over time, collective politics shaped a new framework of memory, constructed to bring the two halves of the country back together.

In David Blight's comprehensive study of Civil War memory, he describes three competing visions: reconciliation, white supremacy, and emancipation. Blight's thesis is based on the relationship among these three, which he says is "in the end... a story of how the forces of reconciliation overwhelmed the emancipationist vision in the national culture, how the inexorable drive for reunion both used and trumped race."<sup>24</sup> Reconciliation honored the shared memory of soldiers in lieu of a focus on the root causes of the war; by ignoring the bitter divide over slavery and the emancipation of the slaves, the veterans could instead work to bring the two halves of the country back together and heal the wounds opened by the fighting. The 1913 photograph of veterans of Pickett's Charge, blue and gray, shaking hands over the

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<sup>22</sup> Blight, 170. Emphasis added.

<sup>23</sup> Blight, 19.

<sup>24</sup> Blight, 2.

stone wall at Gettysburg, captured the reconciliationist vision. The men in the image look solemnly at each other and extend their hands in friendship; nowhere is there evidence of the reasons the men shaking hands had gone to fight each other fifty years before.

Although Martha Minow writes about trauma on a larger scale, her thoughts on understanding memory can be applied to the study of the Civil War. She describes the inclination of perpetrators to rationalize their actions; the way she deals with this can be extended to the problem of reconciliation and forgetting the emancipationist idea. “To try to understand these beliefs is not a capitulation to evil nor merely a pragmatic effort to avoid laying the ground for further group conflicts. It is a recognition of the filters of meaning and memory that lead people to view their own conduct and beliefs as justifiable.”<sup>25</sup> The veterans who shaped their memory around the exclusion of black veterans and civil rights cannot be demonized and written off; their memory, their lingering consequences, need to be understood in order to write the full history.

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Chamberlain fit in this context as an active creator and consumer of memory. The experiences of the war shaped the way he thought, and his memories were a political tool in his quest for public offices. However, his recollections were not static; from his earliest reports to his post-war speeches and memoirs, his memories changed

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<sup>25</sup> Minow, 122.

in their detail and scope. With more distance from the war and with the benefit of hindsight, some events gained significance in the narrative and others were pushed to the background. The bayonet charge on Little Round Top eclipsed the rest of the battle in importance for him, and he remembered the officers he had served with in the Fifth Corps above other officers in the army.

Chamberlain himself identified some of his writing as an expression of memory rather than an attempt at history. His speeches were not always “an essay in composition,” but rather an attempt “to hold fast the image which passed before my eyes.”<sup>26</sup> He clearly recognized the limitations of one person’s memory to represent the whole experience. At the same time, he defended the significance of his memory, claiming that “...this will no less be truth, - one aspect of *the* truth, which in its manifold, magnificent wholeness would take the notes and memories of thousands to portray.”<sup>27</sup> Chamberlain expected his reader to understand that the events and people that he experienced most directly would have greater prominence in his memory.<sup>28</sup> In his memoir, he implored his readers to forgive any omissions, insisting that, “it is not that I forget that in every grade and all through the ranks are men whose names deserve remembrance as

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<sup>26</sup> *Armies*, 246.

<sup>27</sup> *Armies*, 246.

<sup>28</sup> *Armies*, 246-247. Diane Monroe Smith, *Chamberlain at Petersburg: The Charge at Fort Hell, June 18, 1864*. (Gettysburg, PA: Thomas Publications, 2004), 78.

immortal as their devotion was sublime.”<sup>29</sup> In a 1903 speech on Petersburg and Appomattox, Chamberlain clearly demonstrated this understanding:

I have no reason to expect that what most drew my interest there will equally command, or deserve, yours. My motive was primarily personal; to assure myself as to two certain points on those fields, the last visions of which had left my memory somewhat clouded – the one [Petersburg], with the sudden overcast of my own early down-going amidst storm and disaster; the other [Appomattox Court House], with the thrilling phantasmagoria of the consummation. I am not trying to write history; nor, indeed, to write at all. I am yielding to the mood of the hour; letting these scenes review me as much as I them – what is unchanged testing the changed.<sup>30</sup>

Both Chamberlain and the veterans in his audience understood the power of memory. He revisited the sites that held continued significance for him to reconstruct the events and understand why they had significance. For Chamberlain, understanding the ground around Petersburg where he had been wounded helped him understand how he had changed because of that wound. The ground at Appomattox Court House similarly helped him recall his actions there, which defined for him the beginning of his reunion relationship with the South. Although “some points, no doubt, are set in high light, under the emotion which atmospheres them,” Chamberlain’s acknowledgement

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<sup>29</sup> *Armies*, 246-247.

<sup>30</sup> Joshua L. Chamberlain, “Reminiscences of Petersburg and Appomattox: October, 1903.” Reprinted in Smith, 78.

of his memory's unconscious selection allows the reader to accept his account as a portion of the truth because he did not claim to represent the whole.<sup>31</sup>

However, in some instances, Chamberlain and other veterans clearly intended to use their memories to shape history as it was being written. Like War telling his story to History, the veterans wrote and broadcast their memories in the hopes of preserving them for posterity. Regimental organizations appointed historians to record their movements and experiences, and the same groups carefully designed the placement and design of monuments to reflect their service. When veterans disagreed with another account, they took it upon themselves to correct it with a counterargument.



Some historians write off much of Chamberlain's memory as self-promotion and image building. From their perspective, he actively promoted his memory at the expense of others for primarily political reasons. It is true that in several cases, Chamberlain stretched the truth; for example, although he had asked his superiors for a promotion after his Petersburg wound, he claimed that Grant had promoted him almost spontaneously.

However, most of his contemporaries trusted his recollections implicitly. On asking Chamberlain for a description of the events commemorated by his Medal of Honor, Thomas Hubbard told him, "it

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<sup>31</sup> *Armies*, 246.

would be impossible for you to say anything... that would savor of boasting, for your record as a brave soldier is so well known that self praise would necessarily fall far below what those who remember the dark days know to be true of you.”<sup>32</sup> His audiences trusted that Chamberlain’s speeches represented the actions he had participated in, and the culture that celebrated veterans’ memories allowed the professor of rhetoric some poetic license with his depictions of events. Chamberlain’s biographer Alice Trulock points out that, although details differed from other accounts, Chamberlain remained “willing to amend his statements when other information warranted and was substantially correct. He also went out of his way to reconcile seemingly contradictory accounts were possible.”<sup>33</sup> Although he relied heavily on romantic imagery and although his memories sweetened with time, the evidence suggests that Chamberlain did not intend to deceive his readers or inflate his achievements; his accounts of his memories simply placed himself in the foreground.

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However separate or interdependent memory and history are, “...memory has a history, or more precisely, histories.”<sup>34</sup> This project is an attempt to write the history of one memory of the American Civil War. Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain defended his memory from other

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<sup>32</sup> Thomas Hubbard to War Dept., March 1, 1893, JLC Military Personnel file, National Archives. Quoted in Trulock, 366.

<sup>33</sup> Trulock, 440 (n. 60).

<sup>34</sup> Davis, 2.



interpretations at Gettysburg, romanticized the beginnings of reconciliation at Appomattox, and embraced collective memory through the Grand Army of the Republic. However, because “there are as many memories as there are groups,” the history of Chamberlain’s memory does not represent the memory of Southern veterans, the memory of veterans of the Western theater, or even necessarily the memory of other men within his own regiment.<sup>35</sup> As the conflicts of memory encountered in this narrative will show, there are many more histories to be told.

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<sup>35</sup> Nora, 9.

## Chapter 3 Of Monuments and Men

But, in a larger sense, we cannot dedicate... we cannot consecrate... we cannot hallow... this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it far above our poor power to add or detract.

- Abraham Lincoln, November 1863

On a summer day that would remain with him for the rest of his life, Colonel Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain of the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine led a bayonet charge toward the enemy after a desperate fight to hold the left flank of the Union army on a rocky hill in Pennsylvania. Thirty years later he was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for his actions there, often credited with saving the Union army and, in some accounts, with changing the course of the war. The battle at Little Round Top was often mentioned in reports directly after the battle, and over the years, increasingly romantic views declared that Little Round Top was the “key” to the Union position and that a defeat there would have forced the Union army to retreat. Some extreme accounts even equated the loss of the hill with the loss of the war.<sup>1</sup> Although the myth grew out of proportion to the actual strategic importance of Little Round Top in the larger sense of the battle and the war, to Chamberlain the

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<sup>1</sup> Garry Adleman, *The Myth of Little Round Top* (Gettysburg: Thomas Publications, 2003), 37.

hill and the battle were synonymous. The battle to save the army at Little Round Top was the defining moment of Chamberlain's war experience, and for him, therefore, the charge down Little Round Top was the defining moment of the war.

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On July 2, 1863, the Union and Confederate armies faced each other for the second day at Gettysburg, a small crossroads town in southern Pennsylvania. Lee had pushed his army into Northern territory to forage from land untouched by war and to strike a decisive blow that would end the war. The Union line was anchored along a crest in a strong defensive position, except for the Third Corps under General Daniel Sickles. Sickles disobeyed orders and swung his line forward to higher ground, leaving the left flank inadequately defended. As Meade, the commanding general, discovered the extent of Sickles's mistake, he sent reinforcements from the Fifth and Sixth Corps to fill the gaps created in the line. Colonel Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain, commanding the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine, was placed along the slope of Little Round Top, rising ground at the left flank of the Union army. Simply because of the order of march that morning, the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine formed the far left of the brigade, and therefore the far left of the Union army. Colonel Strong Vincent, the brigade commander, placed the regiment, telling Chamberlain "with a voice of awe... 'to hold the line at

all costs!”<sup>2</sup> Their neighbors to the right were the rest of Vincent’s brigade: the 83<sup>rd</sup> Pennsylvania, 44<sup>th</sup> New York, and 16<sup>th</sup> Michigan. To the left were the detached Company B of the regiment and the rocky, wooded slope of the hill.

