



Copperheads got their name from an editorial writer who likened them to the snake of Genesis. Here they are depicted as three snakes threatening Columbia, who holds a sword and a shield with the label, "Union." From *Harper's Weekly*, February 28, 1863. *Courtesy of the Library of Congress*

The War at Home: Copperheads Down East, 1861-1865

Tim Garrity

In the common American memory of the Civil War, Maine is counted among the northern states most solidly supportive of the Union cause, sending to the fight more than thirty regiments of soldiers and thousands of sailors. Of the state's approximately three hundred thousand male inhabitants, almost seventy thousand men served in the military, and more than twenty-eight thousand of these were wounded, killed, or died of disease.¹ Maine civilians expressed their support, too, cheering as the men left home and marched away to the seat of war. Their majority votes at town meetings raised bounties to encourage enlistment and assist soldiers' families. They sent gifts of food, blankets, bandages, clothing, newspapers, and affectionate letters to their soldiers far from home. Booming cannon and pealing church bells spread the news when the Union armies won battles.

The Civil War continues to be highly visible in Maine's landscape, living on in monuments that abide in cemeteries and public squares of almost every town and village in the state. But that picture of cheering civilians

and soldiers marching to defend the flag is incomplete. Despite the large numbers of Maine people who expressed support for the Union war effort, there was also a significant, persistent, and vocal minority that opposed it. Known variously as Tories, Secesh, or Peace Democrats, war opponents came to be known most popularly as Copperheads, a name first given to them by a letter writer to a Cincinnati newspaper who equated them to the snake of Genesis. Copperheads eventually took on the appellation with



Copperheads eventually took on the appellation with pride, wearing on their lapels the Indian Head penny, with its image of Lady Liberty, who symbolized their belief that they were defending the Constitution.

Courtesy of the ANA Money Museum

pride, wearing on their lapels the Indian Head penny, with its image on the reverse side of Lady Liberty, who symbolized their belief that they were defending the Constitution. Copperheads in Down East Maine expressed their dissension from the beginning of the war until its end. Anti-war opinion was expressed vehemently in newspapers, until most of those newspapers were shut down by rioting mobs or abandoned by advertisers and subscribers. Private citizens demonstrated against the war in acts of vandalism and nonconformity, when they tore down or refused to fly the flag. Men who opposed the war declined to volunteer for the army,

and once the federal draft was implemented, evaded the draft by fraud or flight. When it came to elections, four of ten votes were cast for candidates who declared their opposition to the administration's war policy.²

Historians have examined wartime dissent since at least the early twentieth century, often focusing on Copperheadism in individual states of the North.³ Most of these studies agree that immigrants, Catholics, Democrats, and city-dwellers made up a substantial proportion of the Copperheads.⁴ But historian Jennifer Weber, writing in the 1990s, forged a new interpretation of the history of Copperheadism, finding that antiwar sentiment was present early in the war, that it was a widespread and divisive force throughout the towns and villages of the North, and that it hindered the northern war effort to the extent that Union soldiers viewed their Copperhead enemies at home as a greater threat than the Confederates at the front.⁵

Current research and analysis tend to confirm Weber's view. The Copperheads of Down East Maine were not urban, immigrant, and

Catholic, but rural, native, and Protestant. On Mount Desert Island, immigrants comprised only 1.6 percent of the population, and Catholics were a rare, and not necessarily welcome, presence. The nearest Catholic church was located in Ellsworth about twenty miles away, and even there, in 1854, Father John Bapst had been tarred and feathered by a gang of anti-Catholic Nativists.⁶ When examining the 1860 census records, one cannot even safely assume that all of the small number of Irish immigrants were Catholic. One of the few native-born Irishmen on Mount Desert Island, I. A. Barkwell, identified himself as a Baptist preacher.⁷ This examination of Copperheadism in Down East Maine shows that war opposition was not limited to Catholic immigrants in northern cities, but was also a phenomenon found among rural Protestants whose families had been present in America for three generations or more.

A Divided State

When Confederate batteries in Charleston, South Carolina fired on Fort Sumter on April 12, 1861, the news of the beginning of the Civil War electrified the country. Within three days of the Sumter battle, Abraham Lincoln issued a call for seventy-five thousand volunteers to be raised according to a quota assigned to each state. The Town of Mount Desert voted to raise a \$100 bounty for each soldier who enlisted and in the first months of the war, twenty-one men from Mount Desert signed up as volunteers.⁸ Young women encouraged local boys to enlist and berated those who did not. James M. Parker of Somesville reported that a friend from home, Lizzie Young, was “down on all those who don’t enlist. I tell you she gave some of the Somesville boys a terrible raking.”⁹ The peer pressure for young men to enlist was considerable.

