

Norwich University and the Civil War

These Honored Dead: Private and National Commemoration



The Third in a Series of Exhibitions Commemorating the 150th Anniversary of the Civil War

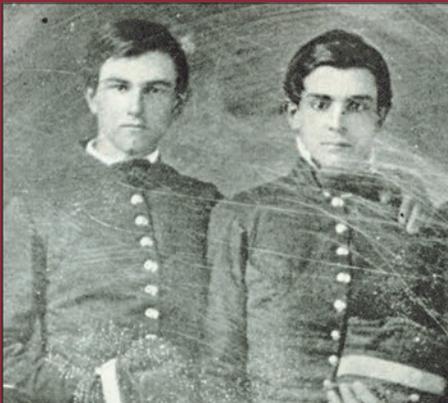
In early 1863, the outlook for the Union cause looked bleak. The Army of the Potomac had suffered devastating losses at the battles of Fredericksburg and Chancellorsville. In the west, Union armies could still not break the Confederate hold on the Mississippi River.

Two long years of war had sapped the morale of the troops. Recruiting officers no longer found patriotic men eager to join the war effort. Increasingly, bounties and the threat of the draft were needed to coax soldiers into the ranks.

On the home front, civilians dreaded the ever-growing list of soldiers who would not be coming home. Thousands of soldiers had died from wounds, and even more had succumbed to the ravages of disease. Many more were imprisoned or simply missing, with no marked grave or story for their loved ones.

1863 proved to be a pivotal year, however. Victories at Gettysburg and Vicksburg fortified the Union resolve to fight on towards ultimate triumph. Norwich alumni were prominent in these and many other battles. The human cost of these victories forced the nation to reconsider how it dealt with such losses. In the Nineteenth Century, individuals were encouraged to spiritually prepare themselves for death, knowing that their families and friends would preserve their memories. The Civil War expanded this notion of commemoration and shifted it from the private realm to serve a civic purpose. President Abraham Lincoln acknowledged this change when he dedicated the National Cemetery on the Gettysburg battlefield.

This exhibition commemorates the contributions of Norwich alumni during the Civil War, particularly during the year 1863. We examine how soldiers entered the service, including the controversial draft. We also focus on the stories of Norwich alumni who were held as prisoners of war. Several of these men boldly escaped. Finally, we consider how soldiers faced the prospect of death. Norwich alumni strove to ensure that their own sacrifices, and those of their comrades, would indeed prove meaningful.



Norwich classmates Thomas Ransom and Lewis Strobel. Ransom would go on to fight for the Union, while Strobel fought for the Confederacy.
(NU Archives)



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A Nation in Grief and Observance

The tremendous loss of human life during the Civil War is recounted in simple numbers—approximately 750,000 individuals became victims of the turmoil over the years of the war. Both sides suffered loss in staggering numbers and rarely was there a family member or friend that was not affected by these events. For each person lost, there were parents, siblings, children grieving. Death was a constant presence in American life.

Grief and personal observance of this emotion has throughout the centuries been marked in both formal and informal tradition. The magnitude of loss during the Civil War brings to focus an entire industry serving the needs of the mourner, from special cloth and dyes for dresses to jewelry fashioned especially to house a keepsake of a deceased loved-one.



Mourning Jewelry
(SMHC)

Ritual

Both men and women observed mourning, but women were expected to display the outward stages of mourning for much longer periods. The accepted adornments of dress were entirely black during this period, with lavender and mauve colors permissible after deep mourning ended. Jewelry was fashioned specifically for the mourner with details reflecting either a keepsake of hair, a portrait in a locket or significant features relating to the final resting place.