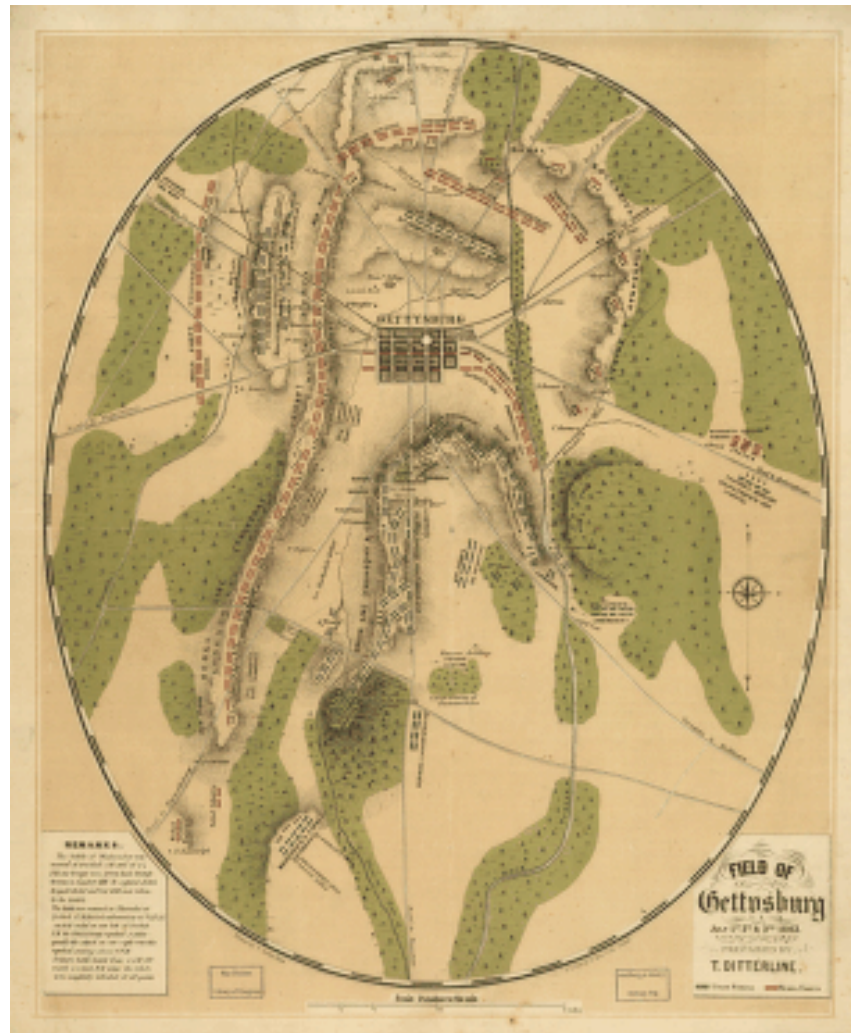
This much is clear from the historical record. However, detailed accounts begin to accumulate contradictions from the point where the battle began. In the smoke and din of battle, each man saw only what was in front of him, and even then only what he thought he saw. Chamberlain, as an officer overseeing several companies, noted this confusion in the officers who reported to him. After the war, several of his officers were surprised “to hear that it was some other than a single one of them who came to me in the course of the fight with information of the enemy’s extended movements to envelop our left.”<sup>3</sup> Each officer claimed the credit of having observed the enemy’s movement. Chamberlain graciously acknowledged that each soldier’s memory was correct, although it was limited to his personal experience: “...they are all right; no one of them is wrong.”<sup>4</sup> While this philosophy respects the memory of individuals, it only sidesteps the fact that no single narrative encompasses all the memories.

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<sup>2</sup> Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain, *Through Blood and Fire at Gettysburg: General Joshua Chamberlain and the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine* (Gettysburg: Stan Clark Military Books, 1994), 10.

<sup>3</sup> William Styple, ed., *With A Flash of His Sword: The Writings of Major Holman S. Melcher 20<sup>th</sup> Maine Infantry* (Kearny, NJ: Bell Grove Publishing Co., 1994), 121.

<sup>4</sup> Styple, 121.



**Gettysburg battlefield (LOC)**

Because the subject of this essay is Chamberlain's memory, it is appropriate to begin with his version of events as the standard, though it is important to remember that it is only his version. He recalled that the lines had not been in place for ten minutes before the Rebel cannons ceased firing and the infantry lines met. The musket fire was "promptly answered, repulsed, and renewed again and again," as Longstreet's men reached Little Round Top.<sup>5</sup> Upon observing a potential flanking maneuver by the Confederates, Chamberlain chose

<sup>5</sup> *Blood and Fire*, 14.

to extend his line by directing his men to move from double to single ranks, at the same time refusing the flank, bending it back at approximately a right angle to the original.<sup>6</sup> The men of the 20<sup>th</sup> performed this maneuver while continuing to take and return fire. When the 15<sup>th</sup> Alabama advanced again, far from “repulsed and as we hoped dispersed,” the Union line, weakened by cross fire and out of ammunition, threatened to break.<sup>7</sup> When his men asked to move forward to cover their wounded, Chamberlain ordered a bayonet charge toward the enemy, which took the form of a right wheel as the refused flank caught up with the original line.

This unexpected offensive and the terrifying threat of bayonet wounds succeeded in halting the enemy: “Ranks were broken; many retired before us somewhat hastily; some threw their muskets to the ground – even loaded....”<sup>8</sup> The charge finally repulsed the advancing Alabamians and secured the flank. Through the night of July 2, the men buried their dead and built stone walls as fortification; they were relieved the next morning and held in reserve through the trial of Pickett’s Charge the following day.

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The first monument on the Gettysburg battlefield was placed inside the cemetery in 1867; the next monument, placed in 1878,

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<sup>6</sup> Refusing the line is a military maneuver that moves the flank, or end, units back so they face to the flank rather than the front. This tactic prevents the enemy from attacking on the flank and firing down along the line rather than at the front, as well as allowing the refused units to more effectively fire on the attacking force.

<sup>7</sup> *Blood and Fire*, 21.

<sup>8</sup> *Blood and Fire*, 24.

recognized Colonel Strong Vincent and marked the point of his wounding at Little Round Top. Since the placement of these first memorials, monumentation along the Union line had flourished as veterans returned to mark their accomplishments. Regulations were established to govern the monuments, first through the Gettysburg Battlefield Memorial Association (GBMA), and later through Congress. These policies were worded as impartially as possible, with the design to make the battlefield a document rather than a platform for celebration of one side or the other.

Congress in making appropriations for the park has prescribed that in marking positions inscriptions shall be without praise and without censure. In other words the park is to be devoted to historical purposes; its topographical and general features are to be maintained; its lines of battle marked and made accessible; monuments to be on lines of battle with inscriptions giving positions and movements limited to statements of historical facts.<sup>9</sup>

The goal of these regulations was to assist in the public recognition of a history that honored both sides. The official sanction of praise or censure on a monument meant that one side was in the wrong, while the other was in the right. By avoiding mention of the causes of the war, the park allowed the inclusion of the memories of both Northerners and Southerners. The narrative of the battle and the valor of the men on both sides provided common ground for reconciliation; it

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<sup>9</sup> Commissioners to Oates, Feb. 3, 1903. OC-GNMP.

is not surprising, therefore, that Gettysburg became the symbolic site for grand reunions of all veterans.

The park sanctioned what historian David Blight calls the “reconciliationist vision, which took root in the process of dealing with the dead from so many battlefields....”<sup>10</sup> Gettysburg, the site of the bloodiest battle, stood out as an appropriate place to begin healing wounds. However, this vision, with its tendency to shy away from discussing reasons for the war, turned the discussion of the war away from the Southern defense of slavery and towards a reconciliation between Northern and Southern whites.<sup>11</sup> Some veterans objected to this non-partisan philosophy, including one who claimed: “No God-knows-who-was-right bosh must be tolerated at Gettysburg. The men who won the victory there were eternally right, and the men who were defeated were eternally wrong.”<sup>12</sup> However, the spirit of reconciliation came to dominate the field as the history of Gettysburg was written more as a shared white experience than as a bitter conflict over race.

The park’s ambition to mark battle lines for solely “historical purposes” meant fighting the way memory works. The objective truth is elusive, especially when reported by opposing sides, precisely because each individual has a different recollection of the true story. The guidelines of the park attempted to correct for bias, but they could

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<sup>10</sup> David Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory*. (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2001), 2.

<sup>11</sup> Blight, 2.

<sup>12</sup> *National Tribune*, June 14, 1888; quoted in Blight, 203.



not legislate agreement on a “correct” interpretation of events. The park’s commissioners and historians did the best they could to arbitrate disputes over facts, but the urge to impose a narrative that both sides could embrace distorted their conclusions. The task of ensuring that inscriptions were limited to “historical fact” was in fact a challenge to reconstruct events and rewrite history.

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**20<sup>th</sup> Maine veterans at the dedication of the monument, Oct. 3, 1889 (GNMP)**

In October of 1889, survivors of the Twentieth Maine and their spouses gathered at Gettysburg for the dedication of their monuments; they came to add their part of the story to that already recorded on the field. The Twentieth Maine in fact placed three monuments of their own: the main monument on Little Round Top with flank markers indicating the refused line, a second marker at their advanced position

on Big Round Top, and a smaller marker for the detached Company B. The dedication ceremony was an opportunity to reinforce the veterans' sense of shared history through recollections and orations. The event was marked with speeches by the president of the Twentieth Maine Regiment Association, the Association's historian for the event, and Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain, their commander at the battle.

Chamberlain opened his speech by suggesting the modesty of the regiment, saying to his men, "You were doing what you deemed your duty. Today you come with modest mein [*sic*], with care more for the truth than for praise, to retrace and record the simple facts – the outward form – of your movements and action."<sup>13</sup> This statement echoes the guidelines for monument placement; creating a record of the outward form of the battle adheres strictly to the intent to record factual troop movements and positions, without referring to the different motives of each side for fighting. Throughout Chamberlain's speech he stayed close to the military history of the occasion. Unlike Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, Chamberlain's address did not touch on the cause for which his men died. Far from forgetting these men, he wished "Honor and sacred remembrance to those who fell here, and buried part of our hearts with them."<sup>14</sup> Yet his praise for the fallen on both sides was directly tied to their performance of duty, not to their political or sectional differences.

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<sup>13</sup> Stypke, 119.

<sup>14</sup> Stypke, 126.

The bulk of Chamberlain's dedication speech delved into the details of the regiment's position on July 2. The placement of the monument was the paramount concern; this piece of granite represented the legacy of the veterans.

I am certain that the position of this monument is quite to the left of the center of our regimental line when the final charge was ordered. Our original left did not extend quite to the great rock which now supports this memorial of honor. When we changed front with our left wing and extended it by the flank and rear, the color was brought to mark the new center, which was to become the salient of our formation; and it was placed, I was sorry to do it, on the smooth and open slope, and in a position completely exposed. Beyond this the left was refused and extended in single rank. When the charge was made I was beside the color-bearer, and I know well that we struck the enemy where their line was open to view, and the ground comparatively unobstructed. .... I am not at all criticizing the judgement of our comrades who selected the great boulder for the base of the monument. It was entirely fitting to mark it with that honor, as it became so conspicuous an object during the terrible struggle – the center and pivot of the whirlpool that raged around.<sup>15</sup>

The accuracy of the monument's placement was important because the inscription and location literally writ in stone the actions of the men on the field for posterity. Small, seemingly irrelevant details, such as the exact location of the flag before the charge, meant a great deal to

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<sup>15</sup> Stuple, 120-121.

the veterans because these details reinforced or repudiated their own memories of this defining moment in the battle.

