

This Fearful Slaughter:
The Impact of Civil War Deaths on Rochester, New York

by

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Dedication

Dedicated to those I love, to those I lost, and to those who helped me through the many trials and obstacles found on life's path. To my family, friends, and mentors—this would not have been possible without you and all of the guidance and support you provided along the way. To quote the general who oversaw much of the war's fearful slaughter, Ulysses S. Grant, "The friend in my adversity I shall always cherish most. I can better trust those who have helped to relieve the gloom of my dark hours than those who are so ready to enjoy with me the sunshine of my prosperity."

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Abstract

The American Civil War brought about death on an unmatched scale. While scholarly estimates vary and range from 620,000-850,000 wartime male deaths, the understanding of the significance of these deaths and how they impacted society varies as well. Civil War deaths destroyed the antebellum concept of the “good death” and created new societal norms and practices. This thesis studies these changes by examining periodicals from the city of Rochester and noting how the newspapers report about the death, carnage, and sickness during the war. How frequently graphic accounts of the battlefield deaths occur and how prevalent calls for aid for sick, wounded, and dying soldiers appear in these papers suggest the immense importance and significance the increased number of deaths had on the city. The antebellum version of the “good death” had to change as the Civil War made it impossible for most soldiers to depart in that manner. As Rochesterians sought to understand this new form of death and dying, they created aid societies, periodicals dedicated to helping the sick and wounded, and published elaborate accounts of how the fallen died so as to help the bereaved better cope with not only the loss of their loved ones but also the loss of their conceptions of a good death. They struggled to build a new idea of what a good death was as the casualty reports poured in. Finally, by the conclusion of the war and with time for the nation to heal, monuments and memorialization of the fallen could try to make up for the aspects of the antebellum “good death” that had proved impossible to adhere by during the conflict.

Keywords: Civil War, Death, Rochester, Rochesterians, newspapers, Antebellum, New York, “Good Death”

Introduction

Although the last military battle of the American Civil War concluded almost 150 years ago, battles over the significance of the war and how it should be remembered and retold rage on. One particularly heated battle centers around the tremendous loss of life experienced by both sides during the war and how it affected the country. In 2009, historian Drew Gilpin Faust published a groundbreaking book, *This Republic of Suffering*, which sought to explore death as the focus of the period and not merely a consequence of the war. Faust's thesis is that the death experienced by Americans during the war had a profound impact on society and initiated many changes in nineteenth-century life and how society handled death. Many things that we who live in the twenty-first-century take as givens in regards to war such as detailed casualty reports; paid, dignified burials for the war dead; and pensions for fallen soldiers are born out of the Civil War. Faust uses these governmental changes to suggest that it reflected the changing views of society in regards to the death of soldiers. The massive loss of life forced American society and the Federal Government to reexamine what death meant and what was owed to someone who died for their country.

Yet, no good thesis is safe from criticism or differing ideas. In March 2014, historian Nicholas Marshall published an article in the *Journal of the Civil War Era* titled, "The Great Exaggeration: Death and the Civil War." This article argues that the death toll of the Civil War has been over-exaggerated in terms of both the estimated number of dead and its significance to society. While Marshall heavily relies on statistical evidence of antebellum and Reconstruction Era death tolls to defend his stance that death was common both before and after the war, his argument that the 16-29.8 percent increase to the average peace time death rate experienced

during the war was not "overwhelming" does not mean its effects are over-exaggerated.¹ The fact that death was a "persistent presence of affliction" during nineteenth-century American life does not mean that people had become numb to the pain that it caused.² In fact, Faust highlights that the main difference between the pervasiveness of death before the war and during the war is the destruction and modification of the Victorian belief in the "good death."³ The Civil War was the first time Americans had to deal with violent, sudden deaths on a large scale. Men frequently died in horribly grisly ways, far from home, and nearly always out of sight of their loved ones. This kind of death was the antithesis of the "good death." Thus, even though Marshall is right to focus on omnipresent death being no stranger to nineteenth-century Americans, his attempt to prove that the impact is exaggerated is unconvincing.

Gary Laderman, author of *The Sacred Remains: American Attitudes Toward Death, 1799-1883*, further supports this paper's stance that the death of the Civil War forever changed this country:

In spite of the familiarity with death and the intimacy with the dead evident in the antebellum period, the destruction of life during the Civil War made the awareness of death even more compelling and challenged established patterns of thought and action for both soldiers and civilians. On the one hand, the war had an impact on attitudes toward the body, leading to alteration and unorthodox practices for disposing of the dead. On the other hand, the symbolism of death, its connotations and meanings, were reconceptualized according to a series of ideological and social imperatives because of the political stakes in the war and the amount of human sacrifice necessary to achieve

¹ Nicholas Marshall, "The Great Exaggeration: Death and the Civil War," *The Journal of the Civil War Era* 4, no. 1 (March 2014): 11.

² Marshall, 6.

³ Drew Gilpin. Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (New York: Vintage Books, 2008), 9.

victory. But underneath all of the rhetoric and political rationalizations legitimating the war effort, behind all the efforts to make sense of the violence and put the dead in their place, the brutal demographic facts of the Civil War tell a tale of blood and dismemberment, grief and suffering.⁴

This paper will focus on how one area of the Union acknowledged, interpreted, and reacted to “the tale of blood and dismemberment, grief and suffering” to highlight the flaws in Marshall's argument. The city of Rochester, New York and the surrounding areas were significantly impacted by the unprecedented death brought on by the Civil War. Ultimately, this paper presents an argument that supports Faust’s findings and differs from the suggestions of Marshall. The impact of the death toll on Rochester changed the city. Various relief societies were created by civilian groups to aid ailing soldiers and bereft families of fallen soldiers. Initial support of the war waned after reports of the carnage arrived from the front lines. As the war began to take on a different meaning, specifically one of black emancipation, Rochesterians questioned if the loss of their sons was worth this cause. After the guns fell silent and the Union was restored, the area was forever changed with the loss of life and sought ways to memorialize this sacrifice with Grand Army of the Republic plots in local cemeteries and the Soldiers and Sailors monument in Washington Square Park. While the sources and conclusions I have derived from them will not necessarily be representative of the entire Union or even other areas of New York State (specifically New York City), there are many reasons why the Greater Rochester area is particularly interesting and worthy to use as a region to show societal change.

Rochester was a hotbed for social reform before, during, and after the Civil War. Rochester was part of the "burned-over district" during the Second Great Awakening with

⁴ Gary Laderman, *The Sacred Remains: American Attitudes toward Death, 1799-1883* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 96-97.

Charles Grandison Finney preaching in the city between the fall of 1830 and the summer of 1831. Abolitionist sentiments were fairly strong in Rochester compared to other parts of the United States as both a cause and effect of the religious revivals. Frederick Douglass chose to live in the city and published his various abolitionist periodicals in the city center. The Temperance Movement was heavily supported by many Rochesterians. Women's rights activists and suffragists such as Susan B. Anthony, Lucretia Mott, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Amy Post all brought their activism to Rochester. The city was a complicated religious mix of old protestant, the revived Protestants from the Second Great Awakening, Quakers, and a growing population of predominantly Catholic Irish and German immigrants. The religious movement of Spiritualism reached many via the Fox Sisters who hailed from Rochester. Though many of these movements and ideas were not unique to the Greater Rochester area, no other area witnessed all of these movements with the fervor of Rochester. Thus, even though the way Rochester experienced the Civil War and death may not be representative of other Union areas, the war's impact on the city and vice versa is worthy of study.

To prove the significant impact of the Civil War's dead on Rochester society, I relied heavily on the periodical the *Rochester Daily Union and Advertiser (RDU)*. Newspapers are one of the best sources to help show the spirit of the times and what was important to Rochester society during the war. To break up the monotony of one periodical, at times I use the *Rochester Daily Democrat (RDD)*, the *Brockport Republic*, *Moore's Rural New Yorker*, and *The Soldiers' Aid* to give different perspectives to key events during the war. However, these collections of papers are not nearly as thorough or as complete as the *Daily Union and Advertiser* and are used far less frequently. There is another obvious danger of using newspapers as the bulk of source material and that is the fact that newspapers often portray a sensationalized version of events and

are written to sell copies. Yet, this aspect can be a positive in trying to examine societal reaction to the effects of war. For my purpose, the facts surrounding the death of Colonel Patrick O'Rorke of the 140th New York Infantry at Gettysburg are less important than how the paper reported his death and subsequent funeral. Therefore, my methodology is nearly completely opposite of Nicholas Marshall. Whereas his thesis is backed up by statistics common in many New Social histories, I craft a history that is based more on ideology--though we both focus on the war's impact on society rather than the military battles, generals, and political leaders.

In order to find the evidence to show death's significant impact on Rochester's society within over four years worth of newspapers, I searched around key dates. I looked up the muster rolls of Rochester's most celebrated and decorated regiment, the 140th NY Infantry, and wrote down the names, dates, locations, causes, and approximate ages of all who died whilst in service of this regiment. This helped me narrow down which dates to closely examine in the papers and to gauge reaction to death as the war dragged on. In addition to the dates important to the 140th NY, I also focused on major events during the war such as the outbreak of rebellion; the first significant battle of the war at Manassas; Antietam; Gettysburg; the Wilderness; Cold Harbor; Lee's surrender at Appomattox Court House; Lincoln's Assassination and funeral; and the Grand Review of the Armies. I also extend my research past the conflict years and note how Rochester's society remembers and commemorates the war's dead culminating in the creation of Civil War veterans plots in Rochester's two largest cemeteries, Mt. Hope Cemetery and Holy Sepulchre Cemetery, in 1908. While the death experienced by the people of Rochester during the Civil War did not send the city into inescapable pits of despair, it certainly changed the city, ideologically, religiously, and physically. The effects of this unprecedented number of deaths have not been over-exaggerated.

Chapter 1: No Half Way or Timid Course

Even before the first shots had been fired on Fort Sumter, Rochester was firmly committed to preserving Union. On the April 12, 1861 edition of the *RDD*, the paper states, "If the voice of the people could now be embodied and expressed, there would be almost a unanimous approval of the recent vigorous movements of the Government [to prepare for war]."⁵ If the Union was under attack from within, the people of Rochester supported brisk mobilization and the raising of arms against open rebellion: "There is a conviction in all minds that Rebellion, which has grown insolent as it has been tolerated, should be checked."⁶ In fact, New York State took the initiative and had already created legislation to appropriate the funds to arm their militias before news broke that Sumter was under bombardment. Rochester's society was anxious to see what would happen in Charleston, South Carolina and many were ready to swiftly jump to defend the Union. By the 13th of April, the *RDD* advertised a Canandaigua recruitment event with the Zouave Cadets of Seneca Falls putting on a demonstration.⁷ On the 15th, the passion and excitement to put down the uprising continued to gather strength with a column stating, "No half way, or timid course will be tolerated by the people; of that we are well assured."⁸

The reactions exhibited by the people of Rochester are not unlike most cities in both North and South. As war broke out, men wanted to be a part of what they believed would be a quick show of force before the other side backed down. Many historians such as James McPherson, Gerald F. Linderman, Adam Goodheart, and Lorien Foote have dedicated substantial time to the question of why men chose to fight in the Civil War. There are no reasons

⁵ *Rochester Daily Democrat*, April 12, 1861.

⁶ *Rochester Daily Democrat*, April 12, 1861.

⁷ *Rochester Daily Democrat*, April 13, 1861.