A Good Death

For perhaps the first time in many families, loved ones were perishing away from their homes, and knowledge of whether the deceased had experienced “a good death” or “a bad death” preyed upon the hearts and minds of fathers and mothers, husbands and wives. Treatises such as the *Rule and Exercises of Holy Living and of Holy Dying* were important to all social classes, as “dying well” was as important to the mourner, as was the manner of the life lived of the one lost. Experiencing death at home, one could see, hear and observe the death of the person, but away on remote battlefields, alone, or even with one or two comrades present, knowing that the person had passed from this life to the next within the tenets of the Rules was of utmost importance, and sometimes the only solace a parent or sibling was afforded upon learning of the death.

The Ransom Family in the Civil War

Truman B. Ransom (Class of 1825) served as the second president of Norwich University. He resigned his Presidency to fight in the Mexican War. Truman Ransom was killed at the battle of Chapultepec. The Vermont Legislature paid tribute to Col. Ransom and presented a ceremonial sword in his memory to his eldest son, Dunbar (Class of 1851).



(NU Archives)

All three of Ransom’s sons eventually attended Norwich University, where they lived in the shadow of their father’s heroic legacy. Each son fought for the Union in the Civil War.

Thomas E. G. Ransom (Class of 1851) 1834-1864

When the Civil War began, Thomas Ransom enlisted in the 11th IL Infantry. He was quickly promoted to colonel. In early 1862 he led his regiment in the capture of Fort Donelson, where he was severely wounded. At Shiloh he was wounded in the head but remained in action on the field.

Ransom gained a reputation as a competent and daring commander and was promoted to brigadier-general. During the 1863 siege of Vicksburg he led his brigade in a bold charge towards the Confederate fortifications. When the column wavered under withering fire, Ransom seized a battle flag and personally led the assault, shouting, “Who will follow me?” This action earned him the respect of Union generals Ulysses S. Grant and William T. Sherman.



(NU Archives)

At the battle of Sabine Crossroads he was badly wounded in the knee. Army surgeons wanted to amputate his leg, but Ransom convinced them to spare the limb. He returned home to Illinois to recuperate but longed for the action at the front.

Ransom joined the 1864 campaign against Atlanta. Gen. Sherman promoted Ransom to lead the 17th Corps and directed him to pursue the Confederate army fleeing Atlanta.

Thomas Ransom had been severely weakened from his multiple serious wounds and the strain of campaigning left him racked with illness. Other officers urged him to resign but Ransom remained in the field. In late October 1864 he finally succumbed to disease and exhaustion and died.

Josiah Hall (*Class of 1861*)
(1835-1912)

Vermonter Josiah Hall enlisted as a private in the 1st VT Cavalry. He was soon commissioned captain and promoted to major.

The 1st VT Cavalry was engaged in 78 battles and skirmishes during the Civil War.



(NU Archives)

In October 1863 Josiah Hall was wounded and captured by the Confederates at Brandy Station, VA. He was held as a prisoner of war for almost 10 months, most of the time in Libby Prison. In 1864, he was moved to Charleston, SC along with 50 Union officers and placed in the line of Union fire. The Federals responded by placing 50 Confederate prisoners similarly in harm's way. The two groups of prisoners were finally exchanged in August 1864.

Josiah Hall rejoined his regiment and went on to become colonel of the 1st VT Cavalry. Under his command, the 1st VT took part in one of the final charges of the Civil War at Appomattox in April 1865.

Henry Oakes Kent (*Class of 1854*)
(1834-1909)

After graduating from Norwich, Henry Oakes Kent became a clerk in the New Hampshire legislature. He was a delegate to the 1860 Republican Convention that nominated Abraham Lincoln for the Presidency. He was also active in the New Hampshire Militia.

In 1862 Kent was commissioned colonel of the 17th NH Infantry Regiment. However, before seeing action, the soldiers of the 17th Regiment were transferred to other depleted regiments and its officers mustered out.



(NU Archives)

In 1863 Kent's political connections landed him the job of postmaster of the U. S. Senate. In Washington, he met William Lamson, President Lincoln's assistant. When Lincoln was invited to give "a few appropriate remarks" at the dedication of the Gettysburg National Cemetery, Lamson was put in charge of organizing the procession. He invited nine friends to serve as aides for the event, including Henry Oakes Kent.