Yet, despite the efforts of Miss Young and others, there was significant opposition to the war. Ironically, evidence of dissent is often found in the documents of the war’s most ardent supporters. As one pro-Union diarist recalled, “There was a mania for displaying the stars and stripes,” yet there were many whose refusal to display the flag, “made the place conspicuous, and at once stamped those controlling it as disloyal.”¹⁰ The *Bangor Whig & Courier* announced, “Some scoundrels, probably secessionists who have profited by the teachings of the *Bangor Democrat*, cut down the flag staff at North Bluehill one night last week. We hope they will be found out and punished.”¹¹

War opponents blamed Lincoln and the Republicans, not southerners, for causing southern secession. Many Copperheads pointed

to the Constitution of the United States which, they said, permitted and safeguarded the institution of slavery—a position backed up by the Supreme Court in its 1858 Dred Scott decision. Most Democrats in Maine and elsewhere in the North also supported states' rights over the power of the federal government.

In addition, a belief in the racial inferiority of African Americans was common even among those fighting for the Union cause. When a Captain Hight was mustering men into the 8th Maine Regiment, he noticed a black man standing in the ranks. He ordered the man removed, but the would-be soldier reappeared in another section of the regiment. Hight found him again and ordered the man's name struck from the roll, saying that he'd come to muster "white citizens, not negroes."¹² Despite New England's position as the seat of Abolitionism, there were many Maine citizens who had no desire, and believed they had no right or reason, to interfere in the institution of slavery. Many believed that the cause of freedom for African slaves was not worth the sacrifice that would be required of white men.

The Anti-War Maine Press

The beliefs of Copperheads were expressed in an uncompromising anti-war press, of which the *Machias Union* was a prominent example. In April 1861, as artillery batteries were turned towards the besieged Fort Sumter, the *Machias Union* published the lyrics of the southern anthem "Dixie" on its front page. It attacked rival papers, condemning their "nigger' philanthropy," and blamed the Lincoln administration for its "nigger' agitation."¹³ By the time the next issue of the paper was on the streets, the terrible rumors of war were confirmed, and the editor placed blame on the Republican Party—"that sectional and fanatical party" that had "now fully inaugurated their mad scheme of an 'irrepressible conflict' between the North and the South."¹⁴

The *Machias Union* defended the patriotism of Democrats who, "With sorrowing hearts . . . have witnessed the black flag of Abolitionism waving over a divided and disintegrated Union." As for Lincoln and the Republicans, the editor said, "We respect the flag but detest his piratical nigger worshipping crew." *The Machias Union* warned that the officers and men of the United States Army and Navy would refuse to fight for the abolitionist cause. As the nation plunged towards war, the paper encouraged all good Democrats to refuse to fight, saying, "Let every Democrat fold his arms and bid the minions of tory despotism do a tory despot's work." Democrats, the paper said, had "warned their countrymen against the

troubles we are now experiencing, and feel as though having done their duty honestly, they are not responsible for the present war.”¹⁵

By the summer of 1861, the *Machias Union* was pointing to the effect of the war on common people. An array of government spending increases and borrowing to fund the raising and equipping of troops had resulted in tax increases. Said the editor, “While taxation has been increasing five fold, business has been ruined, the country plunged into a civil war, the Constitution and the laws trampled under foot. The prospect ahead for the poor people, for the day laborers, mechanics, the small property holders, looks gloomy and forbidding.”¹⁶ Poor and working men, the paper contended, would suffer the most in the war.