⁸ *Rochester Daily Democrat*, April 15, 1861.

to suspect that Rochesterians were different from men anywhere else. Many saw joining the war as a way to prove their manliness, patriotism, and honor. Being a soldier also provided employment needing no skills with decent pay--\$13 a month for private--which made it a very attractive premise for the poor laborers and immigrants. Also, for the youthfully bold, they held a tremendous fear that the war might end before they could win some glory for themselves.⁹ As men rushed to render their service to their country, being non-committal or sluggish in responding to Lincoln's April 15th call for 75,000 volunteers could be viewed as lacking courage or love for the Union. On April 18, a pointed notice in the *RDU* about a City Hall meeting to discuss how Rochester should respond to the rebellion read:

It is expected that all patriotic citizens--all who believe in sustaining the Government against treason and the flag of our country against desecration and outrage--all who believe the Capitol of the Union belong to those who recognize the Constitution and the laws of the United States--who are willing to uphold the regularly chosen Executive of the nation and defend the country from foes within as well as without, are expected to be at this meeting, so far as there will be room for their admission to City Hall.¹⁰

The message is clear. If you love your country, you will be there to discuss how to defend its honor.

Within three weeks of the firing on Fort Sumter, Rochester began raising companies for its first volunteer regiment, the 13th New York Infantry.¹¹ These initial 600 hundred men of the eight Rochester companies, were simply the tip of the spear. More than 16 different New York State infantry regiments contained at least one company of men recruited from the Greater

⁹ James M. McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 30.

¹⁰ "Public Meeting! Rochester for the Union!," *Rochester Daily Union and Advertiser*, April 18, 1861, microform.

¹¹ Robert Marcotte, *Where They Fell: Stories of Rochester Area Soldiers in the Civil War* (Franklin, VA: Q Pub., 2002), 18.

Rochester area. The same was true for nine artillery regiments and independent batteries, eleven cavalry regiments, three engineer regiments. Three different infantry regiments and one cavalry regiment contained so many Rochesterians that their nicknames contained the city's name: the 13th NY "Rochester Regiment," the 105th NY "Rochester Regiment," the 140th NY "Rochester Race Horses," and the 8th NY Cavalry "Rochester Regiment." Of course, many Rochesterians supported the war in non-combat roles including the involvement of women helping outfit soldiers with clothing.¹² As local historian and former newspaper columnist Bob Marcotte said, "It seemed the city could not wait to go to war."¹³

Yet, it is easy to support something that has no negative consequences. The surrender of Fort Sumter cost no lives during the battle, though Daniel Hough and Edward Galloway died by accident during the 100 gun salute to the American flag before evacuation of the fort.

Confederate Secretary of War, Leroy Pope Walker, said that he would mop up all of the spilt blood from the impending war with his pocket kerchief.¹⁴ Over confidence by both sides fueled by stereotypes and pride led to many doubting that open war could ever occur. Many Northerners believed that their superior infrastructure, numbers, and the backwardness of Southern cavaliers would mean a quick victory. At the same time, many Southerners believed that no Yankee city-boy would or could be able to march on the South and lay an honor-bound Southerner low.¹⁵

While stereotypes may be based on some elements of truth, believing in them wholesale often leads to disastrous outcomes. This was realized on July 21, 1861 at the Battle of First Manassas.

This first large-scale battle of the war produced a frightful number of casualties. The Union forces lost approximately 2,775 men of whom 625 were killed or mortally wounded. The

¹² Marcotte, 19.

¹³ Marcotte, 17.

¹⁴ J. William Harris, *The Making of the American South: A Short History, 1500-1877* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006), 183.

¹⁵ McPherson, *For Cause & Comrades*, 17.

Confederates fared better in their victory but still suffered about 2,000 casualties of which 400-625 were killed or mortally wounded.¹⁶ Thus, after just one battle, between 1,025 and 1,300 men were killed--approximately one quarter of the number of men who died fighting for the Continental forces during the American War of Independence. The next day when Lincoln called for 500,000 men to enlist for three years, both Northerners and Southerners began to realize that this war would not be quickly settled and that Leroy Pope Walker would need a larger handkerchief.

The Rochester reaction to First Manassas, or Bull Run as they called it, was far more concerned with how its own regiment, the 13th NY performed and suffered than the fact that the Union was defeated. On July 22, as the news of the battle began to trickle into newspapers, the *RDU* reported, "the men have fought nobly and acquitted themselves handsomely [. . .] It appears that the 13th were engaged yesterday and performed a gallant exploit in connection with the 69th and 79th Regiments of New York. They charged upon a rebel battery and carried it at the point of the [sic] bayonet. The brigade suffered severely."¹⁷ The paper warned the people of Rochester to brace themselves for the casualty reports: "The news will carry sorrow to every heart. We can only hope for the best, and invoke the help of Providence to enable the relatives and friends of our gallant volunteers to wait calmly and firmly for the details that may ere many hours be received." Rochesterians were proud to be able to celebrate the performance of the 13th especially in a battle where so many Union regiments were routed. However, they soon realized that battlefield pride was paid for in the lives of their young men.

¹⁶ James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 347.

¹⁷ "The Battle of the Grand Army—The Thirteenth Regiment," *Rochester Daily Union and Advertiser*, Jul. 22, 1861.

The initial sting Rochester felt was mild compared to what would come in the next four years. After First Manassas, Rochesterians learned of the 58 casualties of the 13th NY and the capturing of their Congressman, Alfred Ely, who went to witness the battle as if it were a play or sporting event. Yet, the latter piece of news grabbed headlines in the Rochester papers immediately following the battle.¹⁸ It does not mean that the 58 casualties were insignificant. 13 men from the 13th NY either died in that battle or immediately thereafter from their wounds. However, the war was still in its infancy and only a handful of Rochester families knew what it felt like to pay the war's ultimate price. The disillusionment with the excitement and nobleness of the war that historians Gerald F. Linderman and Drew Gilpin Faust each attempt to explain in regards to soldiers and the general public in their respective works had not yet begun. The 13 men who were laid low on the battlefield in Virginia were seen as heroes that other men should emulate.¹⁹ Yet, even though patriotic pride was plentiful and the majority of the sentiments in the papers were pro-war, the ugliness of battle was beginning to be described by those who witnessed it.

A letter to Jerome Fuller was published in the July 27th edition of the *Rochester Daily Union & Advertiser*. In part it read, "You have no idea of war and its horrors. Every day after the troops fell we listened constantly for cannonading [. . .] We could only walk the yard in a state of the most terrible anxiety."²⁰ This same source identified as "Carrie" recounts the horrible sight of the 69th NY--a regiment that would later earn nearly unrivaled glory as part of the Irish Brigade--as it retreated past the writer: "The 69th came first. Party after party of them came by, worn out; some stained with blood; some with clothing half shot off; some with heads and arms bound up.

¹⁸ "Local Matters," *Rochester Daily Union and Advertiser*, Jul. 23, 1861.

¹⁹ "The Disasters to the 13th" *Rochester Daily Union and Advertiser*, Jul. 27, 1861.

²⁰ "Letters from Soldiers and Others to Friends: From 'Carrie,'" *Rochester Daily Union and Advertiser*, Jul. 27, 1861.

They had marched all night, 20 miles after fighting all day. Some fell dead by the roadside above. All told the terrible story of their defeat." People at home were slowly finding out that this war would be more than parades and town hall meetings. It would be death and grieving and trying to figure out if all of the pain and sacrifice was for a worthy cause. Yet, those realities could be dealt with later and Rochesterians rushed to enlist to fill Lincoln's call for 500,000 men.

Chapter 2: The Tide of Death Rolls in

By the time of Antietam, the progression from flag-waving to deep thought about what this war truly meant and if it was worth it had started. Though this battle marked a strategic victory for the Union forces, Antietam was a turning point in terms of what the war was going to be fought over. After Fort Sumter, there were a multitude of reasons why Rochesterians would volunteer to support the Union. Surely some abolitionists joined the ranks immediately at the war's outbreak, but wanting to free the slaves was certainly not a requirement for service in a Rochester regiment. Bell Irvin Wiley states in his book, *The Life of Billy Yank*, that, "Some fought to free the slaves, but a polling of the rank and file through their letters and diaries indicates that those whose primary object was the liberation of the Negroes comprised only a small part of the fighting forces."²¹ Wiley suggests that less than one in ten soldiers in the Union forces ever had a strong interest in emancipation. Since Rochester was the site of abolitionist leaders, publications, and conventions, the percentage of soldiers that wanted emancipation for the slaves may have been higher. However, it is very unlikely that it was a majority.

The death and destruction from Antietam jarred the public. Never before had so many Americans died at a single time. The September 19 edition of the Rochester Daily Union and Advertiser stated:

²¹ Bell Irvin Wiley, *The Life of Billy Yank: The Common Soldier of the Union* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1952), 40.

When our citizens were rejoicing yesterday over the victories in Northern Maryland, none knew, and few, perhaps, even feared that the work was accomplished at the sacrifice of thousands of lives, including many who were near and dear to us. Such was the fact. The reports of to-day bring the sad news that the successes of the Federal arms have been won at a cost of much life, and that among the fallen are some of our own citizens. The 108th Regiment, a noble band of volunteers from Monroe County, who left home scarcely a month since, full of hope and eager to meet our country's fees, has been thus early subjected to the baptism of fire, and many of its gallant men have fallen [. . .] The intelligence from the 108th caused great sorrow in this community, and threw a cloud of gloom over our citizens.²²

Yet, this report was merely the beginning of the tragic news from Antietam that would hit Rochester. The casualty reports in full were still unavailable. Only the officers and certain important citizens were noted as killed or wounded. With each day following the battle came more heartache for the families who sent a son, brother, or husband to war.

By Monday, September 22, detailed stories of the gallant Rochester soldiers who fell peppered the paper. A detailed account of Lieutenant Charles C. Buckley's death is followed by a few paragraphs describing what a tremendous loss it is to the community.²³ Yet it is not only the loss of officers that the *Daily Union and Advertiser* laments. Corporal J.G. Wensel's funeral is discussed. The segment concludes, "Deceased was a brave young soldier, an excellent young man, and it is due to his memory that his remains be followed to the grave by a large procession."²⁴ Perhaps it is no coincidence that this edition of the paper also includes a biting article about how the *Daily Union and Advertiser* correctly predicted that this war would be a

²² "Melancholly Intelligence," *Rochester Daily Union and Advertiser*, Sept. 19, 1862.

²³ "Death of Lieut. Charles C. Buckley," *Rochester Daily Union and Advertiser*, Sept. 22, 1862.

²⁴ "Funeral of J. G. Wensel," *Rochester Daily Union and Advertiser*, Sept. 22, 1862.

bitter, lasting conflict. The article criticizes the *Daily Democrat* and the *New York Times* for just now coming to the realization that the South can field a formidable army fairly equal in strength of arms to that of the Union. The conclusion of the piece states:

The *Times*, *Post*, and *Democrat* have now “discovered” that they were all wrong; and some of them frankly confess “surprise” at the results they then deemed impossible; while we, instead of being taken by “surprise,” can point to those results as simply the fulfillment of prophecies (if you please) long since made through these columns; or, as we prefer to state it, as the logical consequences of acts and circumstances then current, then current which we carried out to their practical solutions.²⁵

Yet the war would take more human lives and drag on for far longer than even the “prophecies” of the *Daily Union and Advertiser* predicted.

This particular edition of the *Daily Union and Advertiser* also contains a short piece about donations to the Hospital Relief Society that suggests that there was no perceived difference by society between soldiers suffering from disease and illness or soldiers wounded in battle. The piece thanks those who have donated to the society helping provide care for “our brave sick and wounded soldiers.”²⁶ This comment helps challenge the claims made by Nicholas Marshall that the soldiers that died from disease were viewed as less significant or tragic since “Americans of the nineteenth century in the midst of war would most likely have counted them as the cost of living.”²⁷ Yet, in the paper the sick and wounded are viewed as the same—brave and in need of Rochesterians’ aid. In a separate article in the same edition of the paper titled, “Remember our Brave Soldiers—Let there be no delay in Sending Supplies to the Sick and Wounded from the Late Battles,” there is no distinction between those who were harmed in

²⁵ Untitled article criticizing the *Times*, *Rochester Daily Union and Advertiser*, Sept. 22, 1862.