Kent travelled to Gettysburg and was present at the dedication ceremony. He was close by the speakers' platform as Lincoln delivered his famous Gettysburg Address.

After the war, Kent was active in business and publishing. He was a State Senator and candidate for New Hampshire Governor and the U.S. Congress. He remained a loyal Norwich alumnus, and served as a University Trustee from 1854-1909. He founded the Alumni Association in 1860, and later organized the funding for Alumni Hall.

George C. Strong (*Class of 1853*)
(1832-1863)

George C. Strong grew up in Vermont and attended Norwich University for two years before entering the U.S. Military Academy at West Point.

In 1863 Strong commanded a brigade in the operations against Charleston, SC. Gen. Truman Seymour (Class of 1844) chose Strong's brigade to lead the attack on Confederate Fort Wagner. Strong placed the 54th MA Regiment, comprised of African-American soldiers (including some Vermonters) at the head of his attacking column. On July 18th, 1863 the 54th MA fought its way into Fort Wagner before being ultimately repulsed.

George C. Strong was wounded during this famous assault. He was evacuated to a Union hospital and eventually boarded a ship bound for New York. He contracted tetanus during the trip and died. He was posthumously promoted to major-general for his role in leading the attack on Fort Wagner.

Horatio Seymour (*Class of 1828*)
(1810-1886)

Democrat Horatio Seymour rose quickly in New York State politics. He was elected Governor in 1852 for a two-year term. In the late 1850s Seymour observed the increasing conflict between the North and South. He felt these tensions were inflamed by radical Republicans, and he opposed the election of Abraham Lincoln in 1860.

In 1862 Horatio Seymour was elected to a second term as New York Governor. As a Democratic governor of the North's most populous State, Seymour was one of the most visible critics of Lincoln's Republican administration. Seymour supported the war effort to preserve the Union, but felt that Lincoln's policies were unconstitutional. Seymour was against Emancipation and the raising of black troops. He also strongly opposed the 1863 Enrollment Act, which allowed the Federal Government to draft soldiers into the Army.



(NU Archives)

In the summer of 1863 Anti-Draft riots broke out. The most serious Anti-Draft riot occurred in New York City. Gangs of rioters battled police and attacked African-American residents. As Governor of New York, Horatio Seymour attempted to quell the riots in person. He publically sympathized with the rioters while urging them to return home. Republicans criticized Seymour's actions and eventually troops were sent in to New York City to restore order.

In 1864, Seymour was voted out of office, but remained a prominent national Democratic leader. In 1868, he was nominated as the Democratic candidate for President.

Robert H. Milroy (*Class of 1843*)
(1816-1890)



(NU Archives)

The valedictorian of his class, Robert Milroy was distinguished at Norwich for his scholarship and athletic ability. Early in the Civil War, Milroy was assigned to western Virginia. Milroy authorized the execution of Confederate sympathizers for crimes against Unionists. In response, Confederate President Jefferson Davis offered a \$100,000 reward for Gen. Milroy, dead or alive.

In the summer of 1863, a corps of the Confederate army surrounded Milroy's division of Union troops stationed at Winchester, VA. Gen. Milroy held out for three days before surrendering nearly 4,000 troops. A court of inquiry later acquitted him of serious wrong-doing, but this defeat effectively ended his military career.

Robert Milroy would later claim that his actions at Winchester had delayed the Confederate advance towards Pennsylvania. This interval allowed the Union army to consolidate at Gettysburg and enabled its victory there.

Levi Kingsley (*Class of 1856*)
(1832-1915)

Levi Kingsley was active in the Rutland, VT militia company and when the Civil War began he enlisted in the 1st Vermont Infantry. He fought in the first battle of the war, the engagement at Big Bethel, VA. In 1862 he was promoted to major of the 12th VT Regiment. The officers of the 12th VT, including Surgeon Granville Conn (Norwich Class of 1854), kept a mastiff dog as a regimental mascot. They named the dog "Old Abe" and bought him an engraved collar.