The *Machias Union* invoked war’s horrors in a way that was nothing like the glorious struggle euphemistically portrayed in Republican newspapers. War did not consist of a “splendid charge,” with an enemy “annoying the right wing,” and artillery that “effectually held them in check.” Instead, the *Machias Union* reported that in war, “There will be the full compliment of backs broken in two; of arms twisted wholly off; of men impaled upon their own bayonets; of heads sliced open like apples; of other heads crunched into soft jelly by iron hoofs of horses; of faces trampled out of all likeness to anything human. This is what skulks behind a ‘splendid charge.’” Such scenes, the paper reported, had resulted in many a youth going to war a Republican, but returning a Democrat.¹⁷

One such youth was Albert F. Salisbury of Tremont, a nineteen-year-old who enlisted on June 15, 1861 along with his brother Robert, who was six years his senior. The two young men were among the first from Mount Desert Island to enlist, signing up with the Fourth Maine Volunteer Infantry Regiment, based in Rockland, Maine. Within two days of their enlistment, the regiment shipped out, marching through the center of Rockland in the grandest style, more than a thousand men carrying bayonets and following silk flags down to the harbor. A crowd estimated at ten thousand cheered the soldiers, resplendent in their new gray uniforms as they departed Maine on the steamer *Daniel Webster*, with cannon firing a salute and a band on the dock playing “The Girl I Left Behind Me.” The regiment was transported to New York, then Philadelphia, then Washington and by June 21 was encamped south of the Potomac River in Virginia, near Alexandria. On July 21, 1861, the Fourth Maine first engaged the enemy at the first battle of Bull Run. They were routed, suffering twenty-six killed, forty-six wounded, 121 missing, and the ignomy of the regiment running from the field in panic. Robert Salisbury deserted sometime in July and Albert, his

record says, “deserted Aug. 7. 61 to the enemy.”¹⁸ Albert was released by the Confederate forces at the James River on February 20, 1862, his military career over, his patriotic fervor quashed.

Pro-war and anti-war northerners also battled over the topic of emancipation. Early in the war, Republicans denied that they had any desire or inclination to free the slaves. President Lincoln wrote, “My paramount object in this struggle is to save the Union, and is not either to save or destroy Slavery. If I could save the Union without freeing any slave, I would do it, and if I could save it by freeing all the slaves, I would do it.”¹⁹ Only an abolitionist fringe hoped that the war would finally lead to the end of slavery, thereby morally redeeming the nation. The Republican newspapers were disciplined in their silence over emancipation based on principles of human justice. There was still hope, early in the war, that the South could be coaxed quickly back into the Union, and the abolitionist cause was seen as an inconvenient wedge issue that might keep the nation apart. But in time, abolition came to be seen as a military strategy, a means of winning the war. The editor of the *Ellsworth American* wrote, “If the men of the North are expected to sacrifice their houses and lands, yes, their best blood and the best blood of their sons, to maintain their country, the men of the South must be expected to sacrifice at least their slaves.”²⁰

The *Machias Union* warned that emancipated slaves would become a lawless mob, and invoked the specter of an uprising of “the sable hordes” who would unleash “murder and outrage” upon the South. With this line of objection, the *Machias Union* gave voice to a wide-spread fear among white Americans that white women would be the victims of sexual violence perpetrated by black men. One million black men, the *Machias Union* wrote, “are capable of doing an immense work in the destruction of human life. The project once started, the negro butcherers once well at their work, who could tell where it would end?” Northern states could become the victims of “Negro barbarity,” the paper said, and require an army of one-half million to suppress them, “and only an extermination of the race in the country would put an end to their murderous work.”²¹

Suppression of the Press

The inflammatory rhetoric of the anti-war papers soon brought demands for their suppression. By May 1861, the *Machias Union* and other Democratic newspapers around the state were being accused by rival Republican papers of disloyalty. The *Ellsworth American* reminded the public that during the Revolutionary War the pressrooms of Tory

newspapers were destroyed by American soldiers and the type melted into bullets.²²

Within six months of the war's start, many Democratic newspapers had been sacked or closed down. On August 12, 1861, the office and presses of the anti-war *Bangor Democrat* were destroyed by a mob. An estimated two thousand people tore apart the offices and threw the presses, type, furniture, and papers into a bonfire. Marcellus Emory, the editor of the paper, waded into the crowd, despite threats that he would be beaten or tarred and feathered. He had been warned that such an act would come but, he maintained, his "duty to the public required of me that I should not yield to the demands and pressures of a lawless mob." He said, "Though anarchy seems to be coming down upon our unhappy country like night . . . I still believe that there is yet virtue and intelligence enough in the people to maintain their liberties and to protect a free Press, which is their best guardian."²³ After the war, Emory brought suit against members of the mob and the case was finally resolved in 1866. All but two of the men who destroyed the paper were acquitted.