Although Chamberlain intended to talk strictly about facts, he could not avoid praising his men. At a fundamental level, the placement of the monument was designed to recognize for themselves and for posterity the importance of their actions on July 2, 1863. “The country has acknowledged your service,” he told them, “Your State is proud of it. This well-earned and unsought fame has moved you already to acknowledge your deserts [*sic*]. .... At your own cost you set your monument here to mark the ground where faithful service and devotion wrought a result so momentous.”<sup>16</sup> That the fame was unsought is key; the placement of the monument was therefore not merely self-promotion. However, Chamberlain was not above claiming what he thought was his due, stating “...while every one here, officer and soldier, did more than his duty, and acted with utmost intelligence and spirit, you must permit me to add the remark that I commanded my regiment that day.”<sup>17</sup> This is a telling remark from a man often condemned for self-promotion. Like most other veterans, he wanted to tell his side of the story and make sure that it was not lost. Just as he believed that all his officers were correct in their recollections, he believed that his view and his leadership were essential to understand the pivotal events on Little Round Top.

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<sup>16</sup> Stypke, 120.

<sup>17</sup> Stypke, 123.

There is a quality of reverence that pervades Chamberlain's recollections, as if he could not quite believe the experiences and accomplishments of the war. At the dedication he told his men, "We do not count ourselves old yet; and these things were done more than twenty-six years ago. We believe we could do them now; but we wonder how we could have done them then."<sup>18</sup> This indirect praise, as well as more direct praise of his soldiers' sense of duty, stayed within the spirit of reconciliation. The praise Chamberlain offered was based on duty rather than the motivation for fighting and therefore it was not given at the expense of his opponents. In fact, because of the framework in which he placed his discussion, praise for one side resulted in indirect praise for the other. The reconciliationist vision thought of the opposing sides as if they were sports teams, where more skill on each side meant that their accomplishments were more meaningful. This vision transforms the enemy into worthy opponents, allowing praise for one side without attributing blame or a wrongful cause to the other.

The monuments dedicated by the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine immortalized the regiment on the field of Gettysburg. By adding their mark, they became part of the living document of the field that continues today to teach visitors about the battle. To the best of their ability, the veterans marked their locations impartially and recorded their actions without excessive praise. Even after placing the monument, they continued to

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<sup>18</sup> Stypke, 125.

refine their memories to reach the best consensus possible; their simple monument represents the best approximation of the factual history, but like all histories, it remains “problematic and incomplete.”<sup>19</sup>



**20<sup>th</sup> ME monument today**



At the base of the dip between the Round Tops stands a plaque erected by the War Department. It states that Law’s Brigade, under the command of General Evander M. Law, “Arrived on the Field about 4 P.M. [July 2] and advanced against the Union positions. The 4th 15th and 47th Regiments attacked Little Round Top and continued the assault until dark.” This simple plaque is the only memorial erected at

<sup>19</sup> Pierre Nora. “Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Memoire*,” *Representations*. No. 26 (Spring 1989): 7-25, p. 8.

Little Round Top to the Southerners who fought opposing the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine. The commander of the 15<sup>th</sup> Alabama, William Oates, petitioned the Gettysburg National Park Commission from 1902 to about 1906 without luck. The Commission found several problems with his proposed monument; Oates wanted to place the monument at the top of the hill rather than on his original line of battle and his proposed inscription included personal mention of his brother, who was shot during one of the charges.<sup>20</sup>

Oates objected to these regulations, exclaiming, "I am not proposing a fight of any kind, but.... I consider such a decision as that an insult both to our dead comrades and to the living. I and other Southerners voted to create the battlefield Commission, but never with a view to such a rule as that."<sup>21</sup> Here Oates called on his service in the Congress to point out what he felt was a great injustice. He felt that the requirement to place the monument on the original battle line was designed to prevent the placement of monuments by Southerners. Robbins, the Confederate member of the Commission, replied to this charge: "The reason why Confederate monuments are so few is not because our countrymen of the North object to them but because the Southern people seem to prefer spending their money for monuments on some of the many battlefields where Dame Fortune smiled on us

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<sup>20</sup> OC-GNMP.

<sup>21</sup> Oates to Robbins, Oct. 2, 1902. OC-GNMP.

more graciously than she did at Gettysburg.”<sup>22</sup> Many Southerners, however, felt as Oates did and refused to place monuments “a mile away” from where they fought, “where my regiment was repulsed, and good men fell.”<sup>23</sup>

The location that Oates preferred for his monument was more controversial than he acknowledged. In his correspondence with the commissioners, he was consistently vague about his ideal location. The most explicit statement was made in December 1904, asking for a site inside the lines marked by the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine monuments. He made a conscious choice to push for this location, because he “knew a monument placed behind the Union lines would demonstrate the valor of the 15th Alabama and his own heroism – something of a consolation for the defeat he and his fellow Alabamians had suffered at Gettysburg.”<sup>24</sup> His description relied on memory and his claim relied on the acceptance of his memory as a valid source of history.

There is a boulder upon the slope thirty steps perhaps to the west or inside the extreme line held by the 20th Maine. I remember distinctly an incident which occurred [*sic*] at that boulder where the colors of my regiment were at that time. Would your Commission agree for the shaft to be erected there? I showed Maj. Robbins a point further up the slope on the driveway about where my command was driven from and told him that any where

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<sup>22</sup> Robbins, “Historic Gettysburg in 1903,” OC-GNMP.

<sup>23</sup> Oates to Robbins, Feb. 14, 1903. OC-GNMP.

<sup>24</sup> Glenn W. LaFantasie, *Gettysburg Requiem: The Life and Lost Causes of Confederate Colonel William C. Oates* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 299-300.



along there would satisfy me. You know this somewhat conflicts with the claim made by General Chamberlain but I know that I am right about it and he is mistaken.<sup>25</sup>

Because of this claim and the dispute of Chamberlain's perspective on the battle, the Commission enlisted Chamberlain's memory to verify or refute some of Oates' claims. Thus, part of the controversy became personal between the two men; although the bulk of the correspondence was channeled through the Commission rather than directly, they each addressed the other's claims. Chamberlain, for his part, agreed that the 15<sup>th</sup> Alabama had pushed back his line, although he refused to admit that it had broken, which became the key issue. Although he wrote that he would "feel no objection" to a monument, he qualified that he would "expect it to be placed on ground where [the regiment] actually stood at some time during the battle, - at the extreme point of its advance, if desired, - so that it might not only represent the valor of a regiment but the truth of history."<sup>26</sup> Chamberlain also pointed out flaws and inconsistencies in Oates's reports, writing, "Some of the statements of Colonel Oates... differ widely from the well established record of facts in the case, and very materially from former statements of his... [in] which I was much gratified to find so close an agreement between our impressions and

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<sup>25</sup> Oates to Nicholson, Dec. 29, 1904. OC-GNMP.

<sup>26</sup> Chamberlain to Nicholson, Aug. 14, 1903. OC-GNMP.

recollections as to our contest there."<sup>27</sup> At stake for both men was recognition of their memories as valid history.

Both Chamberlain and Oates maintained the spirit of reconciliation through their correspondence, although each remained firmly convinced that the other was wrong. They hid their disagreements under a veneer of cordiality. Chamberlain wrote to the commissioners,

I am more than willing that the monument of the 15th. Alabama should be placed inside my lines, for some of these men were... doubtless there, and I should feel honored by the companionship of the monument of so gallant a regiment on that historic crest, as I was honored by its presence forty years ago.<sup>28</sup>

This highly politic response to Oates's request is typical of Chamberlain's writing. While he used the language of reconciliation, speaking of honor and gallantry, Chamberlain was clearly not thrilled by the idea of his opponent's monument encroaching on the memorial erected to his men. In fact, the very boulder that Oates pointed to for the placement of his monument was proposed as the base for a statue of Chamberlain in 1910.<sup>29</sup> The ground and, more importantly, the memory that meant so much to Chamberlain were threatened by Oates's conflicting claims. Possibly knowing this, Oates repeatedly couched his arguments in terms of memory, telling Chamberlain

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<sup>27</sup> Chamberlain to Nicholson, Aug. 14, 1903. OC-GNMP.

<sup>28</sup> JLC to Nicholson, March 16, 1905. OC-GNMP.

<sup>29</sup> OC-GNMP.

directly that, “General neither of us are as young as we were when we confronted each other on Little Round Top nearly 42 years ago. Now in the natural course the memory of neither is as good as then.”<sup>30</sup> In contrast to Chamberlain’s statement to his men that all of them were correct in their observation, Oates used the knowledge that “No one man can see all that occurs in a fight even between two regiments” to attempt to cast doubt on Chamberlain’s refutation of his claims.<sup>31</sup> Each of the men talked in terms of memory and reconciliation, although they each wanted the reconciliation to take place on their own terms.<sup>32</sup> Although Chamberlain offered to meet at Gettysburg, and Oates suggested that if they were on the ground they would find more to agree on, Oates refused to point out to Chamberlain where he would like the monument placed.<sup>33</sup>

That the monument was never placed, in the end, was a matter between Oates and the Commission. The commissioners were not willing to alter the regulations; Oates was not willing to place the monument a mile away from the site of the battle, where he felt no one would see it and recognize his memory. Chamberlain’s involvement in the controversy was tangential; his only input was to criticize the consistency of Oates’s arguments. However, Oates’s attempt to circumvent the rules was based on an understanding that the winners

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<sup>30</sup> Oates to JLC, April 14, 1905. OC-GNMP.

<sup>31</sup> Oates to JLC, April 14, 1905. OC-GNMP.

<sup>32</sup> Blight, 164

<sup>33</sup> Oates to JLC, April 14, 1905. OC-GNMP.

had made the rules and that Union veterans had the upper hand in commemorating their victory at Gettysburg. As his fellow Alabamian W. R. Houghton wrote to the Commission, the South felt that "...as now laid off the field gives only one sided history, as nothing shows what particular commands fought at particular points. In fact it is not shown that any body fought there on one side."<sup>34</sup> In proposing his monument, Oates tried to right the perceived injustice to his side, and in the process ran up against not only Chamberlain, but also the established Federal narrative of the battle.

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Controversies erupt over any public recognition of any controversial event. In some sense, monuments can be an important part of healing wounds between groups. As historian Martha Minow writes, "devoting public space to memories of atrocities means devoting time and energy to decisions about what kinds of memories, images, and messages to embrace, critique, and resist."<sup>35</sup> Although the Civil War is not an atrocity on the scale of the genocides that Minow studies, it created a rift in the nation that required time and discussion to repair. The drive to erect monuments required veterans of both sides to have a voice, although the victims of slavery were left out of the conversation altogether. "Shared spaces and experiences enabled by public art do not produce singular or coherent memories,

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<sup>34</sup> Houghton to Nicholson, November 14, 1903. OC-GNMP.