"Old Abe's" collar (SMHC)

The 12th Vermont was assigned to guard duty during the battle of Gettysburg. Although their nine-month enlistments expired the day after the battle, the 12th VT continued to guard 2,500 Confederate prisoners captured at Gettysburg.

Levi Kingsley returned to Rutland and eventually became brigadier-general of the Vermont National Guard. He was also active in Civil War veterans groups, serving as the Rutland Grand Army of the Republic post commander for many years. He was mayor of Rutland and a Vermont state senator.

William D. Munson
(*Class of 1854*)
(1833-1903)



(NU Archives)

In 1862 William Munson recruited a company of men from Winooski for the 13th VT Infantry Regiment. In May 1863 he was promoted to lieutenant-colonel. The colonel of the 13th VT was Francis Randall, a Northfield resident and future vice-president of Norwich.

In late June 1863, the Confederate army moved north towards Gettysburg. With just days left in their nine-month enlistments, the 13th VT rushed to join the Union army. After forced marches, the exhausted Vermonters arrived on the battlefield.

On July 3rd, William Munson was in command of the left-wing of the 13th VT. As Pickett's Charge approached Cemetery Ridge, the regiment moved forward of the rest of the Union line and executed a flanking maneuver against the Confederates. It unleashed a destructive fire that shattered Pickett's attack. William Munson led his men until he was wounded. The Vermonters captured hundreds of Confederate prisoners.

Later in the war, William Munson was appointed to recruit loyal volunteers from Georgia and Alabama to serve in Vermont regiments. Munson returned to the South in the 1870s, where he and his son taught music and performed with concert orchestras.

Thomas H. Davis (*Class of 1855*)
(1836-1867)

Thomas Davis grew up in Virginia. He came to Vermont and attended Norwich University for two years before graduating from Middlebury College. He returned to Virginia and joined the Confederate army, becoming a captain in the 1st VA Infantry Regiment.

At Gettysburg, the 1st VA was part of Pickett's division that attacked the Union center. As they approached Cemetery Ridge, the troops were struck by the flank attack of the 2nd Vermont Brigade. Thomas Davis was wounded and captured, perhaps by the Vermont troops.

Thomas Davis was sent to Johnson's Island, a Union prison off the Ohio coast of Lake Erie. On the frigid night of January 1, 1864, Davis and several other prisoners scaled the stockade wall and crossed the frozen lake. They made their way to Michigan and crossed the Detroit River into safety in Canada.

Davis then boarded a ship and slipped through the Union Naval blockade to land in North Carolina. He rejoined his regiment and fought on until the final days of the war. He was again captured at the 1865 battle of Saylor's Creek and sent back to prison on Johnson's Island.

Edmund Rice (*Class of 1860*)
(1842-1906)

Edmund Rice entered Norwich University in 1856, but left two years later to seek adventure. The 16 year-old joined the crew of the clipper ship *Snow Squall*, and voyaged to the China Sea.

In 1861, Rice was commissioned captain in the 19th MA Volunteer Infantry Regiment. The 19th MA fought in many battles and Rice was noted for his bravery. He was severely wounded in the leg at the 1862 battle of Antietam. When he returned to his regiment, he was promoted to major.



(SMHC)

During the battle of Gettysburg, Edmund Rice led the 19th MA in the repulse of Pickett's Charge. Rice personally led his regiment into the gap in the center of the Union lines, and engaged the Confederates in hand-to-hand combat. Although he was again seriously wounded, Rice's action bought time for Union reinforcements to arrive. He was later awarded the Medal of Honor for his gallantry at Gettysburg.

Edmund Rice continued to lead the 19th MA for the remainder of the Civil War. He was captured at the 1864 battle of Spotsylvania. While a prisoner, Rice cut a hole through a freight car door and leapt from the moving train. He walked four hundred miles back to Union territory. He fought through the Petersburg campaign and was present with his regiment at the Confederate surrender at Appomattox.