The vigor with which the suppression was undertaken has been cited as evidence of Maine's support for the war. Yet the presence of Copperhead newspapers and their obstinacy in the face of threats and violence suggest a corresponding determination and vehemence on the part of the war's opponents. Opposition to the war was soon to be carried out in practical terms as well, in the form of resistance to the draft.

Avoiding the Draft

In the first months of the war, political arguments in the press, news of local boys gone to camp, and stories of far-away battles remained mostly theoretical issues rather than near and present matters of life or death. But in 1862 a policy decision of the Lincoln administration made the consequences of the war an immediate concern for almost everyone. The administration recognized that if insufficient numbers of volunteers enlisted in the army, conscription would have to be imposed. Huge numbers of soldiers were called for. By the end of the war, the total number of troops summoned by the federal government amounted to more than 2.9 million, of which Maine was given a quota of 73,587 and supplied 69,738.²⁴

"Last Chance! A Draft is Coming! Rally boys, and volunteer and receive the Bounties. No drafted men receive bounties." So declared a local advertisement.²⁵ The *Ellsworth American* urged that "where there is some secesh feeling, and there are stout, able-bodied men discouraging enlistments,

let the draft be resorted to and let those men stand their chance.”²⁶ Any town that failed to meet its quota of volunteers would be forced to subject their young men to the draft. Bounties to encourage enlistment were offered by town, state, and federal governments in amounts that increased as the war went on. A man of means could avoid the draft by paying an exemption fee of \$300 or by hiring a substitute to take his place in the ranks. These provisions were intended to afford a way to fund federal bounties and,



Men who purchased an exemption or a substitute to avoid being drafted were sometimes scorned, as this political cartoon showed. *Harper's Weekly*, August 30, 1862. *Courtesy of the Library of Congress*

a boyhood friend, Lyman H. Somes, who had purchased an exemption. Parker wrote that Somes was "overwhelmed by remorse at his neglect of duty and fearing my just displeasure undertook to do something in the way of writing a letter but in my opinion he failed. At any rate, I did not consider it worth a second reading. He says, 'I thank God that I have got clear of the conscription for three years.' Noble youth. His courage and patriotism deserve great praise. Probably his monument will bear some such inscription as this, *Delce et Gloria pro patria mori.*"²⁷

Lyman Somes was a clothier, a merchant in the village of Somesville, the son of a prosperous family. He and Parker had grown up together. Somes'

supposedly, to keep in civilian positions men who were important to the war effort. But generally the exemption and substitution provisions were interpreted as a way for the rich and influential to avoid service while the poor workingman had to fight.

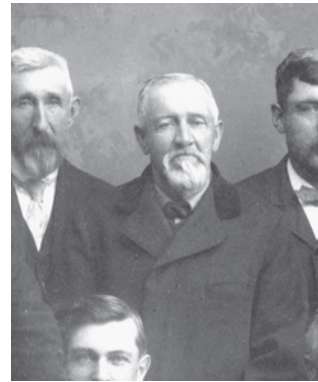
Men who could afford to pay the exemption fee or hire a substitute were sometimes the subject of contemptuous comments from their neighbors. James M. Parker, serving with the First Maine Heavy Artillery Regiment, received a letter from

effort—his need—to explain his purchase of an exemption illustrates the divide that separated those who volunteered and those who stayed out of the fight. Lyman Somes was a young man who had a significant financial stake invested in a business. James M. Parker was a young unmarried man of more modest means, less weighed down by financial responsibilities, whose economic potential was more portable. Somes likely felt that it would be impossible to walk away from his business interests, and viewed his purchase of an exemption as an act of patriotism, his provision of funds fulfilling and equaling Parker's enlistment.

In the neighboring town of Eden (now Bar Harbor), it was considered a matter of civic pride that the town raised funds to purchase substitutes on behalf of men who were subject to the draft. Eben Hamor wrote in his journal, "At the beginning and during the civil war the citizens of Eden were intensely loyal to the Government, always filling our quota of soldiers called for, either by volunteers or substitutes for drafted men, by raising money, by loan or otherwise, for soldier's bounties, or to buy substitutes, or to provide for soldiers families, promptly, and generally quite unanimously."²⁸ Soldiers like James M. Parker obviously viewed matters differently and believed that only enlistment fulfilled a man's patriotic responsibility.