²⁶ Untitled article thanking the public for donations,” *Rochester Daily Union and Advertiser*, Sept. 22, 1862.

²⁷ Marshall, 15.

battle and those who were stricken with illness. This particular article also helps show how all Rochesterians are called upon to help the sick and wounded which emphasizes that the prevention of loss of life changed how people lived their lives. This serves as more evidence that the casualties created by the Civil War had a large impact on the lives of all Americans.

Although the people of Rochester knew that the battle of Antietam had been won (debatably) at a terrible cost of human life, as days continued to pass by, the casualty reports became more detailed and the horrors of the battle became clearer. The paper on September 23, 1862 gives the estimate of 10,000 killed and wounded as well as vivid account of the dead strewn across the battle field and the dozens of field hospitals near Sharpsburg tending to the wounded.²⁸ An article detailing a speech by New York gubernatorial Democratic candidate, Horatio Seymour, hints at the beginnings of the disillusion of the war both by the soldiers and those at home: “While our soldiers bleed for national rights, shall we not defend the fire-side rights? When they return, perhaps disabled by the cruelties of war, shall they find their bounties and pensions, pledged to them by the public faith, turned to dust and ashes by national bankruptcy, caused by unpunished hands?”²⁹ Seymour’s words would resonate with many New Yorkers as he would win the election in 1862. He was not the only Democrat to carry the election. As the voters in the Union reflected upon the past year and a half of war, many chose to replace their Republican leaders with Democrats. The House of Representatives Election of 1862 saw the Republicans lose 22 seats and the Democrats gain 28. In the eyes of some voters, Lincoln and the Republican Party had started a war that had already cost many lives and was far from over. When Lincoln announced the preliminary Emancipation Proclamation on September 22, 1862, the meaning of the war changed. Many who had elected and supported Republican

²⁸ “Additional Particulars of the Battle of Sharpsburg,” *Rochester Daily Union and Advertiser*, Sept. 23, 1862.

²⁹ “From the *Utica Observer*, yesterday. Governor Seymour Serenaded,” *Rochester Daily Union and Advertiser*, Sept. 23, 1862.

leaders in the interest of keeping the nation whole did not agree with black emancipation becoming an objective.

Furthermore, articles in the *Rochester Daily Union and Advertiser* outline how dangerous the proclamation could be towards the war strategy. An article on September 23, warns that the Emancipation Proclamation could create southern sympathizers and sway those in Kentucky to openly support the Confederacy. Further skeptical analysis of the proclamation sarcastically muses that perhaps “it possesses the magic power that has been attributed to it by its advocates,” to bring a swift end to the war.³⁰ Two days later on September 25, an editorial harshly criticizes Lincoln and suggests the president ought to be impeached for his neglect of power as well as his abuse of power.³¹ After Lincoln and his supporters were thoroughly attacked by the democratic leaning *Rochester Daily Union and Advertiser*, blacks became the target of the paper’s attacks against the proclamation. W. H. Hurlburt writes in a piece called “Feelings of the Slave,” that the slaves the Union Army encounters have a strong dislike for Yankees. Essentially, Hurlburt suggests that the slaves are unworthy of emancipation since they do not help the North’s troops. They show their loyalty to their masters and do nothing to aid their potential liberators. He states that there is too much “negro ignorance and prejudice to be overcome before the slaves can be made to put forth their hands to the armies of the North.”³²

Meanwhile, this information of an ungrateful, ignorant, and unfriendly slave population is given alongside more in-depth and gruesome casualty reports of the Battle of Antietam. The letter of newspaper reporters, chaplains, and soldiers flooded the *Rochester Daily Union and Advertiser*. The graphic reality of war was delivered twice a day to the citizens of Rochester. As

³⁰ “Slavery to be Abolished, on Paper—The Great Blow Struck,” *Rochester Daily Union and Advertiser*, Sept. 23, 1862.

³¹ “The Correspondence Between President Lincoln and Mr. Greeley,” *Rochester Daily Union and Advertiser*, Sept. 25, 1862.

³² “Feelings of the Slave,” *Rochester Daily Union and Advertiser*, Sept. 26, 1862.

more accurate casualty reports reached the anxious family members, so did articles such as “A Sketch of the Great Battle Field” appearing in the September 26 edition depicting the aftermath of the Irish Brigade’s charge on the Sunken Road. The account reads:

The stench was intolerable. From whatever point a breath of wind proceeded a fresh effluvium assailed the senses. The sights witnessed were, if possible, still more loathsome. The Confederates had been shot principally in the head which swelled up to twice its usual size, the face being absolutely hideous. Blood had oozed out of mouth, eyes, nostrils, ears and bullet holes until it ran in streams down the lane. Decomposition had immediately set in, the features turning black as pitch within a few hours.³³

Rochester’s own George Breck, a Lieutenant in Reynold’s Battery further painted the reality of what victory looked like:

[T]heir dead [Confederates] lay in files—in [*sic*] winrows—many rods long, and so closely that their bodies touched each other; and then, all over the field, wherever the battle was waged, scattered here and there, were the lifeless remains—terribly mangled in some instances by shot and shell—of the rebel force. . . . Many of our regiments were badly cut up, and the rebel ranks were mowed down in swaths. How many more terrible battles like this must there be before the war will end? . . . We are now encamped in the woods the rebels occupied yesterday. They left all their dead bodies unburied. A horrible, horrible sight we witnessed on reaching the rebel lines, in the vicinity of which, or on this side our forces were not allowed to pass yesterday. We saw hundreds of dead bodies lying in rows and in piles, and scattered all over, looking the picture of all that is sickening, harrowing, horrible. O what a terrible sight!³⁴

³³ “Visit to the Battle Field,” *Rochester Daily Union and Advertiser*, Sept. 26, 1862.

³⁴ “The Late Battle in Maryland,” *Rochester Daily Union and Advertiser*, Sept. 26, 1862.

Another depiction of the aftermath of the battle gave insight to the destruction of the land and homes in Sharpsburg, Maryland:

The dead have now been all buried that fell on the battle field of Wednesday last. The field, however, still presents a sad picture of war's desolation. Fences down, fields trodden hard, trees leveled, the graves of departed heroes catching the eye at every step, the carcasses of horses everywhere, a solemn stillness pervading, broken only by the voices of men calling to each other in different parts of the field, while roaming over the ground in search of relics or the graves of relatives and friends; houses once the home and pride of the peaceful farmer now a mass of blackened ruins, riddled with balls and trodden over with the feet of curious strangers and straggling soldiery; all seem to convey to the mind a shuddering idea of the terrors of the late struggle, and far from producing a realization of the poet's oft-quoted expression, "The pride, pomp and circumstance of glorious war."³⁵

A letter published in the September 27 *RDU* from Dr. Arner of the 108th NY eloquently attempted to put into words the tragedy he had witnessed: "But the battle. I cannot write of it now. I can only say, may I never see another such a sight, and I pray, as never before, that this horrible war may soon cease. Let all the people at the North pray and act to this end, that this fearful slaughter of human lives and the mourning that must follow throughout the land may be speedily assuaged."³⁶ Yet Rochesterians were far from the conclusion of the butchery of its men at the hands of the war.

³⁵ "The Late Battle Field," *Rochester Daily Union and Advertiser*, Sept. 26, 1862.

³⁶ "Letter from Dr. Arner," *Rochester Daily Union and Advertiser*, Sept. 27, 1862.

Chapter 3: The Passing of the Antebellum “Good Death”

Even if death was a common presence in nineteenth century life, this form was utterly foreign to Americans. Antebellum ideas of the good death—what historian Drew Gilpin Faust refers to as an updated *ars moriendi*—involved the dying party, surrounded by his or her family, accepting his fate and willingly leaving this world for God’s kingdom of heaven.³⁷ Death during the Civil War did not resemble this guide to dying. Fathers, husbands, and sons died far from the warmth and love of their families. Some had no time to prepare themselves for their journey with the angel of death as a minie ball or cannon shot instantly ceased their corporeal existence. This proved extremely worrisome for the soldiers and the families of those who fell. Faust quotes a pamphlet from a Presbyterian Church that explained what many Protestants believed happened at the moment of death around the time of the Civil War: “Death fixes our state. Here [on Earth] everything is changing and unsettled. Beyond the grave or condition is unchangeable [...] What you are when you die, the same will you reappear in the great day of eternity.”³⁸ Faust explains why these antebellum concepts of the “good death” were so troublesome during the Civil War:

How one died thus epitomized a life already led and predicted the quality of life everlasting. The *hora mori*, the hour of death, had therefore to be witnessed, scrutinized, interpreted, narrated—not to mention carefully prepared for by any sinner who sought to be worthy of salvation. The sudden and all but unnoticed end of the soldier slain in battle, the unattended deaths of unidentified diseased and wounded men denied these consolations. Civil War battlefields and hospitals could have provided the material for an exemplary text on how not to die.³⁹

³⁷ Faust, 6.

³⁸ Faust, 8-9.

³⁹ Faust, 9.

The question weighed heavy on the minds of all, North and South: could salvation be had for those who died in the flash of musket fire or the explosion of cannon? What of the man delirious from fever and disease crying for his mother when he finally passed? The man whose body was found mangled on the field with anguish and pain on his face, what happened to his soul? These questions and the answers that would be unfathomable to the families of the deceased based upon pre-war notions of the “good death” would lead to a change in how death would be interpreted by American society.

Yet, this change was not instantaneous. Soldiers who grew up with the teachings of antebellum “good death” tried to find ways to provide the families of the fallen with accounts of a traditional, acceptable, and honorable death that the soldier might have had if he were at home. Faust notes that there becomes a need for comrades to become a proxy for the family at the bedside of the departed to retell the last words and the spiritual state in which they died so as to provide the family with some comfort.⁴⁰ An example of this phenomenon can be seen in a letter from George A. Rowe of the 108th NY that is published on request of the family of his fallen comrade, Lyman R. Potter. The letter paints the picture of a good soldier’s death stating, “He was the first of our company (Co. B) to fall, and surely no one was better prepared. Often have I heard him sing in verse, ‘Die on the Field of Battle,’ and when I saw him fall I could but sing it too. . . .we dug a grave and buried him beneath a black walnut tree. His initials are marked on the tree, and his remains may be removed in cooler weather.”⁴¹ Rowe mentions something that was on the mind of all grieving families of fallen soldiers—how can the body be brought home? Again, Americans and Rochesterians are presented with an almost entirely new hurdle to overcome: transporting the remains of their loved ones back home where they belonged.

⁴⁰ Faust, 14.

⁴¹ "Death of A Soldier in the 108th," *Rochester Daily Union and Advertiser*, Sept. 26, 1862.

Via reporters and soldiers' letters home, families of fallen troops knew what could await their beloved deceased: shallow graves often without coffins. Hopefully those who buried them took the care to mark down their name on a piece of cracker board or a nearby tree. Furthermore, hopefully a friend of the departed knew how to get the information to a family member. This fate seemed nearly unbearable for the living family members but it was not nearly as concerning as the potential that the deceased was buried in an unmarked mass grave. The families that lost their loved ones to the war did not want to lose their remains as well. The grave provided the families with a place to honor and reflect upon the life. An unmarked or forgotten grave in what many Protestants thought of as "profane" southern soil was not an acceptable final resting place for a hero of the north.⁴² Families struggled to find a way to remedy this tragic reality.

