



"Wounded." From Harper's Weekly Magazine, July 12, 1862

Casualties: The Women of Mount Desert and the Civil War

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Introduction

Memorials to male valor and sacrifice during the Civil War are written into the Maine landscape. Granite soldiers on pedestals keep watch over town squares, and the cemetery stones of veterans are adorned with the bronze markers of the "GAR"—the Grand Army of the Republic. Popular histories of the war consist largely of personal or regimental memoirs, stories of battles or campaigns, biographies of officers and common soldiers, and other accounts of the military experience of men. In the common memory of the Civil War, the theme of male hardship is so prominent as to overshadow the experience of women. But the difficulties that men experienced can only really be understood when compared to the hardships of women. Life in the nineteenth century was hard for everyone, with many discomforts and sorrows long forgotten by modern society. Women's lives were very difficult during the three middle decades of the nineteenth century, and the Civil War made those lives even harder. Both the preeminence of men in the Civil War memory and the suffering of women through the mid-eighteen hundreds can be found in the history of Mount Desert, Maine, a small town located on an island about one hundred miles east-northeast of Portland.

A simple cemetery tableau illustrates how a monument to male sacrifice invites the viewer to overlook the struggles of women. Here, a marker documents the death of one Civil War cavalryman, John M. Gilley, who died in a Confederate prison in 1864 at age forty-five. Gilley's tombstone is larger than the one next to it and is marked with a bronze GAR star. Nearby lies Gilley's first wife, Mary, who died in childbirth in 1844 at age twenty-six. Gilley's second wife and widow, Lorenda, who died in 1867 at age forty-three, is buried on Bartlett Island, several miles away. No star adorns the graves of the two women who accompanied John Gilley in life, though they also suffered greatly, and their life spans were shorter than his. Mary's struggle to survive the common perils of the nineteenth century, and Lorenda's ordeal during and after the war, appear only as a backdrop to the prominent place given to John Gilley's memorial.

It is easy to understand why the popular memory of the Civil War is focused on the men who fought. Maine contributed seventy-three thousand men to the war effort, 11 percent of its population. Of the men who served, eighteen thousand, or 25 percent, were killed, wounded, or recorded as missing.¹ The Town of Mount Desert sent at least seventy-nine men to the war, almost 9 percent of the town's total population of 915. Of the Mount Desert men who served, at least thirty-six were killed, wounded, or captured, or died of disease.²

But women, especially those of childbearing years, also were at risk, not only during the war, but throughout the nineteenth century. The women who gave birth to the Civil War's soldiers, and those who bore their children, experienced a striking level of mortality. In the Town of Mount Desert during the years 1850 to 1879, a time period that includes the years of the Civil War (1861-1865), more than twelve women of childbearing years died for every ten men of military age.³ As suffragist Lucy Stone wrote, "The soldier risked his life for his country, but in every instance some woman risked her life that the soldier might be born."⁴



The cemetery markers of John and Mary Gilley and their son, Mount Desert, Maine.
Photo by the author

A Brief History of Women in the Civil War

Although the modern memory of the Civil War is dominated by the theme of male valor, there was a common understanding during the war itself that women also suffered great hardships. In the national and urban newspapers and periodicals of the war years, women appeared quite prominently. Historian Alice Fahs, studying the popular literature of the war, found that while the war was underway, women's voices were commonly heard in the popular national press; for example, females were the protagonists in 58 percent to 62 percent of the war stories featured in *Harper's Weekly Magazine* during the Civil War.⁵ After the war, however, both nationally and locally, the story of women's roles was overshadowed by numerous accounts of men's experience. The rise of veterans groups such as the GAR created a demand and supply for remembrance that recast the events of the time in a male voice and in the theme of military life and battles that effectively eclipsed women's written experience of the war.

Considering the impact of the Civil War on women from a national perspective are studies—of relatively recent vintage—like Mary Massey's *Bonnet Brigades: American Women and the Civil War*. Massey was interested in understanding how women expanded their role in the public arena during the war and how they broke boundaries by entering previously male-dominated professions such as nursing, education, industry, and government service. When the book was published in 1966, the blending of gender studies with Civil War studies was uncommon. In the years immediately following the publication of *Bonnet Brigades*, historians interested in social and cultural history, women's studies, and Civil War military history began to merge their work into a new genre of scholarship that considered the impact of women on the war, and the impact of the war on women.⁶