<sup>35</sup> Martha Minow, *Between Vengeance and Forgiveness* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998), 138.

but they can enable ways to hold and reveal, in common, competing memories.”<sup>36</sup> Oates’s proposal constituted a counter-memorial to the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine monument; although he did not succeed in erecting the monument, just the proposal forced the stakeholders to discuss how their visions differed.

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<sup>36</sup> Minow, 138.

## Chapter 4

### Honor Answering Honor

No rumour of the foe's advance  
 Now swells upon the wind;  
 No troubled thought at midnight haunts  
 Of loved ones left behind.  
 No vision of the morrow's strife  
 The warrior's dream alarms;  
 No braying horn, nor screaming fife,  
 At dawn shall call to arms.

- Theodore O'Hara,  
*The Bivouac of the Dead*, 1847

As the end of the war neared, the two armies assumed a parallel course, probing at each other's lines. The last offensive of the Union army and the retreat of the Confederates were marked with names such as Quaker Road, White Oak Road, Five Forks, and Appomattox Station. The Confederate troops evacuated Petersburg on April second, after a nine-month siege by Federal forces. Chamberlain distinguished himself again at Five Forks, on April first, and he devoted a chapter to the battle in *The Passing of the Armies*, his 1915 memoir of the end of the war.<sup>1</sup> This journey came to an end at Appomattox Court House, where on April 9, 1865, General Robert

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<sup>1</sup> Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain. *The Passing of the Armies*. (Bantam Books: New York, 1993). The chapter on Five Forks covers pages 87-134, much of which contains a defense of General Warren's actions against the disapproval of General Sheridan. This action led to Warren's replacement as commander of the Fifth Corps by Griffith for the duration of the war. Chamberlain's focus on this aspect of the battle shows the tendency of memory to exaggerate issues important to those involved at the time, but inconsequential from a larger perspective.

E. Lee surrendered the Army of Northern Virginia to General Ulysses S. Grant. Grant initiated the official surrender on April seventh through a dispatch to Lee, asking him to end “further effusion of blood.”<sup>2</sup> Lee replied that evening, saying he still believed in the viability of the Army of Northern Virginia, but inquiring about the terms of surrender Grant would offer. Grant’s reply named only one set condition, “that the men and officers surrendered shall be disqualified for taking up arms again against the Government of the United States until properly exchanged,” and offered any meeting Lee wanted.<sup>3</sup> On April 9, 1865, troops ran into Union cavalry attacking their supply train with infantry support; the Battle of Appomattox Court House became the last engagement of the Army of Northern Virginia.<sup>4</sup> The Confederate troops sent out a white flag, and Lee sent another message to Grant, requesting an interview to discuss terms of surrender.

The two men met that afternoon at the house of Mr. McLean at Appomattox Court House: Lee wore a new uniform and carried a dress sword, while Grant appeared in a private’s uniform with only shoulder straps to mark his rank. The terms of surrender and Lee’s acceptance were written out while the two men met. The Confederates would be paroled, bound not to take up arms against the United States, and sent home. That was it. The arms, artillery, and public property of the

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<sup>2</sup> Ulysses S. Grant, *Personal Memoirs of U. S. Grant*. Reprinted in *Ulysses S. Grant: Memoirs and Selected Letters*. (New York: The Library of America, 1990), 727.

<sup>3</sup> Grant, 727.

<sup>4</sup> Grant, 727-728.

Confederates were to be “turned over to the officer appointed by” Grant, although an exception was made for the horses and sidearms of the officers.<sup>5</sup> With this agreement, the Army of Northern Virginia ceased to exist.

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Although the generals had exchanged messages tiptoeing around the terms of surrender, the ordinary soldiers were unaware of the correspondence. On April ninth, Confederate advance infantry attempted to retake some of their supply trains guarded by Union cavalry; Chamberlain’s two brigades were sent in to relieve the cavalry.<sup>6</sup> In his 1915 memoirs, Chamberlain’s description of this last battle is full of romance and glory:

Right before us, our cavalry, Devins’ division, gallantly stemming the surges of the old Stonewall brigade, desperate to beat its way through. I ride straight to Sheridan. A dark smile and impetuous gesture are my only orders. Forward into double lines of battle, past Sheridan, his guns, his cavalry, and on for the quivering crest! For a moment it is a glorious sight: every arm of the service in full play, - cavalry, artillery, infantry; then a sudden shifting scene as the cavalry, disengaged by successive squadrons, rally under their bugle-calls with beautiful precision and promptitude, and sweep like a storm-cloud beyond our right to close in on the enemy’s left and complete the fateful envelopment.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Grant, 736-739.

<sup>6</sup> Chamberlain here commanded the First and Second Brigades of the First Division, Fifth Corps. William Marvel. *Lee’s Last Retreat: The Flight to Appomattox*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 232. *Armies*, 187, 192-194. Grant, 728-729.

<sup>7</sup> *Armies*, 175.



This version of the battle matches the romanticized tone of much of Chamberlain's writing. The battle is "a glorious sight," described in terms more apt for a ballet than for bloodshed. The infantry on both sides engaged, but the Confederates were vastly outnumbered and almost surrounded.

Chamberlain and his men first heard of the approaching surrender at the appearance of a Confederate staff officer under a flag of truce, "that simple emblem of homely service, wafted hitherward above the dark and crimsoned stream that never can wash themselves away."<sup>8</sup> This messenger came from General Gordon with a request for a suspension of hostilities until terms of surrender could be negotiated with Grant. Because this request was unexpected, Sheridan and Meade, the commanders of the troops engaged, hesitated to agree to the truce. They eventually agreed to a suspension of hostilities for two hours and sent orders for the army to cease firing and halt, though soon after came an order to be ready to go back into battle.<sup>9</sup> Interestingly, Chamberlain remembered more movement after the orders came to halt: "The more the captains cry, 'Halt! the rebels want to surrender,' the more the men want to be there to see it. Still to the front, where the real fun is!"<sup>10</sup> When the officers managed to halt them, the men climbed trees, fences, and each other to secure a better

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<sup>8</sup> *Armies*, 179.

<sup>9</sup> Grant, 731.

<sup>10</sup> *Armies*, 181.

vantage point, driven by the impulse to see the historic moment firsthand and to verify the surrender.



The movement of the men toward the “real fun” soon turned into a movement towards the men in the lines facing them. Officers, many of whom had known each other before the war, met and talked. General John Brown Gordon, commander of the Confederate Second Corps, which included “the old Stonewall brigade,” recalled that, “marked consideration and courtesy were exhibited at Appomattox by the victorious Federals, from the commanding generals to the privates in the ranks. General Meade, who had known General Lee in the old army, paid, after the surrender, an unofficial visit to the Confederate chieftain.”<sup>11</sup> Once the fighting was over, these men who had struggled against each other for four years could attempt to revisit the days before the war.

More compelling is the story of the troops. Chamberlain recalled his soldiers, who when presented with a starving foe, “acted like men, knowing we would suffer for it ourselves... But we forgot Andersonville and Belle Isle that night, and sent over to that starving camp share and share alike for all there....”<sup>12</sup> Grant ordered rations for 25,000 Confederates at his last meeting with Lee, but Chamberlain’s

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<sup>11</sup> John Gordon, *Reminiscences of the Civil War*. (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1903), 443.

<sup>12</sup> *Armies*, 186.

memory is of the men acting of their own accord out of compassion.<sup>13</sup> The two armies had respect for each other and for the hardships they had endured. When the rifles were laid down, though they might not agree, they could get along, and overrun each other's camps with words and trade rather than bayonets. "Such as we parted with was not for sale, or barter; this went for 'old times' – old comradeship across the lines. ...trivial things that might serve as souvenirs, made an exchange about as brisk as the bullets had done a few days ago."<sup>14</sup> The same comradeship and respect for valor made the Union accept the Confederate surrender with grace rather than with vengeance. This attitude valued reunification first; it is how Confederate leaders escaped punishment and why veterans on both sides embraced reunions later in the healing process.

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Historian Jay Winik claims that, "If the spirit of Appomattox was codified on paper on the ninth... it was enshrined in the memories of the fighting men on the twelfth."<sup>15</sup> This was certainly the case for Chamberlain. General Grant insisted on an official surrender ceremony, not letting the Confederates simply stack arms and march away. He selected Chamberlain to receive the official surrender of arms on April twelfth, instructing him to oversee a ceremony "as simple

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<sup>13</sup> Gordon, 443. Appomattox Court House National Historical Park, *Appomattox Court House* (Harpers Ferry: National Park Service, 2002), 73.

<sup>14</sup> *Armies*, 188.

<sup>15</sup> Jay Winik. *April 1865: The Month That Saved America*. (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2001), 195.

as possible,” that would not “humiliate the manhood of the Southern soldiers.”<sup>16</sup> Chamberlain fully felt the honor this assignment conferred upon him; he would orchestrate the historic moment of the surrender, a historic moment that heralded the return of peace.

At dawn on April 12, 1865, Chamberlain placed his division<sup>17</sup> lining the main road in Appomattox Court House, Virginia.<sup>18</sup> The First Division of the Fifth Corps represented the Union, with the veteran Third Brigade placed at the front of the line.<sup>19</sup> The surrendering army marched along his ranks, and at a determined point lay down their arms. The Confederates here were vastly outnumbered: the Union Army totaled 112,000 men, with about 80,000 engaged in the main pursuit of the Confederates. In striking contrast, only 21,000 to 22,000 Confederates participated in the surrender of arms on April twelfth, and only 28,231 paroles were issued, including infantry, cavalry, and artillery.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> *Armies*, 187. Alice Trulock. *In the Hands of Providence: Joshua L. Chamberlain & The American Civil War*. (University of North Carolina Press: Chapel Hill, 1992). 302.

<sup>17</sup> Chamberlain commanded the First Brigade after Petersburg, and the Second Brigade had been placed under his command during active engagements. However, after the official surrender, he requested to be transferred back to the Third Brigade, which included the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine and the veterans of the Fifth Corps. In addition to his attachment to his original unit, he claimed, he believed the veterans should have the honor of accepting the surrender of arms. He also requested that the First and Second Brigades be present for the surrender of the Army of Northern Virginia. This made him, for the day, in charge of the division, although he was not the division commander. *Armies*, 187, 192-194. Marvel, 232.

<sup>18</sup> *Armies*, 194.

<sup>19</sup> Appomattox Court House National Historical Park, 79.

<sup>20</sup> Appomattox Court House National Historical Park, 45, 80. James McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 848.