Trying to transport a body home during the war required a small fortune. Faust outlines the process which included embalming, purchasing a metallic and airtight coffin, and transporting the body home via railroad.⁴³ A Pennsylvanian soldier wrote his family that his company raised \$140 to preserve and ship two of his comrades' remains home in 1862 suggesting a price of \$70 to send a fallen soldier home.⁴⁴ A metallic coffin alone cost \$50 in 1862 according to Faust's research. Railroads soon began to implement regulations in regards to transporting the bodies of the dead. Trains and therefore human remains could be delayed by problems with the tracks, availability of space, and weather. Though the bodies waited to finally arrive home, the decomposition process did not wait. Wooden coffins were deemed unacceptable for transport as they did little to prevent decomposition and could not keep the gasses and liquids of the process from escaping. Coffin design changed as a result of these problems. When Lieutenant John Buckley of the 140th NY went to retrieve his brother's body, Lieutenant Charles

⁴² Laderman, 92.

⁴³ Faust, 87; 89-92.

⁴⁴ Faust, 86-87.

Buckley of the 105th NY, it is explicitly mentioned that “[t]he body will be enclosed in a tight coffin and brought home. . . .”⁴⁵ In addition to zinc lined coffins, coffins that put the body on ice were implemented by various companies like the Staunton Transportation Company.⁴⁶

Embalming itself is a perfect example of how significant Civil War deaths had a massive impact on American society. Prior to the Civil War, embalming was a very uncommon practice for a typical death. It was mostly done to preserve bodies for medical studies. Dr. Thomas Holmes is considered to be the father of modern embalming in the United States.⁴⁷ It was Holmes that embalmed the body of the North’s first war casualty, Elmer E. Ellsworth, whose body was on display in the White House and City Hall in New York City. It was a tremendous opportunity to show the public how embalming could preserve the bodies of those who died far from home. The practice of embalming did not come without its pitfalls. As previously mentioned, it was quite expensive for the average family to pay the fees. Prices ranged from about \$25 to \$200 depending on the rank of the deceased and services performed.⁴⁸ With any profitable business, unscrupulous and unsavory opportunists were drawn to the practice. Faust cites several examples of families complaining to government officials that they were being extorted by embalming firms who embalmed their deceased loved ones without permission and threatened to not return the bodies unless the bill for services was paid.⁴⁹ Embalming led to such a plethora of complaints and problems that Congress considered and ultimately did not pass two different bills specific to the practice: a bill that sought to give exclusive embalming rights of federal dead to a specific firm and a bill to create a corps of military undertakers in each

⁴⁵ “Letter from Lieut. Buckley,” *Rochester Daily Union and Advertiser*, Sept. 27, 1862.

⁴⁶ Faust, 92.

⁴⁷ James C. Lee, “The Humble Undertaker,” *America’s Civil War* 9, no. 5 (November 1996): 20.

⁴⁸ Faust, 96; Lee, 20.

⁴⁹ Faust, 96-97.

division.⁵⁰ The fact that these two bills were even considered helps prove that the type of death experienced by Americans during the Civil War change the country and started a dialogue on funeral practices. Another question that the American public asked was why families should have to pay for the various services related to burials when their loved ones had died for their country.

During the early years of the war no official federal policy existed to help families pay for the retrieval or burial of bodies. Each state had a different policy on the matter.⁵¹ Eventually the United States Sanitary Commission took on an increased role in helping families of the dead secure the bodies from the front, however, the Sanitary Commission was not a government run institution but rather a civilian run philanthropic organization.⁵² The fact is that the United States Government simply could not come to agreement on an official policy on how to deal with the dead during the war. The lack of an official policy helps suggest the complexity of the problem. Just how much was the federal government expected to do for the families of the dead and the physical remains of those who fell for their county? The soldiers enlisted to serve their state, drilled and trained with men from their state, and fought and died under the flags of their state. However, these state regiments were fighting for a national cause. Thus, should it be the federal or state governments that aided the families of the deceased and give their loved ones a proper burial? The truth is that politicians had no idea and they tried to figure it out as the war continued to rage on. The tragic reality is that little was decided during the war and many of the practices that today we take is givens in regards to soldiers' deaths such as notification of the families, pensions for the families of the deceased, and accurate records of the burial location came late in

⁵⁰ Lee, 20-22.

⁵¹ Faust, 86-87.

⁵² Faust, 87.

the war and after the last shots were fired.⁵³ Unfortunately, policy has a habit of being reactionary rather than proactive.

The first *Rochester Daily Union and Advertiser* of 1863, circulated on January 2, presented a detailed chart of the number of deaths of Rochesterians within the past year. Remarkably, under the category “Killed in Battle,” only three men are recorded.⁵⁴ 3 deaths out of a reported 1,216 hardly support the society-altering impact of Civil War deaths that this paper is arguing. However, it is imperative to note that soldiers who died from disease both in the camp and on campaign are not listed under this category. Since the majority of soldier deaths during the Civil War were caused by microscopic pathogens rather than minié balls, this is not surprising. When one examines the numbers a bit closer, they implicitly suggest that the war had a notable impact on normal death trends. A particular chart lists the number of deaths per month over a six year period from 1857 to 1862. In June, July, August, and September, prime campaign season months, six year highs in deaths are recorded.⁵⁵ December, the month that featured the brutal defeat at Fredericksburg, also features a six year high with twenty-three more deaths than the next highest year. While there is not definitive proof that these spikes in mortality are directly because of the Civil War, the circumstantial evidence they present helps build the case.

Another piece of circumstantial evidence is found in this edition of the *RDU* in a paragraph notifying readers that they may soon have to pay for obituaries. The notice reads, “The Palmyra Courier and other weekly papers are to charge henceforth five cents per line for obituary notices, beyond the mere announcement of death. This is just, and might be carried further, and

⁵³ *Death and the Civil War*, dir. Ric Burns, by Ric Burns and Drew Gilpin Faust (WGBH, 2012), DVD.

⁵⁴ “City Mortality for 1862,” *Rochester Daily Union and Advertiser*, Jan. 2, 1863.

⁵⁵ “City Mortality for 1862,” *Rochester Daily Union and Advertiser*, Jan. 2, 1863. The number of 135 deaths in September 1862 matches that of September 1857.

payment demanded for all obituary notices.”⁵⁶ When a notice like this appears, the first question must be, what led to this change? Perhaps it is because too many editorialized obituaries for soldiers who died far away from home and friends and family took up too much space that could be sold for advertisements in the paper.

A new periodical first published in June 1863 provides another example of how the slaughter and violence of the war led to changes at home. The first volume of *The Soldier's Aid* reached subscribers on June 19, 1863. Its purpose was to inform the public of humanitarian efforts aimed at helping the soldiers and to prompt civilians to contribute to these organizations. The *Soldier's Aid* first volume notifies the public that:

During the last few months there seems to have been a general falling off in hospital supplies, owing partly to the fact that the stock of half-worn materials, entering largely into former contributions, is exhausted, and the difficulty under present prices of substituting new goods; partly to an impression that they are not so much needed; and partly also, no doubt, to distrust occasioned by exaggerated reports of fraud and waste, as well as to other causes. In as far as this deficiency arises from a misapprehension of facts, it can be remedied by keeping the community well informed, and one aim in these columns, was to contribute our mite toward applying this remedy. Such was the original idea of “*The Soldier's Aid*,” to which, however, we now allow a greater breadth, admitting, as appropriate to its object, whatever bears, in any way, upon the interests of the soldier, or of the cause in which he is engaged.⁵⁷

As the war progressed and more fighting men were afflicted by camp diseases and battlefield wounds the need for donations and contributions to relief societies had never been greater. Thus

⁵⁶ “Obituaries to be Paid for,” *Rochester Daily Union and Advertiser*, Jan. 2, 1863.

⁵⁷ “Prospectus,” *The Soldier's Aid* (Rochester), June 19, 1863.

the paper took on purpose of notifying the public of the soldiers' needs and also as a pulpit that supported the political stance of, “Our Country, our whole Country, and nothing but our Country;’ or this other version, ‘Liberty and Union, now and forever, one and inseparable.’”

Chapter 4: O’Rorke and the Carnage at Gettysburg

Although antebellum Americans were used to death and Rochesterians were accustomed to its sons dying in the war, nothing prepared the city’s populace for Gettysburg. In the three days of fighting spanning from July 1 to July 3, 1863, over 51,000 men were casualties—over 23,000 of these casualties belonging to the Union. Regiments containing Rochester area men were heavily involved in the battle including the 8th NY Cavalry, 94th NY Infantry, 108th NY Infantry, 136th NY Infantry, 140th NY Infantry, and the 1st NY Light Artillery. On July 11, the *RDU* published detailed casualty lists where over 480 men are reported as casualties from most of the aforementioned regiments.⁵⁸ When one includes the casualty report of the 1st NY Light Artillery the number surpasses 550 casualties. The Rochester area had never seen a battle that created this many casualties from regiments and companies recruited in this region. One particular man who fell captured the attention of those in the city.

Colonel Patrick Henry O’Rorke of the 140th NY, a decidedly Rochester regiment, was killed on July 2, 1863. O’Rorke was something of a hometown hero even though he was born in County Cavan, Ireland. Patrick grew up in the city’s “Little Dublin” district with many other Irish Immigrant families.⁵⁹ He attended the original School Number Nine on Parker Street (now Joseph Avenue) and excelled in the classroom. O’Rorke scored so well on an examination that the newly formed University of Rochester offered him free tuition. However, O’Rorke would not attend the university at the request of his mother who feared that the Catholic Patrick O’Rorke

⁵⁸ Casualty report lists, *Rochester Daily Union and Advertiser*, Jul. 11, 1863.

⁵⁹ Brian A. Bennett, *The Beau Ideal of a Soldier and a Gentleman: The Life of Col. Patrick Henry O’Rorke from Ireland to Gettysburg* (Lynchburg, VA: Schroeder Publications, 2012), 6.

would face unfair treatment by the Baptists who founded the school.⁶⁰ Thus, O’Rorke became a respected member of the Rochester community as a stonecutter’s apprentice. Yet O’Rorke yearned to become something more and appreciated former Rochester mayor and then Congressional Representative John Williams’ nomination of O’Rorke for the United States Military Academy at West Point.⁶¹ O’Rorke started his time at West Point in 1857 and was part of the June 1861 Class that graduated early to aid in the war effort. O’Rorke graduated at the top of his class with other Civil War notables such as Alonzo Cushing and George Armstrong Custer who graduated last in the class.⁶²

O’Rorke valiantly served in the elite Army Corps of Engineers before his appointment to lead his hometown regiment—the 140th NY. O’Rorke was held in high esteem by his soldiers and fellow officers. First Lieutenant Ira C. Clark remarked that he “knew of no officer who seemed destined by nature for so easy and brilliant a career of popularity and military glory.”⁶³ Yet destiny is a funny thing that often disappoints those who think they know its agenda. Instead of rising through the ranks of the Army like so many thought he would, O’Rorke would fall on that hot day in July after Brigadier General Gouverneur Kemble Warren convinced his former student at West Point to ignore his standing orders and immediately support the Union position at Little Round Top.⁶⁴ Knowing that the need was dire, O’Rorke led the 140th over the summit of the hill and plunged into the fray leading his men on and bolstering the wavering 16th Michigan of Colonel Strong Vincent’s Brigade. The 26 year old colonel was shot through the neck while urging his men on and died instantly. O’Rorke was the perfect catalyst for Rochesterians to come together and mourn their collective losses. He was a homegrown talent;

⁶⁰ Bennett, 17-18.

⁶¹ Bennett, 22-23.

⁶² “Local Matters,” *Rochester Daily Union and Advertiser*, Jul. 7, 1863.

⁶³ Bennett, 74.