These works point out the significant contributions of women to the Union cause. The engagement of Northern women in the war effort was a matter of necessity. At the start of the war, the army was short of basic provisions. Women were called upon to provide the soldiers with blankets, clothing, socks, and other gear. Across the northern states, women gathered together to sew clothing for soldiers. Thinking that their men would suffer under the oppressive southern heat, the women made havelocks, a cloth draped from the back of the soldier's cap to protect his neck from the sun. Women undertook this work with such enthusiasm that soldiers were inundated with havelocks, few of which were needed. But havelock mania gave way to more useful

contributions. Women in sewing circles made much-needed mittens and blankets and socks; others volunteered as nurses; and still others organized the distribution of humanitarian supplies and services, all of which represented a monumental outpouring of volunteered labor and products that the Sanitary Commission later estimated at a value of fifteen million dollars.⁷

An illustration in *Harper's Weekly* titled "Our Women and the War" highlighted the range of female contributions to the war effort. Women are depicted sewing shirts and socks, washing soldiers' clothes, writing letters and praying for soldiers in the hospital, and lending their feminine "influence." The expanded role of women in the Civil War fractured what Jeannie Attie described as the "antebellum ideology of gender spheres," the idea that a woman's place was in the home. As women were drawn into the public arena, they began to speak more openly and forcefully, and some of them worked to forge a path towards women's suffrage.⁸

The demands on women during the war years were considerable, yet they were sometimes exhorted to give even more. Writing in the *Atlantic Monthly* under the pseudonym Gail Hamilton, Mary Abigail Dodge addressed the "thousands upon thousands" of Northern women "who at this moment are darning stockings, tending babies, sweeping floors," but had not yet done enough to win the war. She wrote, "Tender hearts, if you could have finished the war with your needles, it would have been finished long ago." She urged her audience to carry the war, but not sag under its weight. She said women should write to the soldiers, but withhold their "tears and sighs," and not "lament separation and suffering." Instead, wrote Dodge, "Glory in your tribulation . . . make a mock of your discomforts. . . . Fill your letters with kittens and canaries, with baby's shoes, and Johnny's sled, and the old cloak that you have turned into a handsome gown."⁹

Civil War women's history provides insight into the ways the war redefined women's roles in society. The nineteenth-century middle-class ideal for women was home and motherhood, and the enormous popularity of women's magazines disseminated this ideal widely.¹⁰ Yet throughout the northern states, the demands of war pulled women out of their homes and into occupations that were once primarily male—from teaching, nursing, and government service to farming and manufacturing.¹¹ James McPherson wrote, "The Civil War marked a milestone in the transformation of nursing from a menial service to a genuine profession."¹² He added, "In agriculture, the increased use of farm machinery enabled women to fill much of the gap left by the enlistment

of nearly a million Northern farmers and farm laborers in the army.”¹³ The entry of women into the public sphere also was a first step towards women’s suffrage. As they entered the workplace, and as slaves were freed, women began to conclude that they too should be emancipated. Though suffrage remained several generations in the future, as Drew Gilpin Faust wrote, “The war that freed the slaves established broad claims to rights—for blacks as well as whites, for women as well as men. . . .”¹⁴



“Our Women and the War” illustrated the varied roles of women in support of the northern war effort. *From Harper’s Weekly Magazine, September 6, 1862*

The new Civil War studies also explored the degree of women’s suffering during the war. Drew Gilpin Faust described how women, particularly in the South, were directly affected by the military action, victimized by guerillas, caught up in riots, and suffered starvation. She cited the twenty women killed by artillery fire during the siege of Vicksburg and the forty female workers killed in the explosion of an ordinance factory.”¹⁵ Faust also addressed the widespread gloom of mourning that cast a pall over the nation’s women as they dealt with the enormous number of soldiers’ deaths. One of the most popular books of the nineteenth century was *The Gate’s Ajar*, written by twenty-year-old Elizabeth Stuart Phelps. Phelps envisioned a beautiful heaven where the dead and their mourners would be reunited. Phelps wrote the book in 1864,

when, she said, "the country was dark with sorrowing women. . . the helpless, outnumbering, unconsulted women; they whom war trampled down, without a choice or protest."¹⁶

Northern women, though usually far removed from the battlefield, were also profoundly affected by the war's violence. During the Civil War years, there appeared in popular literature a concept of "the bullet that wounds twice." *Harper's Weekly* in 1862 carried a fictional story titled "Wounded" that described a woman's reaction to news of battlefield casualties: "From every battlefield go swift-winged messengers that kill or wound at a thousand miles instead of a thousand paces."¹⁷ For every male casualty, there were women and families wounded, too, sometimes fatally. During the Civil War, people commonly believed that one could die of a broken heart. But whether from a broken heart or increased risk factors resulting from a broken world, combat morbidity and mortality caused home front casualties as well.