Not everyone was willing or able to choose between enlistment and the purchase of an exemption or substitute, the primary legal routes of avoiding the service. In Eden, a young man named Martin V. Higgins was caught trying to escape the draft. His captors offered him the choice of prosecution or enlistment, and he reluctantly joined the army.²⁹ The *Ellsworth American* reported that a lighthouse keeper in Prospect was arrested for resisting the draft. A young man in Moscow, Maine cut off part of his finger to avoid the draft, only to see the town meet its quota through enlistment, so that his maiming was for nothing.³⁰ Another man went to the dentist to have four front teeth extracted, so that he would be unable to tear a paper cartridge and load a weapon.³¹

The town of Tremont (which then included the present-day town of Southwest Harbor) was noted to be a center of anti-war sentiment. The



In a letter to his sister Letitia, James M. Parker expressed scorn for his boyhood friend, Lyman Somes, who purchased an exemption. Parker was killed at Petersburg on June 20, 1864. Somes lived to an old age and is pictured here when he served on a grand jury in 1902. *Collection of the Mount Desert Island Historical Society*

Ellsworth American reported, "There is a squad of secessionists in the town of Tremont that ought to be made to 'skedaddle' or to enlist."³² In November 1862, the paper published a list of towns deficient in supplying soldiers for the draft. Of the three towns on Mount Desert Island, only Tremont was slow to meet its manpower quota, as the town was eight men short.³³ Anger at the war effort reached its peak in Tremont in early 1863, when two public meetings dissolved into violent confrontations between Copperheads and Union loyalists. If a Unionist's version of events is accurate, the Copperheads got the upper hand at a first meeting, held in March 1863, causing the Unionists to disperse. At another meeting two weeks later, Copperheads armed with slingshots, knives, and revolvers were chased away by Union supporters. The *Ellsworth American* declared that Tremont "contains a large nest of old fashioned Democrats, many of whom have heretofore fattened at the public cost, holding some of the best local offices as the gift of the general government."³⁴

Throughout Maine, an atmosphere of discontent was amplified by the accumulating losses of the state's soldiers. By the spring of 1863, much of the supply of volunteers had been used up, yet the army's demand for men seemed insatiable. Soldiers at the front reported home with stories of the inept leadership of Union generals and the careless treatment of troops in camp and in the field.

Some men refused to take part in the war, but the draft cut off their escape. Fear, anger, and resentment towards the draft sometimes were expressed in violence and crime. A physician in Waldo County was charged by the Provost Marshal with carrying out a fraud to help men obtain medical exemptions from the draft. Dr. Jacob Brown was accused of administering medicines (one might say "poisons") that would make mild medical conditions worse so that men would be disqualified.³⁵ In October 1863, Copperheads were accused of setting fire to three barns in Gouldsboro and vicinity, and a deserter from Gardiner was captured when he was "found at the house of one of his wives."³⁷

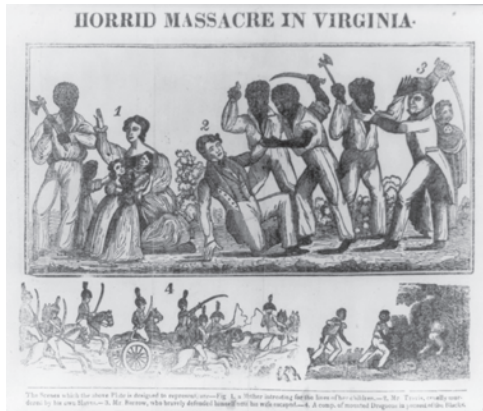
The Provost Marshals prepared for violent resistance. Captain A.D. Bean, responsible for the district that included Mount Desert Island, wrote to his superior, "I find it absolutely necessary that guards at the Barracks and with detachments sent away should be armed. Can you loan me thirty rifles or muskets and a small quantity of ammunition?"³⁸

As bad news from the Virginia battlefields arrived home, war opposition grew. The Union army began a major offensive in the spring of 1864, catalyzing a series of battles whose names epitomize the most

violent clashes in the history of warfare: The Wilderness, Spotsylvania, Cold Harbor, Petersburg. The offensive eventually yielded positive military results, but only after months of horrific losses, seen at home in newspapers filled with lists of the local boys who were casualties. May 1864 was a month when, the *Ellsworth American* reported, “there was not a whole day of fair weather,” and the war news “cast a gloom over many a household, and the public generally.”³⁹