In 1915, Chamberlain painted the scene in vivid present tense:<sup>21</sup> he watched the Confederates “fix bayonets, stack arms; then, hesitatingly, remove cartridge-boxes and lay them down. Lastly, – reluctantly, with agony of expression, – they tenderly fold their flags, battle-worn and torn, blood-stained, heart-holding colors, and lay them down...”<sup>22</sup> In Gordon’s *Reminiscences*, he described men “weeping as they saw the old banners laid upon the stacked guns like trappings on the coffin of their dead hopes.”<sup>23</sup> This wrenching feeling led to the efforts of some veterans to conceal their colors to bring them home. Although they could accept their military defeat, they were not willing to surrender the physical evidence of their courage and their identity as soldiers.

The Confederates who clung to those pieces of battered bunting knew they would never again wave as martial ensigns above embattled hosts; but they wanted to keep them just as they wanted to keep the old canteen with a bullet hole through it, or the rusty gray jacket that had been torn by canister. They loved those flags, and will love them forever, as mementos of the unparalleled struggle.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Chamberlain’s eloquent description of the ceremony can hardly be improved on. The day after the surrender, April 13, 1865, he wrote a touching description in a letter to his sister, Sarah Chamberlain. After the war he gave speeches and wrote newspaper pieces, but these recollections were epitomized in *The Passing of the Armies*, Chamberlain’s 1915 memoir of the last days of the war. The events presented remain materially the same between accounts, but later accounts tend toward more romantic descriptions and greater flourishes.

<sup>22</sup> *Armies*, 196.

<sup>23</sup> Gordon, 448.

<sup>24</sup> Gordon, 446.

Gordon was quick to point out that the officers made efforts to “check this exhibition of loyalty and love for the old flags,” but he not could bring himself to condemn the actions of these devoted men.<sup>25</sup> His focus on the military symbols of the beaten army mirrors Chamberlain’s attachment to his own “battle-flag, high borne also, – the red Maltese cross on a field of white, that had thrilled hearts long ago.”<sup>26</sup> Chamberlain’s apparent sympathy for the Confederates presages the spirit of reconciliation as brothers in arms, honorable though opposing. In retrospect, the moment at Appomattox could be called the first glimmer of reconciliation.

Chamberlain’s own sense of honor led him to sympathize with the wounded pride of the beaten Confederates. He not only kept his troops from mocking the Southerners as they surrendered their arms and flags, but he ordered his troops to salute by carrying arms.<sup>27</sup> This gesture, he was sure to clarify, was intended for the men and not for their cause. In fact, the action “could be defended... by the suggestion that such a salute was not to the cause for which the flag of the Confederacy stood, but to its going down before the flag of the Union,” although he contended in his memoir that it did not need defense.<sup>28</sup> It

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<sup>25</sup> Gordon, 445.

<sup>26</sup> *Armies*, 180.

<sup>27</sup> “Order arms” and “carry arms” are positions of the Manual of Arms. At the order, the rifle is supported by the stock on the ground and the soldier’s hand on the barrel. At the carry, the rifle is held to the right shoulder and supported by the right hand at the trigger guard. Lem. D. Williams, *The American Illustrated Military Text-Book* (Baltimore: John Murphy & Co., 1861), 33-34.

<sup>28</sup> *Armies*, 195.

came from the same place of respect as did the sharing of rations. He noted:

Before us in proud humiliation stood the embodiment of manhood: men whom neither toils and sufferings, nor the fact of death, nor disaster, nor hopelessness could bend from their resolve; standing before us now, thin, worn, and famished, but erect, and with eyes looking level into ours, waking memories that bound us together as no other bond; - was not such manhood to be welcomed back into a Union so tested and assured?<sup>29</sup>

Writing fifty years later, Chamberlain recalled their “proud humiliation” with compassion. He remembered as each brigade of Confederates passed, identifying them by the battlefields where they had met and with what valor their names were associated. The regiments were identifiable, during the parade as on the battlefield, by the standards they carried. The same flags that the Confederates found so hard to give up were deeply tied to the memories that Chamberlain carried away from the war. The flags were entangled with identity; the symbolism of this identity lasted a lifetime and was carried on to different contexts, as seen in Chamberlain’s inclusion of the red Maltese cross on the front chimney of his own home. Chamberlain remarked that as his men lined up in the morning to prepare for the ceremony, “Great memories uprose; great thoughts went forward.”<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> *Armies*, 195.

<sup>30</sup> *Armies*, 194.

In his narrative of *The Passing of the Armies*, this final meeting with the Confederates provides a chance to review his experiences on the battlefield. The memories tied to the men in gray and the flags they bear sweep from Fredericksburg to the battle at Five Forks just ten days earlier. He names not only the key battlefields where he has fought these men, but the infamous names associated with specific movements: Mayre's Heights at Fredericksburg, Devil's Den, Little Round Top, and the Peach Orchard at Gettysburg, and the Bloody-Angle at Spotsylvania.<sup>31</sup> Many of these names were familiar to Chamberlain's audience; they had become celebrated for particularly brave or bloody fighting. The use of these specific places shows Chamberlain's connection with the group identity of the Army of the Potomac over his individual identity. He adopts the memory of the army in places where he saw no action; certain names spur memories of Culp's Hill and the Peach Orchard at Gettysburg, both sites of intense fighting, but both far removed from his direct corner of the battlefield. In adopting the broader experience of the army as his own, Chamberlain romanticized the grand memory of the war and subjugated the memories of trauma and death.



In the memory of Appomattox, a spirit of reconciliation prevailed, to an extent even at the moment of surrender itself, as opposed to the controversies over Gettysburg. In the words of General Gordon, the

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<sup>31</sup> *Armies*, 196-200.



Confederates had been “fought to a frazzle,” and they were grateful for the generosity shown by Grant, Lincoln, and the Union soldiers.<sup>32</sup> Instrumental in setting this tone were Chamberlain’s generous gesture of respect and the bittersweet atmosphere of the ceremony. The men of the Fifth Corps mixed joy at the end of fighting, pride in their victory, and respect for the beaten Confederates. The simple ceremony that Grant insisted upon and that Chamberlain carried out embodied all of these sentiments.

In their accounts of the ceremony, Chamberlain and Gordon both took the gesture of the salute in the same way. Each man noted the significance of the other’s salute; for each, the fact that the gesture was returned was almost more important than their decision to make the motion.

Instructions had been given; and when the head of each division column comes opposite our group, our bugle sounds the signal and instantly our whole line from right to left, regiment by regiment in succession, gives the soldier’s salutation, from the “order arms” to the old “carry” – the marching salute. Gordon at the head of the column, riding with heavy spirit and downcast face, catches the sound of shifting arms, looks up, and, taking the meaning, wheels superbly, making with himself and his horse one uplifted figure, with profound salutation as he drops the point of his sword to the boot toe; then facing his command, gives word for the successive brigades to pass us with the same position of the manual, - honor answering honor. On our part not a sound

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<sup>32</sup> Gordon, 438.

of trumpet more, nor word or whisper of vain-glorying, nor motion of man standing again at the order, but an awed stillness rather, and breath-holding, as if it were the passing of the dead!<sup>33</sup>

Chamberlain's moving words capture the mood of the moment. Gordon is painted as depressed and vanquished, but restored to honor and manliness with the "sound of shifting arms." Chamberlain, the professor of rhetoric, deliberately choose to cast him moving from "downcast" to "uplifted," enhancing the implied significance for Gordon. The return of the salute by the defeated Confederates confirmed for Chamberlain their integrity and validated his action. He saw this exchange as "honor answering honor" – the two sides coming together with respect for each other.

Although Gordon was much less eager to discuss the surrender for obvious reasons, in his 1903 memoir he picked out similar moments as important. Rather than illustrate any change in demeanor of the Confederates, he depicted the Union soldiers' recognition of the Southern pride and honor despite their defeat and tattered appearance.

Some of the scenes on the field, immediately after the cessation of hostilities and prior to the formal surrender, illustrate the same magnanimous spirit, and were peculiarly impressive and thrilling. As my command, in worn-out shoes and ragged uniforms, but with proud mien, moved to the designated point to stack their arms and surrender their cherished battle-flags, they

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<sup>33</sup> *Armies*, 195-196.

challenged the admiration of the brave victors. One of the knightliest soldiers of the Federal army, General Joshua L. Chamberlain of Maine, who afterward served with distinction as governor of his State, called his troops into line, and as my men marched in front of them, the veterans in blue gave a soldierly salute to those vanquished heroes – a token of respect from Americans to Americans, a final and fitting tribute from Northern to Southern chivalry.<sup>34</sup>

To the defeated Gordon, the recognition of the victors provided some salve for his wounded pride. This “token of respect” allowed him to begin to consider himself an American, although at the same time he insisted on the distinction of being Southern. The commonality of the veterans’ chivalry created a meeting place where the men could begin to heal from the war and reconcile their sections. Yet animosity did not die out with the last guns; four years of bloody fighting could not be entirely erased in a moment. Upon Chamberlain’s commenting on the prospects for good relations between the two sides to the Virginian general Henry Wise, Wise retorted, “You are mistaken, sir, we won’t be forgiven, we hate you, and that is the whole of it!”<sup>35</sup> However deeply rooted this hatred for some, the conduct of both armies at the surrender, especially that of the winners, laid a foundation for bringing back together the fragments of the nation. In a newspaper article, Chamberlain asked, “What was surrendered?” and answered himself, “Whatever was surrendered and laid down, it was not manhood, and

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<sup>34</sup> Gordon, 444.

<sup>35</sup> Trulock, 310.

not honor. Manhood arose, and honor was plighted and received.”<sup>36</sup>  
On some level, the war had brought the men of the armies closer together through shared experience.

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Some historians suggest that Gordon and Chamberlain had more than tone in common; William Marvel attributes their stories of the surrender to the tendency of both generals to inflate their importance and to exaggerate their stories. Marvel presents these inventions as a problem of memory. Chamberlain “...saw the world as one grand romantic cavalcade in which he participated prominently, and if he did anything common, he seemed unable to remember it that way. ... Chamberlain could have passed for a hero with no exaggeration at all, yet he tended to recount his exploits in such towering grandiloquence...” that even friends doubted his accounts.<sup>37</sup> Staying true to this characterization, Chamberlain overstated his importance in orchestrating the ceremony, claiming he was in charge rather than simply at the front of the line of the division, and “from that inflated perspective he would remember offering the defeated foe a salute that banished sectional antagonism and launched the spirit of national reunion.”<sup>38</sup> To approximate the truth, Marvel turned to Chamberlain’s April thirteenth letter to his sister, believing that the

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<sup>36</sup> Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain, “The Old Flag,” quoted in Trulock, 303.

<sup>37</sup> Marvel, 193.