The Women of Mount Desert in the Civil War

In some ways, the experience of Mount Desert's women in the Civil War echoes that of women throughout the northern states. In other ways, their experience was quite different. Like their compatriots throughout the North when the war began, they started sewing for the army and shipped off goods to the Maine regiments in the "seat of war" around Washington and in Virginia. Unlike women in urban areas, they did not generally enter new occupations, or significantly encroach on the male realm of politics and commerce. But like women everywhere, they were profoundly affected by the war.

In Mount Desert in the nineteenth century, women's lives were usually less documented than the lives of men, both in the town records of Mount Desert and in the nearest newspaper, the *Ellsworth American*. Women neither voted nor served in public office, and seldom owned property or engaged in the world of business, so they left fewer public records. Men were both the primary authors and the subjects of public discourse. The census of 1860 lists the occupations of the male heads of households but not the occupations of women. Women occupied a cultural world apart from that reported in the public record, so their stories more often emerge between the lines—deduced from missing evidence or discovered in the unintended communications of male writers, editors, and advertisers.

However absent they were from the public record, women wrote letters, and in this private correspondence they chronicled the commonplace but vital events of life. The correspondence between Emily and Augustus Savage is an especially rich source of information about the lives of women during the Civil War. Written during the years 1864 and 1865, while Augustus was serving in the U.S. Navy and Emily was raising three children at home, the collection exceeds two hundred pages and touches on many aspects of life in the community of Mount Desert.¹⁸ As the war ground on during its latter two years, Emily and Augustus wrote candidly to each other about the realities of life at home and in the seat of war. Their intimate correspondence, together with information gleaned from the available public record, create a vivid portrait of life in Mount Desert during the war years.

Mount Desert may have been a small coastal hamlet far removed from the battlefield, but it was fully exposed to many of the war's traumas. Here, women's lives were already hard, and they became harder during the war years. The cemetery inscriptions, newspapers, private correspondence, and other records of the time show that women of the community faced severe privations. The most prominent of these was the mortal hazard of bearing children in the absence of good health care services. To this and other hardships, the Civil War imposed upon women the additional burdens of poverty, widowhood, responsibility for the work of absent men, and the care of orphans.

The hardships of life fell upon separated populations of males and females, each operating within sharply circumscribed cultural and social worlds defined by the most powerful forces of society: religion, family, work, education, and literature. The existence of separate spheres for men and women was a cultural reality, mostly unchallenged and often reinforced in the local newspaper and common literature of the day. As late as 1870, a strict segregation of male and female occupations was observed. The expected roles of men and women were inculcated from an early age and permeated culture and society. A large collection of books from home libraries of the area is preserved at the Mount Desert Island Historical Society. Typical of these is a text titled *The Ladies' Cabinet of Fashion, Music & Romance* that describes "The Good Husband" as a man who "treats his wife with delicacy as a woman, with tenderness as a friend: he attributes her follies to her weakness, her imprudence to her inadvertency: he passes them over, therefore, with good-nature, and pardons them with indulgence." Meanwhile, "The Good Wife:"

Is strictly and conscientiously virtuous, constant, and faithful to her husband, chaste, pure, and unblemished in every thought, word, and deed: she is humble and modest from reason and conviction, submissive from choice, and obedient from inclination. What she acquires by love and tenderness, she preserves by prudence and discretion: she makes it her business to serve, and her pleasure to oblige her husband: conscious that everything that promotes his happiness must in the end contribute to her own. If she duly and punctually discharges her several offices in this life, she shall be blessed and rewarded for it in another.¹⁹

Children were raised and trained in the ways of appropriate gender roles and relationships between men and women. A tiny schoolbook is inscribed to one Mount Desert resident from another, "Mary B Somes from Aunt Mary Dodge, 1866." This text, titled "Little Stories About My Little Schoolmates" contains short morality tales that admonished girls to behave so that everyone loved them, to be kind to mean boys, look forward to going to heaven, never speak a cross word, and never hurt anyone's feelings.²⁰

The world of work was, of course, another place that reinforced the separation of men and women. Despite the national trend for women to leave their domestic occupations during the Civil War, there is little evidence of that phenomenon occurring in Mount Desert, where the distinct spheres of men's work and women's work survived the war mostly intact, as the census of 1870 shows. While the United States census of 1860 listed only male occupations, the census of 1870 was the first to record the occupations of women, and so provides a clear view of the separate occupational spheres of the genders.