‘Skedaddling’ and Violent Resistance

Most Maine men who wanted to avoid the draft did so by “skedaddling,” escaping to New Brunswick or the woods of northern Maine. One historian wrote that the northern and eastern parts of Maine became “a highway for about all the copperheads and cowards of the North.”⁴⁰ Many who fled the draft stayed in Canada until the war was over. The *Ellsworth American* wrote, “We understand that in some of the towns in this district large numbers of men have ‘skedaddled,’ or run away to avoid a draft.” The paper pointed out that the flight of eligible men made it more likely for men who stayed home to be drafted, and noted that there was a \$30 reward for turning in runaways to the Provost Marshal.⁴¹ In Mount Desert, a young mother and wife of a naval officer, Emily Savage, confirmed that many men had left. She wrote, “I dread to hear of the draft for half that are liable to it have gone off.”⁴² Months later she observed, “The Mackerel catchers have about all gone west.”⁴³ The *Ellsworth American* reported, “There is an immense emmigration this year to California, Idaho, and the mineral regions west of the great plains.”⁴⁴ One father of three sons wrote to the Provost Marshal to bluntly state that his sons were out of reach of the draft. Thomas Getchell wrote, “I wish to inform you that Martin L. Getchell, Joseph E. Getchell, & Deaniel [*sic*] W. Holmes has left this town for California.”⁴⁵ Many of Maine’s young men were willing to give up their lives of fishing and farming to try their luck in the great American West.



Opponents of abolition feared a slave uprising like Nat Turner’s rebellion, shown here in a widely-distributed 1831 woodcut. *Courtesy of the Library of Congress*

The War Department cracked down on desertion and on furloughed



Maine's proximity to Canada meant it was fairly easy for Maine men to flee the draft by land or sea. Albert Salisbury of Tremont, a deserter from the army, was reported to have gone fishing off the Magdalen Islands, more than 400 miles northeast of Mount Desert Island. Map of Province of Canada, 1861, by Alexander Keith Johnston. *Courtesy of the David Rumsey Map Collection*

soldiers overstaying their leave, warning, “Any officer or private whose health permits him to visit watering places, or places of amusement, or make social visits, or to walk about the town . . . will be considered fit for military duty, and as evading duty by absence from his command or ranks.”⁴⁶ Civilians could be arrested, too, for harboring deserters. U.S. Marshals were dispatched to search out soldiers missing from their regiments, a duty that could prove hazardous.⁴⁷ Frank W. Gross of Ellsworth was assigned the task of rounding up drafted men on Cape Rosier, by the eastern side of Penobscot Bay. He was warned that any man who attempted the task “would not come off alive. They, devils on the cape, were armed and swore death to any man who should warn them.” He did manage to warn them, but, he wrote, “Some of the most reliable Union men in the town have since told me that I narrowly escaped for the devils were lying in wait when I came back. Fortunately I came another way.”⁴⁸

In August 1862, Augustus Stevens, the post master for the town of Blue Hill, was appointed by Maine’s Provost Marshal to scour the landscape for draft evaders and deserters. Stevens traveled from town to town on the Down East coast, inquiring as to the whereabouts of young men of military age. On August 23, he wrote from Tremont that Albert F.

Salisbury had gone fishing off Canada's Magdalene Islands, saying, "From what I can learn he is no doubt a deserter. Have made arrangements to secure him when he returns."⁴⁹ Salisbury, a deserter from the Fourth Maine Regiment, had been one of the first to enlist but lost all his enthusiasm at Bull Run. Salisbury stayed away until about 1867 when the authorities were no longer searching for deserters. When he finally returned to Maine, he brought back a wife and four children, all born in Canada. They moved to Rockland, where he took up work as a laborer in a charcoal factory.

Stevens was more sympathetic towards William G. Pert of Sedgwick, who deserted from the Second Maine Infantry Regiment. Stevens reported, "He never would have deserted had not his wife written him that his family were suffering for the necessaries of life, and that the Selectmen of Sedgwick refused to supply them." Steven's opinion was that Pert "should be dealt with leniently as the circumstances will allow. He is a seafaring man and would like to go in the navy."⁵⁰ The departure of a man for military service often meant that his wife and children would be left destitute. In that circumstance, men often discounted patriotic appeals, judged for themselves where their responsibilities lay, and measured the risk of flight against the perils of war.