⁶⁴ Bennett, 116-117.

he came from an Irish family; he was young and recently married to a respectable young woman from a respectable family; he was respected; he was precisely the kind of man the city loathed to lose but could point to as a sacrifice on the altar of liberty and Union and payment for the sins of slavery and secession.

The local papers did not miss this opportunity to use this perfect symbol of Rochester's sacrifice to the war. O'Rourke's funeral was heavily covered and editorialized in the July 16 edition of the *RDUA*:

Long before the hour appointed for the service the streets, in every direction, leading to the church were crowded with people, whilst in its immediate neighborhood were to be seen hundreds of persons all anxious to secure admission. At the appropriate time the solemn cavalcade proceeded from the house of E. Bishop, Esq., to the church and the coffin was laid on the very spot where, just one year ago, the gallant young hero stood with his excellent bride, their young hearts throbbing with life and hope as the nuptial blessing was imparted to them. The scene yesterday was sadly changed; the husband a lifeless corpse under the glorious flag which waved over him, and which he had sacrificed his precious life to defend, and the loving wife by its side, clothed in widow's weeds, her cheeks bedewed with her tears, and her heart rent in grief! May a merciful God deign to look upon these two holocausts, and forgive the sins of the nation that has exacted them, we say!⁶⁵

The death of one man, whose funeral was attended by a variety of people from different walks of life and religious beliefs, had an even greater impact on the city of Rochester according to the city's most renowned historian, Blake McKelvey: "all my studies of Rochester's histories, the original fights which had been quite numerous, with battles between groups of Irish and

⁶⁵ "Funeral of the Late Col. O'Rourke," *Rochester Daily Union and Advertiser*, Jul. 16, 1863.

Germans and Irish and yankees and so forth, none of them appeared again. In other words he not only helped win [and] save the union, but he made a union out of Rochester.”⁶⁶ This is high praise coming from a man who dedicated his life to the study of Rochester and its people.

Yet not every city in New York had a symbolic death like O’Rorke’s to keep their war resolve strong and renew their dedication to the Union. The famous New York City draft riots of July 1863 were not the only incidents to occur within the state. In the July 14 edition of the *RDUA*, a draft riot in Buffalo is reported and it is feared that the angry mob may take over the city’s arsenal.⁶⁷ The next day, reports of rioting in Troy, NY can be found in the paper.⁶⁸ Yet, the city of Rochester is largely unaffected by the discontent and unrest that followed in the wake the unpopular conscription. In fact, Rochester is called upon to send its 54th New York State Militia and elements of the 13th Veteran Heavy Artillery to New York City to help quell the mobs. The only way that this arrangement would have been agreeable to the city’s leaders was if they had utter confidence that Rochesterians would not revolt despite its men being drafted. Whether it was because of ideological differences in terms of support for the war or how the city handled its loss, the papers during the time of the draft riots do not even hint at anything happening in the city.

Often historians cite the large Irish immigrant populations in New York City and Boston as the key perpetrators and driving force behind the July 1863 draft riots. There is no doubt that this is largely true as the primary sources point at the poor immigrants as being the ones most affected and enraged by a draft. Furthermore, Irish relations with blacks were complicated and troubling at best. The poor Irish viewed free blacks as competition for the lowest paying jobs that they already struggled to obtain. Now they were being conscripted to fight in a war which sought

⁶⁶ Blake McKelvey interview with Chris Coffey quoted in Bennett, 140.

⁶⁷ “Riot in Buffalo,” *Rochester Daily Union and Advertiser*, Jul. 14, 1863.

⁶⁸ Untitled article on the rioting in Troy, *Rochester Daily Union and Advertiser*, Jul. 15, 1863.

to free the very people who would take their jobs. The Irish also resented that they were fighting a war for their adopted country when the wealthy citizens of the United States could pay a substitute or a \$300 fee to avoid service. While all of this has been heavily documented by Draft Riot historians, it is interesting to note that this post-draft experience was not shared by all cities that held a high Irish immigrant population. Rochester for instance had quite a large Irish immigrant population and many of the soldiers in the Rochester regiment rosters contain traditionally Irish surnames like Fitzgerald, Clancy, Cunningham, McCormick, and McGuire. However, it appears that the sentiments held by those Irish in New York City and Boston were not shared—or at least not felt with matching fervor by those in Rochester and the surrounding areas. Perhaps it was because of the death of O’Rourke and the honor his memory was shown by the city that gave would-be rioters the sense that their sacrifice was appreciated. Perhaps it was due to the prevalence of abolitionists and their ideology. Maybe it was simply because the life of a poor Irish immigrant in Rochester was better than that of their countrymen in the large cities. Regardless, Rochesterians simply marveled at the news of the draft riots rather than providing its own chapters to one of the war’s ugliest incidents outside of the battlefields. Instead of revolting against the draft, the city turned its attention to its recently fallen heroes and increased humanitarian efforts with a new vigor which would be needed when the slaughter renewed.

Chapter 5: Grant’s War of Attrition

By May 1864, the seasonal start of campaign season, those in Rochester anxiously awaited news of the armies. They did not have to wait long before reports from the frightful battle of the Wilderness began pouring in. In fact, the campaign season of 1864 would continuously plague the Rochester papers with tales of carnage and casualty reports. This was largely due to the change of leadership of Union forces when Lincoln appointed General Ulysses

S. Grant Lieutenant General and thus commander of all Union forces. The *Rochester Daily Union and Advertiser* was skeptical of whether or not Grant could be successful with Lincoln as his commander-in-chief. An article quipped, “If the General will go heart and hand for Lincoln he will be petted and allowed ample scope for all the military genius he possesses—be the same more or less. But if he is recusant or even undecided on this ‘vital question,’ [his support of Lincoln’s reelection] he may as well retire on his present laurels, for he will never be permitted to add a solitary laurel to those which already encircle his brow!”⁶⁹ Grant had no political ambition and did support his commander-in-chief “heart and hand.” He would prove to be the general that Lincoln needed to defeat Lee and the Confederacy but at a terrible cost of human life. Grant understood that attrition warfare could defeat a vastly outnumbered Confederate Army and earned the distasteful nickname of “butcher” for his success.⁷⁰ The Battle of the Wilderness spanning from May 5-7 would be the first taste of grinding out the rebels and the start of Grant’s Overland Campaign.

On May 10, 1864, the brutality of the late battle was finally making its way to the paper. A dispatch on this day claimed, “The general results may be stated as a success to our arms. The fighting on Friday was the most desperate of the war.” Again, the first reports to reach the paper contained tremendous errors—chiefly that “the loss in killed is not large but they [Union forces] have many wounded.”⁷¹ The good people of the North would soon learn that over 2,200 Union men were killed and that the battle produced over 17,500 casualties for the Federal Army. This made the Battle of the Wilderness the fourth most costly battle of the war in terms of casualties. Yet no one could know that as they were reading the initial reports of this brutal battle, an even

⁶⁹ Untitled article attacking Lincoln, *Rochester Daily Union and Advertiser*, Mar. 10, 1864.

⁷⁰ McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, p. 742.

⁷¹ “By Telegraph,” *Rochester Daily Union and Advertiser*, May 10, 1864.

more costly battle (the third most costly of the war) was being fought at Spotsylvania Court House.

Spotsylvania Court House was particularly devastating to Rochester's 140th NY Infantry all but eliminating the regiment. The 140th had seen heavy fighting on May 5 during the Battle of the Wilderness at Saunders' Field. Colonel George E. Ryan, a West Point graduate from the class of 1857, was appointed the commanding officer of the 140th after the death of Col. O'Rourke. Ryan, much like O'Rourke, was admired by his men but considered a strict disciplinarian. His leadership and drill of the regiment earned the 140th Zouave uniforms—bright red and blue uniforms modelled after the French Colonial forces in North Africa. These uniforms were considered a great honor by the regiments that received them.⁷² Ryan led the 140th on an ill-fated charge across the open ground of Saunders' Field on May 5. The 140th withstood withering fire and forced the rebels out of the woods on the far side of the field. Yet, the success would be short lived as the 140th found themselves alone, unsupported and flanked.⁷³ The other regiments that had been assigned to support and follow the 140th's charge had veered off course or simply did not make the attack. The 140th was in a horribly hopeless situation. Receiving fire from nearly every direction and confused by the thick growth, brambles, and briars, the 140th fled the woods while being fired upon by their own batteries. The charge at Saunders' Field cost the 140th nearly half of its strength. 255 of the 529 men engaged that day were recorded as casualties.⁷⁴ Yet, this was merely the losses from the Wilderness. The 140th would find a new kind of annihilation at Laurel Hill, Spotsylvania Court House.

Though heavily battered and having not slept in a day, the 140th NY again plunged into action on the morning of May 8. Colonel Ryan ordered his remaining soldiers to make a chaotic

⁷² Robin Smith and William Younghusband, *American Civil War Zouaves* (London: Osprey, 1996), 30.

⁷³ Marcotte, 179-180.

⁷⁴ Marcotte, 180.

charge for the crossroads at Laurel Hill in what one of his officers remembered as, “a far more dispiriting affair than that of the 5th of May: for there as a regiment we at least made a vigorous onslaught in line of battle well formed.”⁷⁵ Major Milo Starks was killed nearly as soon as the assault began on Laurel Hill. Colonel George Ryan was stuck in the left shoulder and the ball exited under his right arm around 8 am.⁷⁶ He lingered for hours before he finally succumbed to his mortal wound. Lt. John Buckley was severely wounded in the leg. In fact, in addition to the rank and file soldiers who made up the majority of the typical casualty reports, the officer corps was essentially dismantled between May 5 and May 12. Captain August Meyer would die from his wounds received at the Wilderness while Captain Henry G. Hamilton and Second Lieutenant Michael Shannon were captured there. Captain Henry B. Hoyt was also wounded at the Wilderness and Second Lieutenant Eugene Shedd was wounded at Laurel Hill. Both were captured.⁷⁷ In all, 16 officers were killed, wounded, or reported as missing during that week. The 140th NY, though continually serving valiantly until the close of the war, would never fully recover from its losses of 315 men in those 7 days.⁷⁸

Grant’s Overland Campaign would ruin plenty of other regiments besides the 140th NY. Though this war of attrition would ultimately prove successful, the heightened death tolls and the near ceaseless fighting dealt a tremendous blow to northern morale for both soldiers and their families at home. Gerald F. Linderman addresses this at great length in his 1987 work *Embattled Courage: The Experience of Combat in the American Civil War*. While Linderman’s book is easily debatable in regards to his sweeping claims of widespread disillusionment amongst the

⁷⁵ Porter Farley quoted in Marcotte, 194.

⁷⁶ Frank Ryan to Matt Ryan, May 20, 1864, Ryan Family Papers, The American Catholic History Research Center and University Archives, Washington, D.C.

⁷⁷ New York State, Adjutant-General, *Annual Report of the Adjutant-General of the State of New York for the Year 1904*, serial no. 38 (Albany: Brandow, 1905), 96; 176.