Of the two hundred seventy-five Mount Desert men age eighteen to sixty-five, 42 percent worked on the water as sailors, sea captains, or fishermen. Seventeen percent were farmers. There was a physician and a lighthouse keeper, and the rest were tradesmen, laborers, retail workers, factory men, or were still in school or retired. Men worked in a variety of occupations, and they worked mostly outside the home. In contrast, 96 percent of women in the same age

range worked in their own home (listed in the census as "Keeping House") or in someone else's home (listed as "Housekeeper").²¹

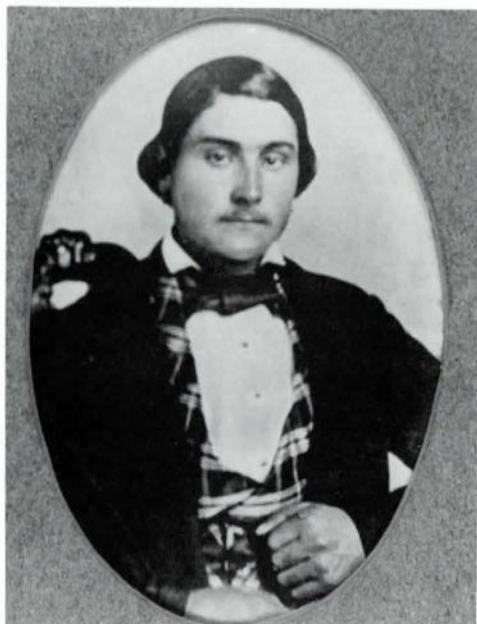
In the 1870 census for Mount Desert, the only occupational titles common to both men and women were the terms "at home," "at school," and "no occupation." All sailors, fishermen, farmers, sea captains, and physicians were male. All persons listed as "keeping house," housekeepers, or teachers were female. Otherwise there was no occupation that employed both men and women. Women aged eighteen to forty-five, identified in the 1870 census as "Keeping House," cared for families whose size averaged 7.1 people.²² Older women, too, were involved in childcare. Mrs. Eleanor Richardson, sixty-four years old at the time of the 1860 census, was known as "the orphan's friend," as attested by the inscription on her gravestone.²³ The defining and most important work of the women of Mount Desert was to be the center of home and family.

The popular culture encouraged not only distinctive gender roles but also an agrarian lifestyle centered on farming. An August 1860 edition of the *Ellsworth American* contained a short story about a young woman who passed on a chance to marry a handsome and ambitious young man, bound to make a name for himself in the city. She instead married a plain farmer. The city fellow turned out to be an intemperate cad, while the farmer was virtuous and industrious. By choosing the farmer, she had won a loving husband and a happy life and family. The story concluded that farming was "the most independent, the most natural, the most delightful and ennobling employment of man."²⁴ True or not, for the most part, the men of Mount Desert preferred harvesting food from the sea rather than from the rocky soil. This choice often left women at home for extended periods. One travel writer observed, "The interiors of the fishermen's houses, where the worn faces of the women, — all trace of beauty so early lost, — told a sad tale of discomforts, of ill-cooked food, and needless exposure to storm and cold."²⁵

But despite these deeply engrained cultural forces, evidence that the spheres were beginning to crack can be seen in the *Ellsworth American*. Fissures in the cultural norm were evident in absent wife notices, advertisements for alcohol disguised as medicine, and in miscarriage warnings that actually promised relief from unwanted pregnancy. As the Civil War began, the newspaper spoke primarily with a male voice to a male audience; in the writing, women were rarely spoken to, and even more rarely did they speak, showing that gender



Emily Manchester Savage and Augustus Chase Savage on their wedding day, December 30, 1854. *Courtesy of Richard M. Savage II*



roles were still clearly defined throughout the war years. But in time, women began to break out of culturally defined boundaries that, in the absence of so many men, could no longer meet the needs of the community and family. The forms and expectations of female behavior were no longer adequate to withstand the consequences of women's sufferings and privations. The *Ellsworth American* contained abundant evidence that the schema of gender relations no longer worked for everyone, and that fractures were forming and widening in some of the foundational assumptions about the proper roles of males and females.

A sampling of newspaper issues from 1861 demonstrates that women's concerns were rarely addressed except in occasional advertisements for doctors and medicines for the treatment of female disorders, and in sentimental poetry and stories oriented towards females. But by 1864, a female voice and audience had emerged. As the war years progressed, the *Ellsworth American* increasingly reported news stories of local women's groups preparing supplies for soldiers and of national women's groups devoted to support of the war effort.

But the newspaper contents also convey an inadvertent story, not necessarily intended by the editors,

but revealing of the changing role of women in society. By the summer of 1864, alongside long casualty lists of local men killed in the battles of Petersburg and Cold Harbor, there was growing evidence of societal disruption affecting women. With increasing frequency, the newspaper carried legal notices from men disavowing responsibility for the debts of wives who had left their homes. More advertisements promoted tonics and cures directed towards women of frail health, and for the relief of such purported female disorders as "hysterics." An industry of social and legal services arose, aimed at helping widows collect pensions and bonuses from the government. Advertisements intended for a domestic market appeared, for mechanical labor-saving devices such as sewing and washing machines.