<sup>38</sup> Marvel, 194. However, a National Park Service publication refers to Chamberlain “overseeing the details of the ceremony.” Appomattox Court House National Historical Park, 79.

sources closest to the event come the closest to the truth.<sup>39</sup> However, Chamberlain's brief letter expresses far more than his simple presence at the event. He tells Sarah Chamberlain, "We received them with the honors due to troops, at a shoulder & in silence. They came to a shoulder on passing my flag & preserved perfect order."<sup>40</sup> In these two sentences, Chamberlain describes the events in the same terms, though with less flowery prose, as he does in several paragraphs in *The Passing of the Armies*. The salute, shouldering arms as the Confederates pass, is given and returned, and the meaning is clearly to recognize them as fellow soldiers.

Marvel's broader claim that the story sprung up in the "real era of reunion," the 1890s, along with apocryphal stories such as that of Grant refusing Lee's sword, has more weight.<sup>41</sup> While Chamberlain's account cannot be dismissed as pure exaggeration, neither should it be trusted blindly. The most stirring and widely cited account was published in 1913, forty-eight years after the event, forty-three years after the collapse of Reconstruction, and in the same year as the gathering of veterans of both armies for the fiftieth anniversary of the battle of Gettysburg. Though it was based largely on previous speeches and articles, the tone of *The Passing of the Armies* is solidly reconciliationist.

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<sup>39</sup> Marvel, 194.

<sup>40</sup> Chamberlain, Joshua Lawrence. *Honor Answering Honor*. (Brunswick, ME: Bowdoin College, 1965. Reprinted, Bowdoin College, 2002).

<sup>41</sup> Marvel, 194, 198.

The exchange of salutes at Gettysburg was a precursor to reconciliation; as a token of respect, it was intended to ease tension and prevent the humiliation of the defeated soldiers. However, in the decades after the war, the soldiers placed increased significance on the event. Both Chamberlain and Gordon's emotional twentieth-century accounts romanticize their experiences and apply the lens of reconciliation to the past. This lens brought into focus the sympathy over attachment to a flag and the salute of honor offered and returned. As Pierre Nora wrote, memory "nourishes recollections that may be out of focus or telescopic, global or detached, particular or symbolic."<sup>42</sup> Both Chamberlain and Gordon nurtured the symbolic aspect of their experience at Appomattox as it began to fit better into the larger narrative of reconciliation. The moment at the surrender ceremony was not falsified in retrospect. A sentiment of reconciliation took root earlier than often credited, and this aspect of memory sharpened with age while the bitterness and sectional antagonism blurred.

In attaching so much significance to the exchange of salutes, Chamberlain and Gordon may well have been trying to portray themselves as ahead of the curve. The movement toward reconciliation was spurred by the veterans' sense of shared honor, epitomized in the handshakes shared across the stone wall at

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<sup>42</sup> David Blight argues in his definition of the "reconciliationist vision" that it "...took root in the process of dealing with the dead from so many battlefields, prisons, and hospitals and developed in many ways earlier than the history of Reconstruction has allowed us to believe." David Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2001), 2

Gettysburg in 1913 by the veterans of Pickett's Charge on both sides. Gordon believed that "...we should have much sooner reached the era of good-will and sectional concord if the spirit of the soldiers who did the fighting had animated the civilians who did the talking."<sup>43</sup> In the era of sectional concord, the veterans looked back to moments like Chamberlain's gesture at Appomattox, but the memory had changed over time, as evidence of the "spirit of the soldiers who did the fighting" and the chivalry of both the North and the South.

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<sup>43</sup> Gordon, 450.

## Chapter 5

### Race and Reconciliation

As the crowded years sweep on, and new interests in the community seem to bury the path by which we have come, and obscure the thought that the present good is the inheritance of service and sacrifice given before, it will be the concern of an organization like this, of men and women who share these memories, and these sons of veterans who are to take our places, to keep these thoughts fresh, and the hearts of our people warm, "lest we forget"!

- Chamberlain to Maine GAR, 1903<sup>1</sup>

After the surrender of the Army of Northern Virginia, the Civil War dwindled to a close. General Johnston surrendered to Sherman on April 26, 1865, and the Army of the Trans-Mississippi surrendered on May 26, 1865.<sup>2</sup> With the end of fighting, on June 28, 1865, army headquarters issued Special Orders, No. 339, which dissolved the enormous Union army of volunteers and draftees. Chamberlain remembered his reaction to the news as grief rather than relief or joy at the prospect of returning home. "Ceases to exist! Are you sure of that? We had lately seen the bodily form of our army, or what remained of it, pass in majesty before the eyes of men," at the Grand

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<sup>1</sup> Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain, "Remarks in accepting Commandership, Dept. of Maine, Grand Army of the Republic At Encampment, Bangor, February 18, 1903," BC.

<sup>2</sup> E. B. Long, *The Civil War Day by Day: An Almanac 1861-1865* (Garden City, NY: Da Capo Press, 1971), 682, 690.



Review in the streets of the capital, “while part of [our army] was left planted on the slopes of the Antietam, on the heights of Gettysburg, in the Wilderness, on the far-spread fields and lonely roadsides of all Virginia, - waiting the Resurrection.”<sup>3</sup> Although the army officially disbanded, the soldiers’ identity within the army could not as easily cease to exist. This collective identity led to the formation of multiple organizations based on the common experience of veterans.



In the wake of the war, several groups formed out of the veterans’ impulse to perpetuate ties. Veterans founded the Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States (MOLLUS) in April 1865, just after the surrender at Appomattox Court House and before the official end of the war. The organization’s founding story claims that three veterans in Philadelphia formed the Loyal Legion to protect the government from future assassination threats and to serve as an honor guard for Lincoln’s funeral train in Philadelphia. In the present, it remains an active organization for the preservation of Civil War memory.<sup>4</sup> Chamberlain participated on a national level, as well as in the Maine Commandery of MOLLUS, serving as Commander for at least one term.<sup>5</sup> Smaller, elite groups such as the Union Veterans’ Legion (1884) and the Union Veterans’ Union (1886) limited

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<sup>3</sup> *Armies*, 299.

<sup>4</sup> Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States, “Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States,” <http://www.suvcw.org/mollus/mollus.htm> (accessed April 28, 2008).

<sup>5</sup> Robert Girard Caroon to John J. Pullen and Steven J. Wright, n.d., PHS. Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain, Special Orders, No. 4. February 15. 1868. PHS.

membership to veterans who had served for extended periods or who had been wounded.<sup>6</sup>

The Grand Army of the Republic (GAR), founded as a fledgling organization as early as 1865 emerged as the dominant organization from the immediate post-war period. Dr. Benjamin Stephenson and William Rutledge of Illinois established the GAR based on the form of Union Leagues and other soldiers' organizations.<sup>7</sup> The shared identity and concerns of the veterans meant that the GAR and other organizations could exercise a great deal of political power as well as serving as a forum for memory. In her history of the GAR, Mary Dearing claims that the GAR was born, in part, as a political machine of the Republican Party, although the popular story of its birth rooted it firmly in the need for memory and community.

According to legend, the Grand Army was founded by an idealistic army chaplain and an army doctor, who whiled away long wartime days in camp discussing a great brotherhood of veterans which might be established when peace had severed army ties. This society would unite the former soldiers in bonds of mutual affection and common memories.<sup>8</sup>

In this legend, Stephenson and Rutledge had no political aspirations, and in fact had their vision of a brotherhood wrested from them.

Politics and the Republican party were even blamed for a decline in the

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<sup>6</sup> Stuart McConnell, *Glorious Contentment: The Grand Army of the Republic, 1865-1900* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 121.

<sup>7</sup> Mary R. Dearing, *Veterans in Politics: The Story of the G.A.R.* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1952), 81-85.

<sup>8</sup> Dearing, 81.

organization in the early 1870s.<sup>9</sup> In fact, the GAR was founded in a highly political environment, during debates over Reconstruction among Radical Republicans, conservative Republicans, and Democrats.<sup>10</sup> Veterans aligned themselves with different parties, and some even suggested a separate “Soldier’s Party.”<sup>11</sup> Although founding members included leading Radical Republicans who envisioned the GAR as a political machine made of veterans, by the 1880s, GAR members for the most part aligned with mainstream Republican views.<sup>12</sup>

To an extent, the formation of collective memory is inherently political. The creation of a shared narrative is connected to the establishment of “socially shared dispositions,” or culturally “correct” ways of acting.<sup>13</sup> The veterans had fought side by side for the Union and came away from the war with shared concerns, including a vision of Reconstruction and the desire for pensions. Some members supported Radical Reconstruction, but a majority believed in the “separate but equal” treatment of blacks that became the mainstream middle class view.<sup>14</sup> To achieve these goals, veterans harnessed the power of memory; the philosopher Foucault said, “If one controls people’s memory, one controls their dynamism,” or in the case of the

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<sup>9</sup> Dearing, 318. McConnell, 24-25.

<sup>10</sup> Dearing, 81.

<sup>11</sup> McConnell, 97.

<sup>12</sup> McConnell, 25, 33, 213.

<sup>13</sup> Steven Knapp. “Collective Memory and the Actual Past,” *Representations*, 26 (Spring 1989), 123-149, p. 123.

<sup>14</sup> McConnell, 213.

veterans, their vote.<sup>15</sup> By gathering to share camaraderie and reminisce about camp life, the veterans created a political community defined by memory. Although candidates and politicians drew on memory as a political tool and courted the veterans as a block through the early twentieth century, the reconciliationist movement of the 1880s pushed the GAR away from political involvement.<sup>16</sup>

Although politics provided the impetus for the creation of the GAR, the brotherhood and shared memory remained the real draw for veterans to become members and attend meetings. The founding legend then makes more sense; to the average member, the GAR was a vehicle for community, not a political machine. The veterans committed time and money to creating public memorials, and “as a result of the members’ contributions and soliciting efforts,” according to Dearing, “thousands of more or less tasteful monuments sprang up throughout the North.”<sup>17</sup> In addition to securing their memories for posterity, veterans looked for opportunities to share memories with each other. Individual posts held meetings, lectures, and picnics to build community and to fund charity efforts, primarily to support veterans and orphans.<sup>18</sup> At the state and national level, the GAR held “encampments”; veterans gathered for festivities and “to renew

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<sup>15</sup> “Film and Popular Memory: An Interview with Michel Foucault,” trans. Martin Jordin, *Radical Philosophy* 11 (Summer 1975), 25, 26, quoted in Keith Michael Baker, “Memory and Practice: Politics and the Representation of the Past in Eighteenth-Century France,” *Representations*, 11 (Summer 1985), 134-164, p. 134.

<sup>16</sup> McConnell, 213.

<sup>17</sup> Dearing, 318.

<sup>18</sup> Dearing, 316-317.

acquaintance with wartime buddies at the regimental reunions and evening campfires.”<sup>19</sup> At encampments, members addressed general business, such as Memorial Day celebrations, charitable work, membership, sons of veterans, and the election of officers. The meetings also presented an opportunity to remember the members who had died since the last meeting.<sup>20</sup> Besides business, the encampments served as social events for remembrance. An observer at one of these encampments thought that, for the veterans, “This rekindling of old friendships... would almost by itself justify all the trouble and expense of these festivities; and certainly the veterans themselves think so.”<sup>21</sup> The function of reunion, sharing their common experience of the most traumatic event in American history, continued to prove the main draw for veterans over the years.