⁷⁸ Frederick Phisterer, *New York in the War of Rebellion, 1861-1865*, 3rd ed. (Albany: J.B. Lyon, 1912).

soldiers with the war goals and the ideals of honor and bravery, he collects enough evidence to suggest that some soldiers certainly felt that way. In particular, Linderman suggests that the rising death toll of the bloody battles of the 1864 campaign season effectively drove a wedge between the soldiers and the civilian population at home who were still promoting Victorian values of courage facing certain death in battle. For the men who were actually doing the fighting, dying, and killing, it was insulting to be told how they should feel or react to the fierce battles by those who were not putting their lives on the line.⁷⁹ Robert G. Carter, a soldier from Massachusetts featured in Linderman's work speaks to this divide when he came in contact with a young man from the Christian Commission:

We could not help thinking, however, how generous and kind this class of young men were with all this liberal contribution of goods, which cost them nothing, and which they are so unwilling to march, fight, bleed, or sacrifice comfort for. There were swarms of these strong-minded well-educated, Christian young men, who were out with the army simply as clerks and attaches of the different commissions and their departments, who, while spoken as making the best of soldiers, were rarely in the ranks as actual combatants on the field of battle.⁸⁰

While a man like the one Carter is referring to did contribute to the war effort, he was not dying for his country. Linderman states that non-fighting men who spoke of the virtues that a soldier should have when facing battle widened the divide between civilians and soldiers.⁸¹

While Linderman no doubt has enough proof to suggest that some fighting men felt that way, the proof is not abundant nor found within the pages of the Rochester newspapers. In fact,

⁷⁹ Gerald F. Linderman, *Embattled Courage: The Experience of Combat in the American Civil War* (New York: Free Press, 1987), 217-219.

⁸⁰ Linderman, 218.

⁸¹ Linderman, 216.

even after the 140th was shredded as they charged Laurel Hill, the letter from the wounded Captain Buckley serving as the adjutant does not hint at all to disillusionment. Buckley recounts his wounds writing, “I was struck on the shoulder strap with a spent ball first, and in about a minute after was hit in the left arm, tearing two holes in my jacket sleeve, and slightly wounding me [. . .] I received a nice shot in the right leg, about midway between the hip and knee, breaking my leg and tearing my pants all to pieces [. . .]” However despite the wounds and witnessing the death and destruction of the 140th in that ill-fated charge, he closes the letter saying, “You must not fret about us. We did our duty—nothing more, nothing less, and according to present indications will be alright by and by.”⁸² Of all the men who might feel indignation and disillusionment with the war, Buckley is still promoting service and for those at home not to worry.

A point that Linderman focuses on that is worthy of merit is that the civilian population does attempt to push the fighting men on to victory. The nation had already endured three summers of fighting and dying and this fourth summer advanced ceaselessly leaving thousands of bodies in the wake. Though the casualty reports constantly speckled the paper bringing terrible news to various families in the area, editorialized reports of the war reminded readers what the war was for and why it was so imperative to keep up the fight. In the May 19, 1864 publication of the *Brockport Republic* one such article reads:

There is already much speculation in the minds of the people as to what will follow the recent great national events. One thing is certain, that there should be no retrograde on the part of those sustaining the national cause. Victory should follow victory until the military power of the rebellion is crushed. This is the most difficult task, but when it is fully accomplished the balance of the work in winding up the rebellion for all time will

⁸² Untitled excerpts of a letter from Captain John Buckley, *Rochester Daily Union and Advertiser*, May 16, 1864.

be readily executed. The hanging of the leading traitors should be quickly performed, and then inducements should be made for so far peopling the South with Northern mechanics and ex-soldiers as to maintain there a general public sentiment and taste like that of the North. Heretofore the bane of discord has been a sectionality of sentiment entirely incongruous and inharmonious between the North and South. The Northern sentiment favored free labor, and free labor upheld and diffused to the fullest extent the elemental principles of genuine democracy and republicanism, producing, as we see, a high order of intelligence among the masses, from which sprung, as the offspring of cultivated minds, exalted agriculture, mechanic arts, innumerable institutions of learning and reverence for the largest practicable liberty[. . .] What next? When the “irrepressible conflict” is ended, and the federal Union becomes all slave or all free, then we may look for peace—a long and permanent peace if freedom rules the day, and a homogeneous liberty loving sentiment pervading the whole nation. May God ordain it.⁸³

This piece provides tremendous insight into how the blue collar working people of the canal town of Brockport, New York likely viewed the war at this time. It is generally advisable to know the target audience when writing something for consumption. These words must have been deemed by the author to reach the people of this town on the outskirts of Rochester. The war to them was a conflict for preserving the Union and bringing the Northern way of life to the mistaken Southern people. Bringing the South back into the fold must be done but they must also adopt the Northern sentiment of free labor and liberty lest peace would always prove impossible.

Chapter 6: A Poetry in Death?

Poetry that appears in the various periodicals during this 1864 campaign season also advises keeping the faith and seeing the war through to its bitter end. A poem in the June 4, 1864

⁸³ “What Next,” *Brockport Republic*, May 19, 1864.

edition of *Moore's Rural New Yorker* lauds the man who's willing to die for his country and fellow man and reassures the reader that the horribly broken body means nothing once the soul had moved on. This is something that must have been reassuring to soldiers and civilians alike who read the graphic accounts of what soft lead did to soft tissue and bones. The poem titled "The Place for Man to Die" reads:

How little [*sic*] recks it where men die,
When once the moment's past,
In which the dim and glazing eye
Has looked on earth its last;
Whether beneath a sculptured urn
The confined form shall rest,
Or, in its nakedness, return
Back to its mother's breast.

Death is a common friend or foe,
As different men way hold;
And at his summons each must go—
The timid and the bold!
But when the spirit free and warm
Deserts it, as it must—
What matter where the lifeless form
Dissolves again to dust?

The soldier falls, 'mid [*sic*] corpses piled
Upon the battle plain,
Where reinless war-steeds gallop wild
Among the mangled slain:
But though his [*sic*] corse be grim to see,
Hoof-trampled on the sod,
What [*sic*] reck's it, when the spirit free
Has soared aloft to GOD?

The coward's dying eye may close
Upon his downy bed,
And softest hands his limbs compose,
Or garments o'er them spread;
But ye who shun the bloody fray,
Where fell the mangled brave,
Go—strip his coffin lid away,
And see him in his grave?
'Twere sweet indeed to close our eyes
With those we cherish near,
And wafted upwards by their sighs
Soar to some calmer sphere;
But whether on the scaffold high,
Or in the battle's van,

The fittest place where man can die,
 Is where he dies for man!⁸⁴

This poem seeks to reassure the reader that corporeal existence is fleeting no matter what. Death will take us all but those who die in the war effort have at least died for something. Though the wounds are grisly and the bodies do not resemble the antebellum body in wake, the soul has risen for its noble sacrifice which is most important. A poem such as this helps prove that notions of a Victorian good death were changing as so many families of dead soldiers had to cope with not only their loved ones dying, but not having a way to bring them home or not knowing where they fell at all.

Faust discusses the latter issue within *This Republic of Suffering*. She notes that during the Civil War, Americans start talking about death as life everlasting like they had never done before. Faust suggests, “In the Civil War death was hardly hidden, but it was nevertheless, seemingly paradoxically, denied—not through silence and invisibility but through an active and concerted work of reconceptualization that rendered it a cultural preoccupation.”⁸⁵ By shifting the focus to death being life’s next journey, it eased those who lost loved ones whose bodies laid in unknown locations or hastily dug unmarked graves—presumably. The Rochester papers do not particularly support Faust’s findings nor does the formation of Clara Barton’s Office of Correspondence in the spring of 1865. The purpose of the latter was to provide information to the families of missing or killed soldiers about their loved ones’ whereabouts if possible. If Americans truly did see death as life everlasting as Faust suggests, then it seems unlikely that the need for a government recognized organization would need to exist to give the families of the fallen details of their deaths and where they fell. Yet her office would receive and answer 68,182

⁸⁴ "The Place for Man to Die," *Moore's Rural New Yorker* XV, no. 23, June 4, 1864.

⁸⁵ Faust, 177.

letters by the time it closed in 1868.⁸⁶ Even if it was believed, as Faust suggests, that the American mentality of death could only mean life, it certainly did not lessen the importance for the families of those buried in unmarked graves to find closure.

As aforementioned, the Rochester papers do not necessarily support this suggestion either that death could only mean life. With how fervent and religious the greater Rochester region was being a part of the “Burned-over District,” one might think that ample proof litters the lines of the *Rochester Daily Union and Advertiser* that discusses the dead and their new station in heaven. Instead, casualties are listed without any consoling words and deaths are reported with graphic detail. Soldiers’ accounts of their fallen comrades sometimes speak of their inevitable ascension into heaven but it is far from a wide-sweeping, national phenomenon that Faust suggests. In fact, more common in these letters are feelings of remorse and regret in the loss of their comrades and sympathy for the families who were surely grieving. Mourning clothing advertisements appear nearly daily within the *Rochester Union and Advertiser*. Perhaps in terms of theological ideology death had made a total transformation as the continuation of an ended earthly life, however in reality, the Civil War deaths were grieved heavily by those afflicted in Rochester. The deaths were largely viewed as being for a worthy cause but that did not make the departures of brothers, husbands, and sons any easier. Hence the constant accounts of the families of the dead in a state of bereavement and the melancholy reports of funerals. While these do not exclude the possibility that Rochesterians viewed the Civil War dead as living soldiers in heaven, death certainly was mourned throughout the city. Death in the Civil War did bring about many changes to American life, but reconceptualizing its meaning is not obviously apparent in Rochester.

⁸⁶ Faust, 213.

Chapter 7: 1864, A Year of Slaughter and Reelection

June would prove no easier on Rochesterians who had family members fighting for the Union cause. Cold Harbor, arguably Grant's worst battle, created nearly 2,000 Union deaths and over 12,700 casualties. Not only was the corporeal cost tremendously high, it was sacrificed in complete and utter defeat. The fighting on June 3 was some of the fiercest and objectively pointless of the entire war. Due to a variety of mishaps and misfortunes for the Union forces including poor communication, inability to coordinate forces en masse, and entire corps getting lost and being unable to fight due to exhaustion, their attack on that Friday morning yielded about 7,000 Union casualties in one hour's time. The Confederates meanwhile only lost about 1,500 and did not lose a single position or retreat at all from their trenches. Grant had been stopped dead in his tracks and reeled to find his next move. While this constant desire of Grant to press the attack and wear down the numerically inferior army of Robert E. Lee ultimately led to Union victory, it led to a common problem that neither army had yet to find a solution to: what was to be done with the bodies that still lay on the field? The tragic reality is that no consistent solution would ever be found during the course of the war. After the fighting ceased and both armies returned home, the federal government finally set out to try to find and identify those men who had unfortunately fallen on ground commanded by the enemy. This did not become formal policy until February of 1867.⁸⁷

The fact that it took over a year and half after the war's end for Congress to pass legislation that officially recognized the government's responsibility to provide honorable final resting places for the fallen is telling. This is tremendous evidence that contradicts Marshall's belief that the Civil War death toll and significance of those deaths is over-emphasized. If Americans were so used to death and its prevalence so desensitizing, then why did it take nearly

⁸⁷ Faust, 233.

six years from the firing on Fort Sumter for Congress to formulate a formal policy of what was to be done for those who sacrificed their lives for the war effort? The fact that they had to create legislation at all suggests that the absence of a policy was simply unacceptable to their constituents. Death may have been a constant presence in antebellum American life but this death was different. This was death for a cause: a sacrifice for the sins of slavery and secession. These deaths demanded acknowledgement and gratitude never before seen in America.

Perhaps this is why Lincoln was able to win the 1864 presidential election. The North had given up so many lives to preserve this Union, but the idea that the Republic should and must survive the war swayed voters to overlook the massive losses and stay the course. Also, though Grant's campaign led to the deaths of thousands of Union men, it was encouraging to the civilian population that the Army of the Potomac continued to prod and advance against Lee's Army of Northern Virginia. However, as details from the Battle of the Crater at Petersburg reached Rochester papers, another crushing Union defeat, the war seemed hopelessly stymied. Accounts in the August 3, 1864 *Rochester Union and Advertiser* lamented the failed attack: "To-day is a black cloud in the calendar of the Ninth corps. Repulsed, bloodily repulsed, at last when victory seemed so sure, when the prize seemed within grasp! It is not time to lament what might have been done."⁸⁸ Even as Union forces failed to capitalize on the brilliant strategy of sapping the Confederate lines at Petersburg a grain of optimism can be identified in the previous quote. The Union forces had been repulsed and defeated, but victory was still on the horizon. As one account suggested, "Indeed, the late battle seems like a dream, so quietly have affairs glided back into their old channel, as they were before the attack."⁸⁹ The affairs the author alludes to are the renewed attempts by Grant to find a way to turn Lee's lines and gain the upper hand on the

⁸⁸ "Special Correspondence N.Y. Herald," *Rochester Daily Union and Advertiser*, Aug. 3, 1864.