Through its advertising, the newspaper showed what was ailing the population. The *Ellsworth American* of the Civil War years ran advertisements for nostrums and remedies for a wide range of complaints. Though in this period the newspaper was written mostly by, for, and about men, when medicines were advertised, women were often the target audience. "Mrs. Winslow's Soothing Syrup For Children Teething" promised "Relief and health to your infants."²⁶ "Bininger's Old Kentucky Bourbon 1849 Reserve" was available "now as a medicinal agent" and "Bininger's Old London Dock Gin" was a "remedial agent . . . especially designed for the use of the *Medical Profession* and the *Family*." This gin was advertised as a remedy for "Gravel [kidney stones], Dropsy [edema], Rheumatism" and, in a common euphemism for unwanted pregnancy, "Obstruction or Suppression of the Menses."²⁷ The advertisement for Cheeseman's Pills also included the phrase, "NOTICE! They should not be used during Pregnancy, as a miscarriage would certainly result therefrom." Posed as a warning, the notice also promised that if desired, the medicine could serve as an abortifacient.²⁸

In other ways, the newspaper showed that the powerful forces holding women to the home could be broken. A category of classified advertisements was the "absent wife" notice, in which men disavowed any responsibility for the debts or conduct of wives who had fled from a difficult marriage. M. Jordan of Orland forbade: "any one trusting my wife, Adelia M. Jordan, as I shall pay no debts of her contracting after this date."²⁹ The husband of Clarinda Thompson declared that she "has left me and the house I have provided for her, without any good cause of provocation."³⁰ Thomas Knowles asserted that his wife, Flora, "without cause, has left my bed and board."³¹ The cultural and material ties that bound women to the home were considerable, so it is doubtful that

many women would have left without cause. Absent wife notices were common enough that they were the subject of a joke that appeared in the newspaper:

An absent wife is thus advertised for: "Jane, your absence will ruin all. Think of the children, your husband, your parents. Return; return; all may be well. At any rate enclose the key of the cupboard where the gin is."³²

Meanwhile, another newspaper notice raised a new expectation for women's conduct in the face of war by describing heroic and quiet sacrifice as men left for military service:

Not far from Augusta, there is a young woman whose husband is in the army, and who takes his place in the field, clears land, hoes crops, and does all the work on a new piece of land.³³

The privations of wartime added more work and responsibilities to the woman's burden. Women were expected to fill their customary roles of caring for the house and performing farm chores, and also to take the place of men in the fields and contribute to the war effort through charitable work while men were absent and subject to wounding, capture, or death. Some were expected to move in with unfriendly relatives and chafe under another woman's roof.³⁴ Spouses separated by hundreds of miles faced the threat that infidelity would ruin a marriage. Mary Massey wrote that many women "wanted to share their men's experiences, or to keep an eye on them, for the press kept the public informed of the prevalence of drinking, gambling and immorality."³⁵ Emily Savage told her husband of the fate that had befallen a neighbor who had volunteered with a Massachusetts regiment: "you know Tylor Robinson, Daniel's son, he has been gone to the war over two years and his wife had a baby this summer. He has not been home but I suppose he must have sent it in a letter."³⁶

Soon after the war began, the *Ellsworth American* began to run an entirely new form of advertisement, one that offered assistance to widows in filing for war claims. The war claims industry was necessary to help newly widowed women navigate the unfamiliar world of business and government affairs.

Lorenda Gilley, widow of John Gilley, a Quartermaster Sergeant of the First Maine Cavalry Regiment, needed the assistance of a war claims agent, H. D. Hadlock of Bucksport, when she filed a pension claim in 1865. Hadlock represented Mrs. Gilley's case to a clerk of the Hancock County Supreme Judicial Court. Because she had no marriage certificate, Gilley needed Hadlock to obtain a statement from the now-ancient Baptist minister who had conducted the marriage ceremony in 1846. Because the place of the marriage, Seaville, had since been subsumed into the Town of Mount Desert, she needed the Mount Desert town clerk to attest to the veracity of the document. Because Gilley's husband had died in a Confederate prison and the date of his death was not properly recorded, Hadlock had to correspond with the state adjutant general of Maine and the office of the Adjutant General of the United States to verify that her husband had died in the course of his military service. Finally, Hadlock was required to administer the loyalty oath to Mrs. Gilley and file the claim. The claim was first filed in May 1865 and the pension was granted in April 1866, after almost a year's struggle with red tape, for which the widow was granted a pension of eight dollars per month. Lorenda Gilley died at age forty-three on May 30, 1867 of a cause that was not recorded. Other than her tombstone, Lorenda Gilley's tremulous signature on her widow's pension application is one of few remaining traces of her life.³⁷