After the war Edmund Rice was commissioned in the Regular Army, eventually becoming a brigadier-general. He served in campaigns against Native American tribes in the West and also designed military equipment. Rice commanded troops during the Spanish-American War and in the Philippines. In 1904 he retired from the Army and returned home to Massachusetts, where he died two years later. He was buried at Arlington National Cemetery, where his grave is marked with a sculpture of the Medal of Honor he earned at Gettysburg.

John B. Bachelder (*Class of 1849*)
(1825-1894)

John Bachelder was educated at Capt. Alden Partridge's military academy at Pembroke, NH before entering Norwich University as a cadet in 1846. In 1850, Capt. Partridge opened the Scientific and Military Institute in Reading, PA. Bachelder taught mathematics and eventually became principal of this Institute.

Bachelder also embarked on an artistic career. When the Civil War began, he looked to combine his backgrounds in art and military education. Bachelder accompanied the Union Army of the Potomac as a civilian artist, in hopes of documenting the decisive battle of the Civil War.

In 1863 Bachelder reached Gettysburg just after the battle had ended. He interviewed hundreds of participants, establishing troop positions throughout the battle. He produced a detailed birds-eye map of the entire battlefield and designed a huge painting of Pickett's Charge. Bachelder originated the concept of "*the High-Water Mark of the Rebellion*." He helped place many of the regimental monuments at Gettysburg, creating the national shrine that the battlefield has now become.

Charles B. Stoughton (*Class of 1861*)
(1841-1898)

At Norwich, Charles Stoughton was a member of the *Alpha Sigma Pi* fraternity, played baseball and football, and was the commander of the *Flying Cloud*, a small sailboat on the Connecticut River. Upon his 1861 graduation, he instructed Vermont recruits in military drill.

Charles Stoughton's older brother Edwin was a graduate of West Point, and commanded the 4th VT Infantry. Charles soon joined the regiment as adjutant. The lieutenant-colonel of the 4th VT, Harry Worthen, was a member of the Norwich Class of 1857. The 4th VT belonged to the hard-fighting 1st Vermont Brigade and saw action in many battles. When Edwin Stoughton was offered command of the 2nd Vermont Brigade, Charles Stanton was promoted to colonel of the 4th VT. At age 20 Charles became one of the youngest colonels in the Civil War.

The 4th VT was not heavily engaged at the battle of Gettysburg, but during the pursuit of the defeated Confederate Army it fought an intense skirmish near Funkstown, Maryland. Charles Stoughton was shot in the face and lost his right eye. He resigned from the Army six months later, and in 1864 began a law practice with his older brother, Edwin.



(NU Archives)

James Evans
(1833-1904)

James Evans arrived in the United States from Wales in 1860 and worked in Pennsylvania iron foundries. When the Civil War began, Evans enlisted in Union Army. He joined the 41st Ohio Volunteer Infantry, and fought in the battles of Shiloh, Perryville and Stone's River. Evans was captured at the 1863 battle of Chickamauga.

James Evans spent the next fifteen months held captive in several of the Confederacy's most notorious prisons. After a short confinement in Richmond's Libby and Pemberton Prisons, Evans was sent to the prison in Danville, GA.

Evans was offered a parole if he agreed to work in a Confederate factory, but he refused. Following a smallpox outbreak in Danville, Evans was again transferred in April 1864 to Georgia's Andersonville Prison.

Conditions at Andersonville were horrendous. Prisoners rarely had enough food, and suffered from dysentery, scurvy and gangrene. Weaker prisoners were victimized by gangs of their former comrades. Evans noted that many Union prisoners committed suicide by stepping over the boundary line and being shot by the Confederate guards.

Nearly 13,000 Union prisoners died at Andersonville, and many of their graves were incorrectly marked.