⁸⁹ "The Repulse Before Petersburg," *Rochester Daily Union and Advertiser*, Aug. 3, 1864.

Confederate forces for one final push. Alas, the fighting men would have to wait another eight months for that last decisive move.

The 1864 Presidential election provides tremendous insight on how the public viewed the war and the cost of human life it required to sustain it. Leading up to the election, Lincoln was quite nervous that he would lose the election saying on August 23, “This morning, as for some days past, it seems exceedingly probable that this Administration will not be re-elected. Then it will by my duty to so cooperate with the Government President elect, as to save the Union between the Election and the inauguration; as he will have secured his election on such ground that he cannot possibly save it afterwards.”⁹⁰ Grant was stymied at Petersburg. William Tecumseh Sherman was unable to make progress outside of Atlanta. Meanwhile, though Lee was essentially trapped behind his fortifications, it did not prevent him from sending General Jubal Early to attack Forts Stevens and DeRussy on the outskirts of Washington D.C. Though Early was repulsed, his attack did strike fear in the hearts of the public. It shook their confidence that the war was going according to plan and that Grant was in control. Lincoln was in desperate need of a victory and the steady stream of Union killed and wounded to the Washington hospitals certainly did not help public opinion.

Finally, one of the Union armies was able to break the stalemate and precisely in time to positively impact Lincoln’s campaign. Lincoln’s prayers were answered by William T. Sherman’s capture of Atlanta on September 2, 1864. Suddenly, all of the death and dying during the Overland campaign, Petersburg, and the Atlanta campaign had been suffered for a reason: inevitable victory. The *Brockport Republic* exclaimed, “The recent news has been most glorious. The capture of the rebel stronghold, Atlanta, has sent a thrill of delight through the heart of every

⁹⁰ Letter from Abraham Lincoln, August 23, 1864, in *The Life of Abraham Lincoln*, by Henry Ketcham (New York: A.L. Burt, 1901), 371.

loyal citizen. The news has been received with manifestations of the highest pleasure throughout the North.”⁹¹ In this same issue of the *Brockport Republic* another phenomenon can be observed. Though Lincoln was the commander-in-chief of the Union and thus was arguably responsible for all the untimely deaths of the fighting men, the vast majority of the soldiers voted for Lincoln. Perhaps what makes this even more significant is that Lincoln’s opponent was one of the men’s favorite commanding generals, George Brinton McClellan. However, McClellan ran on the Democratic platform which called for the cessation of hostilities as soon as practicable. Even though it is well documented that many Union soldiers did not support the new war objective of the abolition of slavery, they found it utterly inconceivable to stop short of the ultimate goal to preserve the Union. As a correspondent told the paper, “It does not seem that our voters at home can be so blind to their own good interests as to allow such a change [cessation of hostilities and election of a Democrat] to be brought about. We here in the field, who are the only ones who really know and feel the full force of this blow, and we want no peace except it be an honorable and a lasting peace, one that shall be our country’s glory hereafter.”⁹² All of the lives lost must not have been in vain. Thus, with a combination of the military success of Sherman, the support of abolition leaning citizens, and the unwillingness of the soldiers to abandon the war effort before the Confederacy was defeated; Lincoln won the election with 55 percent of the popular vote. Again, death and the necessity to rationalize and justify it led to Lincoln’s reelection further proving how significant it was to American society.

Rochester in particular played an interesting role in the 1864 election. New York’s cities largely voted for McClellan and the Democratic ticket. In fact, Rochester was the only major city

⁹¹ “The War,” *Brockport Republic*, Sep. 8, 1864.

⁹² “From the Army,” *Brockport Republic*, Sep. 8, 1864.

in the state where Lincoln won the majority of the vote.⁹³ Though the pages of the *Rochester Daily Democrat* and the *Rochester Union and Advertiser* constantly published criticisms of the Republicans and Lincoln, Monroe County sent over 10 percent of its total population to the war effort and lost over 13 percent of these men by the war's end.⁹⁴ Yet they were firmly resolved to see the war to its glorious completion—a reunified American nation that provided all men with liberty and freedom. In the immortal words of Lincoln in his second inaugural address, “With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation's wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan, to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations.”⁹⁵ Even as Lincoln looked toward the hopeful future of a nation reborn, he was sure to acknowledge the men who gave their lives to its cause and those left behind in loss. The death caused by the Civil War was clearly on the mind of the man who held the reins to the country in his hands.

Chapter 8: Appomattox and Assassination

The Appomattox Court House campaign which began at the end of March 1865 proved to be that last decisive move. Through attrition of the lengthy Siege of Petersburg across an extended front, Lee's army dwindled. The South had simply exhausted its supplies of men, food, and arms. Grant understood the sheer mathematics of the war and sensed the opportunity before him. After Lee's attempt to break out of the siege at the Battle of Fort Stedman failed on March 25, Grant sent his army to cut off supply lines to the southwest of Petersburg. He raced westward towards the small town of Appomattox Court House. Lee's lines were already stretched so thin

⁹³ David E. Long, *The Jewel of Liberty: Abraham Lincoln's Re-election and the End of Slavery* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1994), 258.

⁹⁴ Marcotte, 267.

⁹⁵ “President Lincoln's Second Inngural Address,” *Rochester Daily Union and Advertiser*, Mar. 6, 1865.

all he could do was mount feeble parrying moves while attempting to prevent any breakthroughs over the nearly 100 miles of terrain between Appomattox and Petersburg. The Rochester papers sensed how near the end of the war was as a meeting of the Union high command and Lincoln was held at City Point, Virginia. On March 31 an article reads: “High hopes are sought to be raised respecting peace offerings from President Lincoln whose presence before Richmond at this time is certainly not for mere pleasure or relaxation from public cares.”⁹⁶

The road to peace was paved with the surrender of Robert E. Lee on April 9, 1865. On this day Lee met Grant at Wilmer McClean’s home, a Virginian citizen who moved to Appomattox Court House after his previous home was shelled and used as the headquarters of General Pierre Gustav Toutant-Beauregard during the First Battle of Manassas.⁹⁷ Lee could no longer press on. He had ordered General John B. Gordon to make one last effort to break the Union lines and relieve his vastly outnumbered army of the pressure applied by the Union forces. After initial success, Gordon faced the bulk of Union forces and was forced back after realizing the hopelessness of an advance. Lee considered his options but ultimately he and his subordinate officers decided surrender was the only viable route. Again, death, in this case its uselessness and inevitability, changed the course of the Civil War. Lee stated he would “rather die a thousand deaths” than order the pointless deaths of his men and meet with Grant with the purpose of surrender.⁹⁸ The loss of human life had already gone too far even for the strongest and most revered ideology.

The Rochester papers rejoiced at the news of Lee’s surrender:

The news of the surrender of Lee was received last night between nine and ten o’clock, and the people of our city became greatly excited by the joy they experienced in the

⁹⁶ “The Situation—The Plot Thickens,” *Rochester Daily Union and Advertiser*, Mar. 31, 1865.

⁹⁷ McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 849.

⁹⁸ McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 848.

prospect of speedy peace and the restoration of the Union. It being Sunday night and as most people had retired to their homes before the news came, it was deemed proper by the Mayor to call them up for rejoicing. Notice was sent to the firemen at the several houses that an alarm would be sounded and at eleven o'clock the City Hall bell began to strike and continued to ring for three hours without intermission. The other bells of the city chimed in for a while and helped to swell the notes of victory and peace, and so welcome to every ear, Citizens left their beds by the thousands and flocked together in the streets, congregating mostly near the intersection of Buffalo and State streets, where they were advised that Lee had surrendered and the prospect was a speedy peace. The announcement was hailed with cheers, and cheer followed cheer for hours.⁹⁹

Peace—the prospect that the untimely deaths of the fighting men might cease. This is why Rochesterians celebrated in the streets during the waning hours of Sunday, April 9, 1865. On April 10, the *Rochester Union and Advertiser* published the letters between Grant and Lee before Lee's eventual surrender. Death was the main focus of this correspondence. Lee wrote to Grant upon being advised to surrender, "I reciprocate your desire to avoid useless effusion of blood; and, therefore before considering the proposition, ask the terms you will offer on condition of its surrender." Grant later responded that, "By the South laying down their arms they will save the most desirable event,—save thousands of human lives and hundreds of millions of property not yet destroyed."¹⁰⁰ If the impact of Civil War deaths is over-exaggerated as Marshall suggests then why is it that Grant, facing certain victory, implores Lee to simply lay down arms rather than destroying the Army of Northern Virginia? Though death was certainly a common feature of life, just as it has been throughout human history, Grant and the nation were so very weary of

⁹⁹ "Peace Jubilee!," *Rochester Daily Union and Advertiser*, Apr. 10, 1865.

¹⁰⁰ "Correspondence between Grant and Lee," *Rochester Daily Union and Advertiser*, Apr. 10, 1865.

it. Victory had to be purchased with life but Grant desperately tried to broker the best deal possible.

Although the war did not end with Lee's surrender at Appomattox, that event can be pointed to as the beginning of the end of the bloodshed between the Union and Confederacy. The symbolic end of the war—the end to the tragic, untimely loss of life of the hundreds of thousands of soldiers occurred on Good Friday, April 14, 1865. On this holy day President Abraham Lincoln was assassinated at Ford's Theatre by the ardent secessionist, John Wilkes Booth. It almost seems fitting that this event took place after Lee's surrender. Lincoln's murder raised the president to the status of martyr. The death of the man who so fervently worked to preserve the nation as one unified country but in so doing oversaw the death of over 620,000 men and perhaps as many 750,000 men, according to David Hacker, proved to be the perfect bookend to the conflict.¹⁰¹ It seems now in hindsight that Lincoln had to die in order for the country to come back together. As Faust suggests, "His death was the ultimate death—and became in many ways emblematic of all the losses of the war."¹⁰² The South lost the military conflict but the North lost its leader. The two sides would have to come together in their grief and disbelief to move forward. Never before had Southern Americans been defeated just as no American president had ever been killed in office. The killing of Lincoln in one way put both sides on equal footing. Their individual losses united them.

The Rochester papers forgot all of the many shortcomings they readily identified in Lincoln and his presidency. On April 15, the *Rochester Union and Advertiser* states:

The terrible tragedy at Washington—the foulest blow ever struck at the liberties of our country—is the all absorbing topic in our city to-day. Nothing else is thought of—nothing

¹⁰¹ J. David Hacker, "Recounting the Dead," *Disunion Opinionator Blog, New York Times*, September 20, 2011.