Other war widows had to appeal to local and state governments for assistance in the care of their orphaned children. The Mason family lived on Beech Hill Road, a farming area in Mount Desert. In 1860, the family consisted of William T. Mason, thirty-nine years old, his wife, Mercy Jane, age thirty-four, and their seven children, ranging in age from an infant to teenagers. In 1861, William Mason enlisted in the 26th Maine infantry. The Mason's eighteen-year-old son Timothy joined the 18th Maine Infantry (later the First Maine Heavy Artillery) on August 21, 1862. Though Timothy survived the war, William died of disease in Bangor on August 17, 1863, leaving his widow and six orphans at home. By 1866, Mercy Jane was reduced to writing this letter to the Overseers of the Poor for the Town of Mount Desert:

I Mercy J. Mason the mother of the above named orphans have to provide a home for them. I have a small place a house not all finished nor can I finish it, my place is under mortgage and that has expired and it remains

to the option of other parties wether I remain in it or not. I receive eight dollars per month for myself and six dollars for my children from United States.³⁸

Mrs. Mason's plea was answered. From April 1, 1862 to January 1, 1864, she was awarded seventy-five cents per week for herself and fifty cents per week for her four youngest children. As the war dragged on, the burden on soldiers' families increased, and more women and children became recipients of state aid. In 1862, nine Mount Desert families received state aid. This number increased more than 250 percent, to thirty-two families, by 1865.³⁹

According to local authority Ralph Stanley, one Mount Desert orphan was left on the doorstep of the Richardson family, and the family raised her to adulthood. The responsibility for caring for orphans was contracted by the town to local families. The contracts were publically auctioned and given to the lowest bidder by the town's Overseers of the Poor.⁴⁰

By 1864, the rate of death and illness for both civilians and military had reached its height. On April 25, 1864, Emily Savage sent a list of the sick, wounded, captured, and dead to her husband Augustus, who was serving in the Navy on a ship patrolling the coast of the Mid-Atlantic States.

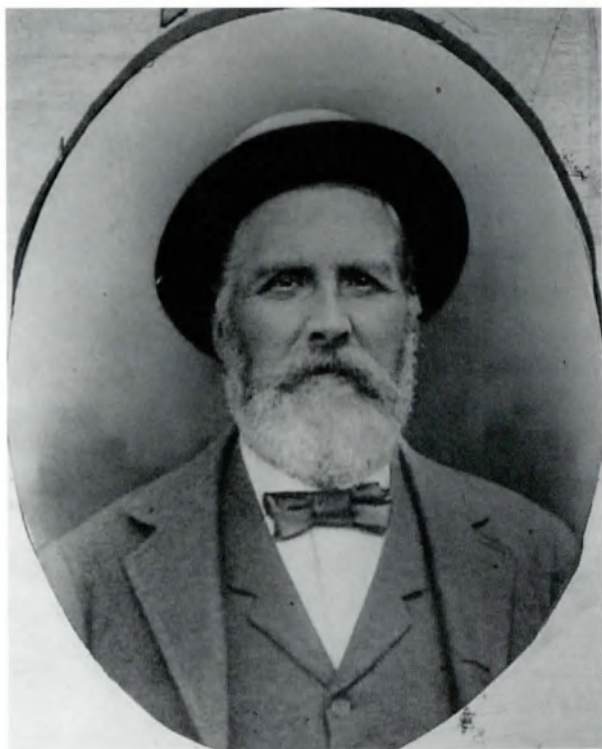
Mr. John Brown is pretty sick with the small pox. Stanley's child is dead. D. Wasgatt's second child is very sick. Uncle Wasgatt died last night... Jared Reed came home wounded in the jaw. Myra Whitmore has a very bad looking knee. The doctor calls it white swelling... The children are all well, I pray to God it may be your lot to come home unharmed.⁴¹

In September, 1864, Emily wrote again as the litany of suffering continued:

I am sorry to tell you that Wm. Fennelly was taken prisoner on the 22nd of August. What a dreadful sight of trouble and suffering this war is the cause of. Mark Richardson has returned to Washington and also B. T. Atherton. I believe



Emily Manchester Savage and Augustus Chase Savage (possibly) on their fiftieth wedding anniversary. *Courtesy of Richard M. Savage II*



John Douglass is at home. He was wounded in the shoulder. I heard that Andrew Roderick was at home wounded but don't know for sure. Rev. Bowker preached at Geo Kitridges and Robert Higgin's funeral last Sabbath at Somesville. Mr. Green has had a very bad sore foot and he has been to Bucksport and had part of it taken off and it is not much better.⁴²

Except for the occasional intervention of male doctors, women provided most of the care to the sick and wounded who were at home. In addition to raising her own three children, Emily Savage served as a primary caregiver to her brother-in-law Samuel T. Savage, who was slowly dying of tuberculosis. Samuel, assigned to the First Maine Heavy Artillery Regiment, returned to Mount Desert on sick leave in April 1864. He struggled for months to recover his health, but died in February 1865.