Chamberlain participated in the GAR and other organizations for both political and memorial reasons.<sup>22</sup> His status as a veteran and a war hero buoyed his political ambitions, although it was not sufficient to secure his election to the Senate. His speeches, on the other hand, show a clear investment in the organization as a vehicle for memory and reunion. These two motivations came together in his role as

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<sup>19</sup> Dearing, 318.

<sup>20</sup> Grand Army of the Republic, *Proceedings of the 27th Annual Encampment of the Department of Maine* (Waterville, ME: Waterville Sentinel Print, 1904).

<sup>21</sup> “Grand Army of the Republic,” *Macmillan’s Magazine* (London 1859-1907), LXV (December, 1891), 131, quoted in Dearing, 318.

<sup>22</sup> At the local level, Chamberlain participated in Post 22, the Vincent Mountfort post at Brunswick, Maine, which had about 70 active members at the turn of the century. *Proceedings of the 27<sup>th</sup> Annual Encampment*, 12.

Commander of the Department of Maine in 1903-1904. As Commander, he held a political position within the organization; this position also required him to articulate his memories and to reminisce with the other veterans.

As Maine's governor and a prominent figure in Maine Civil War memory, Chamberlain frequently gave addresses to veterans' gatherings. He took as his themes concepts such as "Loyalty," sacrifice, and the memory of specific battles. He spoke before the Society of the Army of the Potomac, the Commandery of the State of Pennsylvania, and the Maine GAR encampment.

The GAR's membership made it an inherently partisan organization; its members had fought for the Union and could be assumed to have no sympathy with the Southern cause. Because of this audience, Chamberlain could address, to an extent, the reasons for the war, although he conspicuously avoided mentioning slavery. In this incarnation, the war had been fought to preserve the Union, a perspective that the language of "Loyal Legions" and the "Republic" supported. At a monument dedication, Chamberlain asked rhetorically, "is not the whole land a field of honor for those who have given their lives for its deliverance? ... They who stood for her honor, and who fell for her deliverance, shall they not sleep for her glory?"<sup>23</sup> The context of the speech allowed him to address the cause for which the men

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<sup>23</sup> Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain, "Dead on the Field of Honor," Delivered at the Dedication of the Soldiers' Monument at Gorham, October 18, n.d. BC.

honored fought and died. However, he was careful, even in speeches to fellow Union veterans, to avoid blaming the South and alienating Confederate veterans.

Reconciliation between veterans of the blue and gray required veterans to tread carefully in public discussions of memory. Chamberlain articulated this self-censorship in a speech given to former members of the Army of the Potomac: "Remembering, however, that it is our great duty now to strengthen the bonds of peace, and nurture the growing amenities of a common citizenship, it is most prudent to refrain from entering into these details."<sup>24</sup> Here he referred not only to Reconciliation, but also to controversies of memory between branches of the Union army. He suggested that it would be better to ignore the differences to avoid sectional bitterness or rifts in the unity of veterans. He continued:

Thoughts and feelings like these, crowding in upon each other, embarrass one who, at such a time as this, speaking to and for men who have made immortal history, aspires to a worthy vindication of their merits, and yet upon whom it is incumbent, at this festive and fraternal reunion, not to stir any chord which could mar the harmony of this occasion, or set in motion jarring elements elsewhere.<sup>25</sup>

Although the veterans gathered to celebrate a common past, Chamberlain's words indicate that the collective memory was fraught

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<sup>24</sup> Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain, "The Army of the Potomac": Address at its first reunion, and the organization of the Society of the Army of the Potomac, New York, July 4, 1869, BC.

<sup>25</sup> "The Army of the Potomac," BC.

with conflicting individual memories. As the speaker, he had the burden of honoring all without offending any; he accomplished this through implying that every veteran's memory was valid and that the causes for which they fought were not irreconcilable. This meant ignoring contradictory accounts and avoiding discussion of the causes of the war or the bitterness left over. Chamberlain revised his approach to the meaning of the war; he chose to address benign issues to maintain the spirit of a "festive and fraternal reunion."

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The Union veterans were not alone in trying to establish collective memories. Regional Southern organizations emerged later than Union veterans' societies, although local groups or "survivors' associations" were established early on.<sup>26</sup> The United Confederate Veterans, established in 1889, was a parallel group in the South; women founded the United Daughters of the Confederacy in 1894 as the female corollary.<sup>27</sup> The UCV had a somewhat different focus from the GAR; their defeat and the South's occupation led to an embrace of the Lost Cause ideology. The South's spirit of remembrance and attitude toward reconciliation can be seen in Chamberlain's old foe John Brown Gordon. Like Chamberlain, Gordon served as the governor of his home state, Georgia, and as the first Commander in

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<sup>26</sup> David Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2001), 158.

<sup>27</sup> Blight, 158, 272.



Chief of the United Confederate Veterans.<sup>28</sup> Unlike Chamberlain, Gordon also acted as the titular head of Georgia's Ku Klux Klan, reinforcing the Lost Cause's connection with white supremacy. Gordon's post-war speeches and his *Reminiscences* acknowledge slavery as the cause of the war, yet refuse to blame the South for the institution.<sup>29</sup> Gordon claims that the South protested when the institution was introduced, and that in 1903, "in no section would [slavery's] reestablishment be more strongly and universally resisted."<sup>30</sup> While the truth of these claims, made in the era of Jim Crow by a man tied to the Ku Klux Klan, remains questionable, the tactic is interesting. Gordon attempted to acknowledge the cause of the war while stripping Southerners of guilt; this attempt allowed Southerners to interact with Union veterans on the same moral plane. In defense of the Cause, he said, "Let us cherish the memorials and history will record and heaven judge that both sides were right in fighting for what they believed was right."<sup>31</sup> The Lost Cause version of history left no room for an emancipationist vision, and demanded that any reconciliation happen in the terms of soldiers' honor, in the tradition presaged by the salute between Gordon and Chamberlain's troops at Appomattox Court House.

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<sup>28</sup> Dearing, 495.

<sup>29</sup> John B. Gordon, *Reminiscences of the Civil War* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1903), 18-20.

<sup>30</sup> Gordon, 19.

<sup>31</sup> Washington *National Tribune*, July 26, 1900, quoted in Dearing, 495.

This type of reconciliation translated into the many Blue and Gray reunions of soldiers after the war. Like other expressions of memory, the discussion of these reunions was fraught with tension, and a reporter wrote that in planning a 1937 reunion, “There was much wrangling and telling of the old animosities between Grand Army and the United Confederate Veterans.”<sup>32</sup> Although in some cases, the tension destroyed the plans, such as the discarded idea for a reunion at the Chicago World’s Fair, several large-scale reunions took place to commemorate the war and the reconciliation since.<sup>33</sup>

The most significant of these took place at Gettysburg in 1913, when 53,407 veterans from both sides gathered to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the battle.<sup>34</sup> Although Chamberlain had been involved in the planning for the reunion, by July he was too ill to attend. The veterans camped in tents on the battlefield, wearing their old uniforms and greeting Union and Confederate veterans as friends; the festivities included a reenactment of Pickett’s Charge by veterans and an address by President Wilson. However, the reunion was built on Southern terms: “white supremacy, ...a military tradition and patriotic recognition of Confederate valor, and a South innocent of responsibility for slavery.”<sup>35</sup> Reunion depended on the careful and sometimes contentious changes to communal memory. Because of his stated

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<sup>32</sup> Arthur Bartlett, “A Reporter at Large; the Boys in Blue,” *New Yorker* (1938), quoted in Dearing, 496.

<sup>33</sup> Dearing, 409.

<sup>34</sup> Blight, 8.

<sup>35</sup> Blight, 291.

desire “not to stir any chord which could mar the harmony of this occasion, or set in motion jarring elements elsewhere,” Chamberlain accepted the Southern terms for reunion.<sup>36</sup>



The reconciliationist vision required a shift in the collective memory of the war; the new reunion culture changed the recollection of both the cause and the meaning of the war. Sociologist Maurice Halbwachs generalized this trend in his study *On Collective Memory*: “Society from time to time obligates people not just to reproduce in thought previous events of their lives, but also to touch them up, to shorten them, or to complete them so that, however convinced we are that our memories are exact, we give them a prestige that reality did not possess.”<sup>37</sup> The revised memories served the veterans’ need to find common ground to fill the sectional divide and they created what Steven Knapp refers to as an “authoritative narrative,” which society uses as a guide to behavior that is acceptable or inappropriate.

In an article dealing primarily with biblical literature, Knapp poses the question, “why should it ever matter, if it does, that an authoritative narrative correspond to historical actuality?”<sup>38</sup> He answers that the literal truth of the Bible does not matter for its use as

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<sup>36</sup> Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain, “The Army of the Potomac”: Address at its first reunion, and the organization of the Society of the Army of the Potomac, New York, July 4, 1869, BC.

<sup>37</sup> Maurice Halbwachs, trans. Lewis A. Coser, *On Collective Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 51.

<sup>38</sup> Knapp, 123.

a moral source. However, in the context of more recent history, the historical facts gain importance. For the GAR, an authoritative narrative was built out of pieces of individual memories gathered together and shaped to fit both political goals and their own image of themselves. The manipulation of the past left the truth behind. Today, children are taught that the Union soldiers fought to free the slaves; while tolerance and emancipation are admirable lessons to teach, this simplified version whitewashes history. Like the GAR veterans, textbooks have sharpened the view of one of the causes of the war, although this cause did not necessarily drive most of the individuals in the army to fight.

Whether based on a reconstructed authoritative narrative or on personal memories, the veterans strongly felt the past's presence in their lives. In a study of countries recovering from the fall of Communism, Tina Rosenberg wrote, "The first lesson I learned was that many countries are not dealing with the past, because the past is still with them."<sup>39</sup> This could be said for the United States after the trauma of the Civil War as well; the war was still alive in the minds of the citizens. When asked in 1888 if he went "back to those days," the poet and wartime nurse Walt Whitman responded, "I do not need to... I have never left them."<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Tina Rosenberg iquoted n Martha Minow, *Between Vengeance and Forgiveness* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998), 119.

<sup>40</sup> Louis Masur, *The Real War Will Never Get in the Books* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 253.

Chamberlain literally continued living in the past. In his home, he surrounded himself with artifacts of the war, many tied explicitly to personal experiences. He even designed a chimneypiece with the red Maltese cross – the emblem of his division, which he had adopted as a personal badge. Outside the home, veterans' groups and Maine towns called on him to dive back into his memories in speeches for meetings, memorial days, and monument dedications. The communities of memory created by the GAR and MOLLUS contributed to keeping the war alive.