Harvey Nickerson of Mount Desert was another young man who disappeared from the town during the years of the draft. Samuel Savage, serving with the First Maine Heavy Artillery Regiment, wrote to his brother Chase who was serving in the Navy, "I am not no Hearvey Nickerson but a long ways from it. There is no chickens bread in me. . . ."⁵¹ Harvey Nickerson, thirty years old, is listed in the census of 1860, but not in the census of 1870, meaning that he must have left town during the decade between.⁵² He obtained a divorce from his wife Nancy in 1863, after which the public record speaks of him no more.⁵³

In October 1864, Emily Savage wrote, "The Provost Marshal was shot the other day down east by a drafted man and also a Mr. Sargent Deputy Sheriff at Brooklin was shot on Deer Island by a drafted man. Really I don't know what this world is coming to. How I do wish the crewel war was over but I want to see it ended right."⁵⁴

Even the administration's most ardent supporters were discouraged by the conduct of the war. Both Augustus (Chase) Savage and his wife Emily strongly supported the Republican administration, yet they felt great sympathy for the men who would suffer hardship because of the draft. Chase Savage wrote to Emily in July 1864, "I also see there is to be another draft of 500,000 men which must affect the country sadly. I really pity

those that have to leave homes and friends to join the army. Especially those that have families.”⁵⁵ As an Acting Lieutenant in the U.S. Navy, he had avoided the brutal life of an infantryman. He wrote, “I think I am tough and can stand most anything but the life of a soldier. I see thousands every day and thank my stars that I am not one of them.”⁵⁶

The War Draws to a Close

By March 1865, no more volunteers could be found and a number of men from Mount Desert were selected for the draft. At this point in the war the \$300 exemption provision had been eliminated from the draft regulations and the only legal way a man could avoid conscription was to enlist or hire a substitute. Emily Savage cited two men who hired substitutes, one at a cost of \$700, another for \$900—small fortunes that were sufficient to purchase a medium-sized farm. She was gravely concerned about the consequences to the poor families who could not afford the price of a substitute and stood to lose the labor of their men. She wrote, “Now I think this part of the town has fared hard and it has taken our best and poorest men there is.” Of her friend Alden Jordan, the foreman at a local mill, she said, “There is three



families that looks to him for help. Mr. Jordan [Alden’s father] says he can’t do a thing in the mill if Alden goes to war as Alden is boss of the work.”⁵⁷ When the town proposed raising funds for the support of the drafted men’s families, Emily wrote, “They are going to call a meeting and raise 300 dollars apiece for them that has to go and I am glad of it as the most of them are very poor men.”⁵⁸ She lamented the fate of another drafted man, “Isreal Norwood up here in Browns District. The poorest man in town.”⁵⁹ Emily felt the town selectmen should do more to help men avoid the draft, citing the selectmen from Eden who went to Belfast to negotiate a lower

quota. But as for the town of Mount Desert, Emily wrote, "Our select men haint had spunk enough to try to do anything. . . . Some that are drafted have moved away over a year ago so I think this is a terrible little mean town and our first selectman is the little small mean John W. Somes. He has bought a sub so he don't care."⁶⁰

Chase Savage wrote back from a Navy ship guarding the mouth of the James River in Virginia, expressing bitterness toward the wealthy men of the town who watched as the poor men were forced to join the army and leave their helpless families behind. "How strange," he wrote, "that those young men of Esqu. Kimballs escaped the draft. I do not wish them any ill but would much rather they could have been accomidated to the situation than for the old men that have families. I wonder if Mr. K don't think the government is slighting them. If I were a young man I don't believe I would stay at home and see fathers go and leave helpless children to suffer. I should want to have my family represented by one recruit surely."⁶¹

The war finally ended with the surrender of Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia on April 10, 1865. Some of the celebration was expressed in hostility towards those who had opposed the war. In Bangor, one diarist wrote that he had an urge to pay drummers \$10 to follow him to the home of the most notorious Copperhead in the city, Marcellus Emery, the editor of the *Bangor Democrat*.⁶² A crowd did go to the *Bangor Democrat's* office and threatened to break in, but their violence was withheld by a promise that the Union flag would be hung from the office all day. The throng went to the homes and offices of other Copperheads in the city and made them hang up the stars and stripes or face destruction of their property. A committee of loyal Union men was formed and deliberately contemplated the lynching of one man who refused to comply with the orders of the mob.⁶³

A carriage raced from Bangor to Ellsworth to spread the news of the war's end, and soon old men were dancing in front of the shops on Main Street.⁶⁴ Undoubtedly another carriage delivered the news at last to Mount Desert Island, to similar acclaim. The joy of peace was tempered a few days later by news of the President's assassination, and then came a long time of recovery for a generation decimated by the war. Of the seventy-five men from Mount Desert known to have served in the army, at least twenty-three suffered wounds or disease, were captured or killed.⁶⁵ Dozens of orphans and widows remained to carve a life out of the rugged coast, without a man's help.