The high occurrence of male mortality during the Civil War is best understood in the context of the ambient rate of female mortality throughout the middle decades of the nineteenth century. An analysis of gravestone inscriptions in Mount Desert's cemeteries compares the number of deaths recorded during the years 1850 to 1879 for women in their childbearing years and men of military age—seventeen to forty-five. Women's deaths exceeded men's deaths in seventeen of the thirty years; male deaths exceeded women's deaths in seven of the years; and in six years of the study period, men and women died in equal numbers. The year 1864 was particularly deadly for males, with seven men dying, but women throughout the three decades of this study died at a consistently higher annual rate, outpacing the deaths of men by 24 percent. In this time period, fifty-six women were buried, compared to forty-five men.⁴³ According to the decennial censuses taken in 1860 and 1870, the combined male and female population of the town fell by 6 percent over the decade. In 1860, women comprised 46 percent of the Mount Desert population; by 1870, even after the loss of so many men in the Civil War, women still comprised 46 percent of the population.⁴⁴ For an entire generation, the women of Mount Desert faced a level of mortality surpassed by men only during the war's worst years.

The war's hardships lingered for many months after the Confederate forces surrendered at Appomattox in April 1865. Late the winter of 1866, the

situation of Army veteran Jacob Lunt Jr., along with his wife and infant, was dire. In his letter to a town official, Lunt appealed for aid, asking for "a little bread." He continued:

Everybody is without. It is the hardest times that ever I see. The ice bars us from the flats. I am lame and sick. If I could get a little help at the present after spring opens I could help myself if nothing happened more then. I know I want a little flour and some meal, a piece of pork. I am so lame that I can't come over.⁴⁵



Samuel Thomas Savage (May 22, 1842 - February 28, 1865) was nursed by his sister-in-law Emily Savage during the final months of his life. *Courtesy of Richard M. Savage II*

Because of the ice and his disability, Lunt was unable to access even that last cache of food for coastal Maine's poor, the clam flats. Through Lunt's correspondence, the difficulties his wife and child must have experienced can only be imagined.

Conclusion

The present-day Town of Mount Desert shares a beautiful coastal island and touches on many of its boundaries with Acadia National Park. The idyllic natural environment has a tendency to lure visitors and residents into a romantic relationship with the landscape, inclining them, if they are not careful, to absorb the myths of local history rather than its realities. Though the landscape is strewn with nineteenth- and twentieth-century memorials to male valor, the best recent evidence suggests that the simplest granite marker should be looked at twice—for the ostensible message it conveys, and for the underlying story at which it hints. The tableau of Gilley gravestones shows that a single Civil War soldier, who was wounded in battle and died in prison, was accompanied in life by two women whose lives were shortened by other, less-well-known traumas.

The women of Mount Desert were also casualties of the war—they were killed, wounded, and captured. Throughout the middle decades of the nineteenth century, they were struck down in their prime, suffering greater mortality rates than men. They were wounded, albeit at one thousand miles, when the dread notice announced that their men were battle casualties. And they were captured, by the roles and duties prescribed for them, when in the absence of men, they assumed responsibilities of the home front. All the Civil War monuments that dot the landscape should remind the present generation that the conflict was the hardest of hard times for men, and for women, too.

Notes

¹ Jerry Desmond, "Maine in the Civil War," in *Maine: The Pine Tree State from Prehistory to the Present*, ed. Richard Judd, Edwin Churchill, and Joel Eastman (Orono: University of Maine, 1995), 358.

² Selectmen of the Town of Mount Desert, *List of men furnished by the Town of Mount Desert under the several calls from July 2., 1862 for the military service* (Mount Desert: January, 1869); Robert Pyle, "The Town of Mount Desert's Casualties in the Civil War 1861-1865" (unpublished manuscript, photocopy, Northeast Harbor Library, June 20, 2010); *The American Civil War Research Database* | Alexander Street Press <<http://alexanderstreet.com/>

products/american-civil-war-research-database> (accessed January 29, 2012).

³ Thomas F. Vining, *Cemeteries of Cranberry Isles and the Towns of Mount Desert Island* (Bar Harbor: V. F. Thomas, 2000), 260-412.

⁴ Thomas W. Higginson, "The Other Side of the Woman Question," *The North American Review* 129, no. 276 (November 1879): 424.

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⁸ Attie, "Warwork," 257; Jeanie Attie, *Patriotic Toil: Northern Women and the American Civil War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 268-75.