The veterans who remained in the past fulfilled in part one of Nietzsche's predictions; he claimed that "by excess of history life becomes maimed and degenerate, and is followed by the degeneration of history as well."<sup>41</sup> The veterans' inability to move on from their memories meant that history degenerated to fit their narratives and that the future suffered from their conservatism. The Lost Cause narrative rewrote slavery as a benign institution with fatherly masters and happy slaves; this vision prevented the growth of the emancipationist vision and favored Jim Crow laws over civil rights. Union veterans could fit their own experience into this vision by remembering their cause as the preservation of the Union rather than the emancipation of the slaves;

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<sup>41</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Use and Abuse of History* (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1957), 12.

the Union veterans who accepted this narrative were also culpable in the failure of Reconstruction.

In his essay “History as Social Memory,” Peter Burke asks, “Can groups, like individuals, suppress what is inconvenient to remember? If so, how do they do it?”<sup>42</sup> He answers the question by using examples of founding myths, where the present is projected onto the past. However, as the veterans in the GAR and UCV showed, the collective memory of groups can change within a generation. The social amnesia about the antebellum South developed within two decades of the war. Davis and Starn expanded the concept of social amnesia to include all memory, using the analogy of individual and collective memory.

If memory is an index of loss, and notoriously malleable besides, how can we remember truly? The obstacles are formidable – sheer forgetfulness, suggestibility, censorship, hindsight, conflicting recollections, the force of interests that frame whatever we remember. If we call on memory to inform or confirm present convictions, it may become an all too obliging mirror; if we do not, it becomes, or at least pretends to be, merely antiquarian.<sup>43</sup>

The veterans, particularly in the South, did call upon memory to “confirm present convictions;” the Lost Cause built on constructed memory. As David Blight put it, the Southerners had “values in search

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<sup>42</sup> Peter Burke, “History as Social Memory” in *Memory: History, Culture and the Mind* ed. Butler (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 109.

<sup>43</sup> Natalie Zemon Davis and Randolph Starn, “Introduction, Special Issue: Memory and Counter-Memory” *Representations*, 26 (Spring 1989), 1-6, p. 4.

of a history;" the inherent problems of collective memory obliged and provided a narrative that did not conflict with their present views.<sup>44</sup> Both memory and the Union veterans provided an "obliging mirror" that recreated a narrative based on honor and military camaraderie.

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<sup>44</sup> Blight, 291.

## Conclusion

To cherish the sentiments of that great service, to hold those memories dear as we do this comradeship today, to deepen our thought of the on-going good of our regenerated Country, this is for us each and all in whatever station.

– Chamberlain to Maine GAR, 1904<sup>1</sup>

As biological, psychological, sociological, and historical studies of memory have shown, memory is a changeable and somewhat mysterious phenomenon. It has been my goal to illustrate the changing memory of the American Civil War and to show how that memory has been used to write and rewrite history. Memory of the past is shaped by the realities of the present; the era of reunion was no different. In a historical moment where former enemies re-envisioned each other as comrades, past sectional differences were subjugated in favor of a narrative of shared glory and trauma on the battlefield. Symbolic acts, such as the salute at Appomattox, gained prominence in retrospect, and sectional bitterness faded into the background, though it never entirely disappeared.

Historian David Blight frames this change in memory in terms of three visions: reconciliation, emancipation, and white supremacy.

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<sup>1</sup> Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain, "Remarks in accepting Commandership, Dept. of Maine, Grand Army of the Republic At Encampment, Bangor, February 18, 1903," BC.



During Reconstruction, the discussion of healing and justice shifted away from the uncomfortable and complicated relationship between freed slaves and former masters. “Yankee and Confederate soldiers,” Blight writes, “would eventually find a smoother path to bonds of fraternalism and mutual glory.”<sup>2</sup> The history of Chamberlain’s memory complicates Blight’s thesis, which is based on an argument to explain why the emancipationist vision failed. At Gettysburg, Appomattox, and GAR encampments, Chamberlain participated in reconciliation without addressing the racism inherent in accepting former Confederates’ terms for reconciliation and interpretation of the war. For soldiers like Chamberlain who had fought out of loyalty to the Union rather than a desire to free the slaves, the need for healing and reunification surpassed the need to right the wrongs of slavery. In a thesis advised by David Blight, Sean Gibbon explained that, “in the spirit of reconciliation, while Northerners and Southerners were remembering the bravery of the war, Jim Crow took over the South.”<sup>3</sup> The common bond of the soldier’s experience, sought and reinforced through reunions and supporting narratives, had heartfelt motivation; the failure to address racial issues was an unconscious result.

On the Gettysburg battlefield, veterans wrote their memories in granite monuments for posterity. The controversy that erupted over

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<sup>2</sup> David Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2001), 3.

<sup>3</sup> Sean Gibbon, “Reunion and Remembrance: The Story Told After the American Civil War” (Undergraduate Thesis, Amherst College, 1994), 2.

the disagreement between Oates and Chamberlain demonstrates how important the military details remained to veterans decades later. Because the meaning of the war had become based on the fight itself, the details of the fight became more significant than the causes that propelled the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine and the 15<sup>th</sup> Alabama toward each other in 1863.

At Appomattox, Chamberlain's grand gesture suggested the beginning of healing. As the reconciliation movement grew in the 1880s, so did the importance of this first symbolic act of acceptance by the North and South. The characterization of the salute as a recognition of Southern chivalry and Northern honor by both Chamberlain and Gordon reflected the importance of reunification and the tacit agreement to overlook the uncomfortable root causes of the war and their aftermath.

The Grand Army of the Republic reflected the common political goals of the Union veterans as well as their desire for fraternization. Encampments and post meetings provided an opportunity to relive the best parts of camp life and to meet with others who had experienced the same trauma. Reunions with Confederate veterans expanded this community of memory to include those who had opposed them on the battlefield; the veterans valued the memory of the fight over the memory of why and how they came to fight.

The relics Chamberlain and other souvenir hunters gathered spoke to the memory of the war they cherished. Gibbon writes that the relic hunters on battlefields were "...not looking for mementos that would define the meaning of the war as a fight to free the slaves; they were interested in death and drama, bullets and bayonets. They wanted to come as close to the fight as possible."<sup>4</sup> It was this sentiment that drove Chamberlain to collect relics of his personal war experience: a revolver that had been aimed at his head, flags that had been surrendered to him, and of course, the Medal of Honor awarded for his bravery at Gettysburg. Gibbon's conclusion, that "in a room of old books, battle flags, muskets, and bugles, the meaning of the fight was the fight itself," places Chamberlain's memory in the context of his collection.<sup>5</sup> His Brunswick study became a shrine to a memory of the war, elevating it to a sacred position above the reach of reality and history. For the veterans of the American Civil War, a blurred vision of the past took center stage; bayonets and battle flags were placed on pedestals, while the shackles of slavery were forgotten.

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<sup>4</sup> Gibbon, 18.

<sup>5</sup> Gibbon, 17.

**Appendix A**  
**Selected Timeline of Chamberlain's Life**

September 8, 1828	Chamberlain born at Brewer, ME
1848-1852	Attended Bowdoin College
1852-1855	Attended Bangor Theological Seminary
1855	Master's Oration at Bowdoin College
December 7, 1855	Marries Frances (Fannie) Caroline Adams
1855-1862	Instructor and Professor at Bowdoin College
April 12, 1861	Fort Sumter fired on, beginning the Civil War
August 1862	Enlists as Lieutenant Colonel, 20 <sup>th</sup> Maine
Dec. 11-15, 1862	Battle of Fredericksburg, VA
May 20, 1863	Promoted to Colonel, 20 <sup>th</sup> Maine
July 2-3, 1863	Battle of Gettysburg, PA
June 6, 1864	Assigned command 1 <sup>st</sup> Brigade, 1 <sup>st</sup> Division, 5 <sup>th</sup> Corps
June 18, 1864	Siege of Petersburg, VA begins. He is severely wounded in a charge and is not expected to live.
June 20, 1864	Promoted to Brigadier General by General Grant
Nov. 18, 1864	Returns to active duty at Petersburg after wound
April 1, 1865	Battle of Five Forks, VA
April 2, 1865	Lee evacuates Petersburg, VA
April 9, 1865	Battle of Appomattox Court House, VA
April 10, 1865	Lee surrenders at Appomattox Court House, VA
April 12, 1865	Chamberlain accepts surrender of arms
1867-1871	Governor of Maine
1867-1913	Trustee of Bowdoin College
1871-1883	President of Bowdoin College
October 1889	20 <sup>th</sup> Maine monuments placed at Gettysburg
August 11, 1893	Awarded Medal of Honor for actions at Gettysburg.
1900	Appointed surveyor of the port of Portland, ME
1903-1904	Commander of the Department of Maine, GAR
February 24, 1914	Chamberlain dies, buried at Brunswick, ME

**Appendix B**  
**Proposed Inscription of Oates's 15<sup>th</sup> Alabama Monument**

To the Memory of Lt. John A. Oates  
and his gallant Comrades  
who fell here July 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1863.

The 15<sup>th</sup> Ala. Regt., over 400 strong,  
reached this spot, but for  
lack of support had to retire.

Lt. Col. Feagin lost a leg  
Capts. Brainard and Ellison  
Lts. Oates and Cody and  
33 men were killed, 76 wounded  
and 84 captured.

Erected 39th Anniversary of  
the battle

By

Gen. Wm. C. Oates  
who was Colonel of the Regiment

(OC-GNMP)

## Appendix C Bibliographical Abbreviations

These abbreviations are used throughout the text in footnotes for the sake of clear and concise notes.

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| <i>Armies</i> | Chamberlain, Joshua Lawrence. <i>The Passing of the Armies</i> . New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1915; reprint, New York: Bantam Books, 1992.  |
| <i>Sketch</i> | Chamberlain, Joshua Lawrence. <i>A Sketch: the Original 1905 Biography of Joshua Chamberlain</i> . Brewer, ME: Brian L. Higgins, 1995.  |
| <i>Honor</i>  | Chamberlain, Joshua Lawrence. <i>Honor Answering Honor</i> . Brunswick, ME: Bowdoin College, 1965. Reprinted, Bowdoin College, 2002.  |
| VF-GNMP       | Chamberlain Vertical File. Gettysburg National Military Park.   |
| OC-GNMP       | Gettysburg National Park Commission, Office of the Commissioners. <i>Oates Correspondence, 1895-1910 (Bulk Dates 1902-1906)</i> . Museum Collection at Gettysburg National Military Park. |
| BC            | Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain Collection, George J. Mitchell Department of Special Collections & Archives, Bowdoin College Library.   |
| PHS           | Pejebscot Historical Society, Brunswick, Maine.   |

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