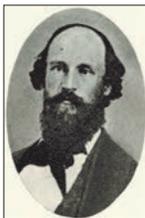
James Evans was finally exchanged in December 1864. He re-enlisted in the 5th U.S. Infantry and served on the frontier under Charles Curtis (Class of 1861). When Curtis became Commandant at Norwich, he offered Evans the position of janitor. James Evans served as the University Janitor and Armorer from 1869 until 1904. Known as "Janitor Jimmy" or "Uncle Jim", he was a confidant of both the faculty and the cadets. James Evans was also active in Union Veterans affairs, and was elected as the Post Commander of the Northfield chapter of the Grand Army of the Republic.



(NU Archives)

Stanley Morris Warner (*Class of 1848*)
(1830-1875)

When his parents separated, Morris Stanley Nevins moved to Norwich, VT with his father. He entered the University in 1844 but left after two years to serve in the Mexican War. Following his service in Mexico he moved to Indiana. There he changed his name to Stanley Morris Warner, adopting his stepfather's last name. He became a lawyer and moved again to Texas in 1856.



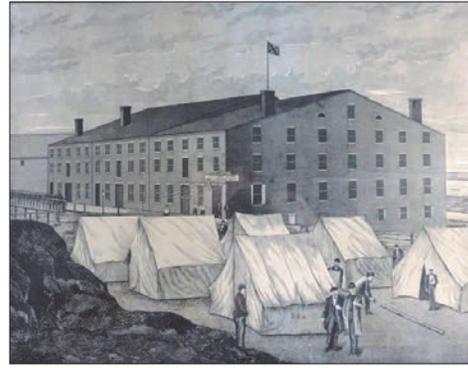
(NU Archives)

Early in the Civil War, Stanley Warner was drafted into the Confederate army and commissioned as an officer in the Texas Volunteers. At the 1862 battle of Fort Donelson, Warner was captured by his old Norwich classmate, Union colonel Thomas E.G. Ransom. Warner was sent to the Union prison at Camp Douglas in Chicago. He managed to escape and walked, by nights, from

Chicago to New Orleans. When he arrived in New Orleans he learned that his young son had died of illness while he had been in prison.

He returned to the Confederate service and was placed in charge of Union prisoners-of-war at Camp Ford, Texas. Camp Ford was the largest Confederate prison west of the Mississippi River. Warner was noted for the kindness he showed to the prisoners. After the war, Stanley Warner left Texas and moved with his family to New York State.

Norwich Men in Libby Prison



(SMHC)

Richmond's Libby Prison was one of the Civil War's most infamous prisons. The building was originally a warehouse leased by Maine shipbuilder Luther Libby. In 1861 it was commandeered by the Confederate government and by 1862 was used as a prison for Union officers. They lived in crowded rooms and suffered from food shortages. A number of Norwich alumni were held as prisoners of war in Libby Prison.



(NU Archives)

William R. Lee (*Class of 1825*) was the colonel of the 20th MA Regiment. He was taken prisoner at the 1861 battle of Ball's Bluff. At the beginning of the war the U.S. government had threatened to execute Confederate "privateers" captured at sea. In response, the Confederates selected a number of Union prisoners at Libby Prison to be held hostage and threatened with execution in retaliation.

Colonel Lee was held among this group, but was exchanged in 1862.

James Buell (*Class of 1864*) of the 17th U.S. Infantry Regiment was wounded and captured at the 1863 battle of Chancellorsville. He was confined in Libby prison for six months before being exchanged and discharged for disability in December, 1863.

Frederick Eugene Ransom (*Class of 1868*) of the 11th IL Regiment was captured and held for eight months in Georgia before being transferred to Libby Prison shortly before his release.



(NU Archives)

His sister later recalled:
"He endured great hardships there, and one time, through impertinence, was kicked into the fireplace by the guard. He was rescued by friends, but it was a long time before the deep wound was healed and it was still in bad condition when he was allowed to return home, broken in health and bearing with him disease which continued for several years."