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¹² McPherson, *Battle Cry*, 484.

¹³ McPherson, *Battle Cry*, 449.

¹⁴ Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (New York: Knopf, 2008), 231.

¹⁵ Faust, *Republic of Suffering*, xii, 137-38.

¹⁶ Faust, *Republic of Suffering*, 186.

¹⁷ Fahs, *Feminized Civil War*, 1475-76.

¹⁸ The Mount Desert Island Historical Society is indebted to Richard M. Savage II, who transcribed the entire collection of letters and made them available for research.

¹⁹ *The Ladies' Cabinet of Fashion, Music & Romance, Vol. 14* (London: G. Henderson, 1850), 169.

²⁰ *Little Stories about My Little Schoolmates* (New York: Sunday School Union, undated, inscribed 1866), 1-53.

²¹ "1860 United States Federal Census, Maine, Hancock County, Mount Desert," accessed February 16, 2011, <http://search.ancestry.com/Browse/View.aspx?dbid=7667&path=Maine.Hancock.Mount+Desert>; "1870 United States Federal Census, Maine, Hancock County, Mount Desert," accessed February 16, 2011, <http://search.ancestry.com/Browse/view.aspx?dbid=7163&path=Maine.Hancock.MT+Desert>.

²² Ibid.

²³ Mrs. Seth S. Thornton, *Traditions and Records of Southwest Harbor and Mount Desert* (Bar Harbor: Acadia, 1988), 237.

²⁴ "Only a Farmer's Wife, or, Gossip on a Railway Car," *Ellsworth American* (Ellsworth, ME),

August 3, 1860.

²⁵ Clara Barnes Martin, *Loring Short & Harmon's Illustrated Guide Book for Mount Desert Island, Maine* (Portland: Loring, Short & Harmon, 1877), 55.

²⁶ *Ellsworth American*, August 3, 1860.

²⁷ *Ellsworth American*, August 2, 1861; Thomas Power Lowry, *The Story the Soldiers Wouldn't Tell: Sex in the Civil War* (Mechanicsville, PA: Stackpole Books, 1994), 95.

²⁸ *Ellsworth American*, May 27, 1864.

²⁹ *Ellsworth American*, August 11, 1865.

³⁰ *Ellsworth American*, August 3, 1860.

³¹ *Ellsworth American*, August 11, 1865.

³² *Ellsworth American*, August 8, 1862.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Massey, *Bonnet Brigades*, 66.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Emily M. Savage to Augustus Savage, September 1, 1864. Richard M. Savage II, "Mt. Desert During the Civil War," in *Mount Desert: an Informal History*, ed. Gunnar Hansen (Mount Desert: Town of Mount Desert, 1989), 36-37.

³⁷ National Archives and Records Administration, *Widow's Pension Application, Certificate 72,047*. Washington, D.C., 1865.

³⁸ Mercy Jane Mason to the Overseers of the Poor, Town of Mount Desert; the document is undated, but is likely from 1866 based on the ages of the children cited in the request.

³⁹ *Report of the Adjutant General of the State of Maine for the years 1864 and 1865* (Augusta: Stevens and Sayward, 1866), 149.

⁴⁰ Ralph Stanley in discussion with the author, March 2011; Joyce Butler, "Family & Community Life in Maine, 1783-1861" in *Maine: The Pine Tree State from Prehistory to the Present*, eds. Richard Judd, Edwin Churchill, and Joel Eastman (Orono: University of Maine, 1995), 229.

⁴¹ Emily M. Savage to Augustus Savage, April 25, 1864. Savage in *Mount Desert*, ed. Hansen, 35.

⁴² Savage in *Mount Desert*, ed. Hansen, 36.

⁴³ Vining, *Cemeteries*, 260-412.

⁴⁴ Thomas F. Vining, *Census Records of Cranberry Isles and the Towns of Mount Desert Island: Volume 3 - 1860* (Southwest Harbor, ME: V. F. Thomas, 2009), 101; "1870 United States Federal Census, Maine, Hancock County, Mount Desert," <http://search.ancestry.com/Browse/view.aspx?dbid=7163&path=Maine.Hancock.MT+Desert>, accessed February 16, 2011.

⁴⁵ Jacob Lunt Jr. to E.M. Hamor, March 31, 1866. Mount Desert Island Historical Society. Box 2, Folder 12; spelling and punctuation have been edited for clarity.



Alice Elizabeth Mason, ca. 1874. Alice was nine years old when her father, a private in Maine's 26th Infantry Regiment, died of disease in Bangor in 1863. Alice's mother, responsible for six orphaned children, asked the Town of Mount Desert's Overseers of the Poor for housing assistance. *Collection of the Mount Desert Island Historical Society*