¹⁰² Faust, 156.

else talked of, and nothing ever gave cause for such an unanimous expression of sorrow. Business is neglected, and citizens walk about or stand in groups in the streets and public places exchanging expressions of profound regret at the calamity which has befallen the country. The city wears the aspect of mourning in all quarters. The flags are draped in mourning and suspended at half-mast. Emblems of mourning appear on the public and many of the private buildings, and the tolling of church bells for the religious services of the season adds to the general solemnity. Many, very many citizens were affected to tears as they conversed on the subject. Sorrow for the event and indignation against the perpetrators spoke from every lip and were seen in every eye.¹⁰³

The 1,374 Rochester area men who had been killed or died during their time of service had now been joined by the man who sent them into the angel of death's arms.¹⁰⁴ Victory and freedom for all men had been won but at what terrible cost? As another column proclaimed, "Every bosom is heaved with emotion at the melancholy event! Lamentation is universal! All heads are bowed in a common bond of unity under infliction!"¹⁰⁵ Death was no stranger to the American people both before the war and during its duration. In this regard a concession must be made to Nicholas Marshall. However his tremendous flaw is that not all death is viewed as equal. Although obviously painful to those families afflicted by an antebellum death caused by disease to a young person seemingly so full of life, the person dying could have a "good death." Surrounded by friends and family and able to contemplate God and life-everlasting achieved by death. The death suffered by so many men during the Civil War was incompatible with antebellum good deaths. They came rapidly preventing the stricken from turning their thoughts to God. Often they came far from home and far from the loving prayers and hand-holding of family members. These

¹⁰³ "The City in Mourning," *Rochester Daily Union and Advertiser*, Apr. 15, 1865.

¹⁰⁴ Marcotte, 267.

¹⁰⁵ "Appalling National Calamity!," *Rochester Daily Union and Advertiser*, Apr. 15, 1865.

deaths came with fear. They left horribly mangled and mutilated corpses with anguish and pain permanently sealed on the corpse's face—that is until decomposition melted the facial expressions away. Not all men could be buried or identified. Not all families definitively knew if their sons, brothers, husbands, and fathers were truly dead. Death in the Civil War was utterly foreign to American concepts of what death was and should be.

Lincoln's death and grand funeral procession was symbolic for the Americans who felt robbed of the antebellum good death. While the manner in which Lincoln died (political assassination) was certainly in stark conflict with a good death due to its violent nature and the president's inability to compose himself and contemplate God and the journey he was about to begin, the scene at Lincoln's death bed was precisely what an antebellum good death looked like. Hushed whispers and teary eyes fell on the president as he drew his last breaths. He was surrounded by those closest to him and they prayed for his soul's admittance to heaven. Edwin Stanton's famous epitaph may have even been, "Now he belongs to the angels," as opposed to the oft-quoted, "Now he belongs to the ages."¹⁰⁶ Northerners flocked from every city and the surrounding countryside to gaze upon the passing grandiose funeral train bedecked with black mourning linens. The event, as Faust suggests, "served in some way as a surrogate for all the funerals that citizens could not attend as their loved ones died unattended and far away."¹⁰⁷ Yet even the heavily attended spectacle of Lincoln's funeral procession could not bring solace to all of the bereaved families. After all, Lincoln's body was respected and buried where his family and friends could visit and pay their respects. Their husbands', fathers', and sons' bodies may still be unaccounted for and rotting in a Virginia bramble.

¹⁰⁶ James L. Swanson, *Manhunt: The Twelve-day Chase for Lincoln's Killer* (New York: William Morrow, 2006), 142. Whether it was "ages" or "angels" is really inconsequential. The fact that any words were spoken in a room full of people who cared deeply for the president and watched him depart this earth is evidence of an antebellum good death.

¹⁰⁷ Faust, 161.

Chapter 9: Reinterpreting the War Dead in Peacetime

Americans struggled with how to move forward after the last shots of the war were fired. Immediately following the war, much of the country seemed very willing to forget the cost of human life Northern victory demanded. However, largely in part to the demands of the families of the dead and humanitarians and conscientious army officers such as Clara Barton, Montgomery Meigs, James F. Russling, and Edmund B. Whitman, a concerted effort was made to locate bodies and provide the dead soldiers with final resting places and a show of gratitude for their sacrifice. Russling pleaded in a *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* article, "Let the American Government show, first of all modern nations, that it knows how to reciprocate that sentiment by tenderly collecting, and nobly caring for, the remains of those who in our greatest war have fought and died to rescue and perpetuate the liberties of us all."¹⁰⁸ Yet formal policy to bury all soldiers at the cost of the government in national cemeteries was not approved by Congress until 1867.¹⁰⁹ Even this decision did not come without its share of opposition and criticism.

The reinternments of Union soldiers' bodies cost on average \$9.75 which is about \$170 per body at modern prices.¹¹⁰ When one considers that Union quartermaster general Montgomery Meigs reported that 114,560 soldiers had been laid to rest in newly formed national cemeteries—which also cost the government quite a bit of money, nearly \$19.5 million was spent on the reburial of the Civil War dead.¹¹¹ This was the first time in American history that such efforts were taken to provide federally funded cemeteries for the country's soldiers. As Russling lamented, the common soldier had previously "been overlooked, as if too humble to be taken

¹⁰⁸ James F. Russling, "National Cemeteries," *Harper's Monthly Magazine* 33 (August 1866), quoted in Faust, 232-233.

¹⁰⁹ Faust, 233.

¹¹⁰ Faust, 235.

¹¹¹ Faust 235.

into account” by his country.¹¹² Efforts had been made during the war when practicable to provide respectable burial grounds for the Union soldiers. Gettysburg National Cemetery was consecrated and dedicated on November 19, 1863. Montgomery Meigs authorized the use of Robert E. Lee’s grand estate of Arlington House in the spring of 1864 for the burials of the dead from the Overland campaign.¹¹³ Shiloh and Antietam National Cemetery were commissioned in 1866 and 1867, respectively.¹¹⁴

Though for many in the North healing and reconciliation with the South meant forgetting the tragedy of the war, others sought ceremonies to remember and respect the dead. The holiday of Memorial Day is created after the Civil War’s end as a way to honor and pay respect to those who answered Lincoln’s call but themselves were called away to death. Though the exact origins of the holiday are debated, it cannot be argued that a ceremony was held on May 5, 1866 in Waterloo, Seneca County, New York.¹¹⁵ The holiday was far different from the one that we celebrate today with picnics, barbecues, and bonfires. Flags were flown at half-mast, parades held with the final destination being the graves of those who perished during the war, and black mourning streamers fluttered in the breeze.¹¹⁶ The formation of Grand Army of the Republic posts created organizations for veterans to adapt to civilian life and share their war stories with other men who understood what it was like. There were no diagnoses of post-traumatic stress disorder or other psychological ailments that we now know are inevitable side-effects to war. These GAR posts were therapeutic to the men who joined. It was also a way to continue to pass on their stories of what they accomplished between 1861 and 1865. While the nation looked

¹¹² Faust, 232.

¹¹³ Meg Groeling, *The Aftermath of Battle: The Burial of the Civil War Dead* (El Dorado Hills: Savas Beatie LLC, 2015), 100.

¹¹⁴ Faust, 236.

¹¹⁵ Marcotte, 267.

¹¹⁶ Marcotte, 267.

forward attempting to move on from the war these GAR posts marched in city parades and remembered the loss of their friends and comrades. In Rochester, the first GAR post was named after Colonel Patrick O'Rorke and boasted the largest roster of any GAR post in Western New York.¹¹⁷ On Rochester's first celebrated Memorial Day in 1868, the GAR led a parade to place a white lily on the grave of O'Rorke.

As time passed and the pain of the afflicted families subsided a bit, state sponsored efforts to commemorate and memorialize the soldiers who fought and died for the country were underway. The golden age for Civil War monuments in New York took place between the late 1880s and early 1900s. From 1888 to 1891 the state of New York erected monuments at Gettysburg for the 94th NY, the 108th NY, the 140th NY, and Reynold's Battery amongst others. In 1892, the city of Rochester erected a grandiose monument that still adorns Washington Square Park.¹¹⁸ The monument cost \$26,000 and featured a 43 foot center pillar with a statue of Abraham Lincoln on top. Mayor and former Civil War surgeon Dr. Richard Curran, an Irish immigrant who earned a Medal of Honor in 1898 for his bravery in treating the wounded on the front line of Antietam, dedicated the monument to all of the dead and "maimed, crippled and prematurely old men . . . ever in our midst," but reminded the crowd that the loss and sacrifice was, "but chaff in the balance, as compared with the glorious result, achieved for ourselves, for the world, and for generations yet unborn."¹¹⁹

In 1908, still in this period of memorializing, Sally James Farnham, a sculptor from Ogdensburg, New York, designed two sister monuments in both Mount Hope Cemetery and Holy Sepulchre Catholic Cemetery.¹²⁰ These monuments are physical proof that the death and

¹¹⁷ Bennett, 141.

¹¹⁸ Marcotte, 267.

¹¹⁹ Richard Curran, quoted in Marcotte, 267.

¹²⁰ Betty Schmidt, "Civil War Statue," *Epitaph: The Friends of Mount Hope Newsletter* 10 (Spring 1990).

dying during the Civil War changed Rochester society. Although Mount Hope was operational during the war years and soldiers who died during their service could be buried there, Holy Sepulchre Cemetery was not established until 1871. As veterans began to die of advanced age, there was a societal need to create a special, honored place to bury their remains that memorialized the sacrifices they and their comrades gave to the Union. Furthermore, in both cemeteries, men who died during the conflict were reinterred in the new GAR plots to lie in the same hallowed ground as their brothers-in-arms. These monuments served as a way to bookend the fearful slaughter and loss experienced by the fighting men and the afflicted families. As the *Rochester Herald* reported, “By the position of the soldier it is taken that the war is over and taps has been sounded, and as the strains die away the 'boy in blue' drops his head in meditation and reflects at the awful consequences of the war and what it has cost in human sacrifice.”¹²¹ The inscription at the base of the Mount Hope monument further suggests how the statue is symbolic of the city finally accepting and honoring its losses while looking forward to the future: “By fame's eternal ramping ground/Their silent tents are spread/And glory guards with solemn round/The bivouac of the dead.” The period of sorrow was over. Time helped heal those wounds. Rochester would forever remember the sacrifices of its men but the grief was replaced with pride.

Concluding Remarks

Ultimately this feeling of pride would also fade away. In 1911, a national GAR meeting was held in Rochester. Over 150,000 people lined the streets, including President Taft, to watch the veterans march.¹²² A similar event was held in Rochester in 1934 but this time only 20,000 people paid their respects to the hoary, wispy thin men and ranks that passed by. The president

¹²¹ *Rochester Herald* article qtd. in Schmidt, "Civil War Statue," *Epitaph*.

¹²² Marcotte, 265.

did not attend this parade. After nearly 70 years had passed and the ancient wounds had healed and the nation returned to one indivisible Union, it was easy to state that the loss during the war had been worth it but that loss and sacrifice belonged in the past. Yet, the country had changed. Death had changed. What constituted a “good death” was no longer simply where someone died or what they turned their thoughts to in their final moments. A good death could be had far from home—in a thick wilderness of Virginia or the rocky slopes of a hill in Pennsylvania, far from family and friends, and it could happen in an instant with no time to think of God and life everlasting. So long as the death was for a worthy cause the surviving family learned to accept it.

These lessons taught to America during the Civil War undoubtedly helped the nation deal with the deaths of the World Wars. The Civil War forced Americans to rethink life’s ultimate fate. In this regard it is impossible to state that the Civil War death toll has been over-exaggerated since antebellum Americans were accustomed to death’s prevalence. Since humans have walked this earth we have had to be accustomed to death. Death during the war served as the catalyst for too many changes to the American way of dealing with death. Funerary technologies developed such as embalming practices and refrigerated caskets. Policy for transporting corpses on railroads was established based on the new problems it caused. Legislation on what to do with the bodies of those who died and whether they deserved government burials was drafted and debated in Congress. Benevolent and aid societies sprang forward to help the dead, dying, and their families. The city of Rochester turned out in tremendous numbers to mourn the loss of some of its finest men. The people of the city raised the money for monuments commemorating the deeds of their soldiers to be erected at the places where so many lives were snuffed out. The city of Rochester was forever changed by the death caused by the Civil War.

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