Memory and History

Victory for the Union cause was perceived not only as a triumph of military forces over the Confederacy but also as a victory over the war's opponents at home. Throughout Maine, much of the elation of victory was expressed through acts of revenge and humiliation directed at Copperheads. The fact that Copperheads were still around at the war's end is an indication of their obstinacy. Opponents of the war increased their resolve as the war went on, as the casualties mounted, and as the draft threatened to draw into the fight men who wanted no part of it.⁶⁶

If it is true, as tradition remembers, that the population of Maine was supportive of the war, it is also true, as tradition has mostly forgotten, that a significant minority was implacably opposed. Many of Maine's soldiers enlisted not only out of patriotism, but also with the knowledge that if they did not go voluntarily, they would almost certainly be conscripted and lose all chance at a volunteer's bounty. While forty-four of every one thousand Maine soldiers were killed in action or died of wounds, an equal proportion deserted.⁶⁷ Some men whose employment took them to sea stayed far from the reach of the authorities until they were certain they were clear of the



The Town of Tremont, which during the Civil War included the Village of Southwest Harbor, was noted for having a strong Copperhead faction within the community. This is a photograph of the J.C. Ralph Studio, looking North on Main Street, Southwest Harbor, 1898. *Photographer unknown; copy by W.H. Ballard. Courtesy of The Southwest Harbor Public Library Collection of Photographs (number 5556)*

draft. Others unlucky enough to be drafted “skedadddled” before they were mustered, or feigned illness or intentionally maimed themselves to obtain a medical deferment. Others deserted at the first opportunity, lighting out for Maine’s boundless north woods or Canada, many never to return. Indeed, Mount Desert’s population fell by 6 percent between the censuses of 1860 and 1870, a reduction that could not have been caused by war mortality alone. Some of the population loss was caused by the exodus of men who fled the draft and never came back.

Though the existence of dissenters in Down East Maine is well documented, the reasons men objected to and avoided the war are less clear. Many may have been influenced by the anti-war press that expressed the political and moral arguments against the war. And though significant social and peer pressure was applied to drive men to enlist, more private and earnest familial and personal priorities pressed to keep them at home. Many men believed their first duty was to support their family, not to coerce the Confederate states back into the Union or free the slaves of the South.

The story of Maine in the Civil War emerges in historical evidence that has survived the century and a half since the conflict. Many of these records passed through a social filter that let accounts of support for the Union cause survive to the next generations, while stories of opposition were considered best left untold. Certainly there was a shadow of public shame that attended those who avoided the war or opposed it. As the Ellsworth American said of the Copperheads in Tremont, “If half is true of what is related of them, their names will go down to posterity reeking with treason and disloyalty.”⁶⁸

But while records of military valor were more likely to survive the post-war years than records of Copperheadism, newspapers of the day reveal the vigorous debate over the legitimacy and conduct of the war and, in boasting of the social pressure, intimidation, and violence they exerted upon Copperheads, the war’s proponents themselves left some of the clearest documentation of dissent. The most emphatic opposition to the war, however, was expressed by those who refused to participate in it. Though their voices have largely been removed from the historical record, their absence from the enlistment rolls, their departure from the community during the years of the draft, their willingness to commit fraud or maim themselves or do anything necessary to avoid military service, testify to their personal opposition to the Civil War.

Research for this essay disclosed no records indicating that men refused

to fight because they were conscientious objectors. But clearly many shared the belief expressed in the Copperhead press that emancipation was not a cause worth fighting for. To such men, whom war supporters labeled cowards or traitors, Copperheadism offered a libertarian defense for their refusal to participate in the war. They preferred to be left alone, even if it meant that the United States would keep the institution of slavery as it was, even if it meant that the Southern states would secede. When such men weighed the personal risks of war, they found political and ethical cover in Copperheadism sufficient to justify their refusal.

Notes

¹ Provost Marshall General, *Final Report made to the Secretary of War by the Provost Marshal General* (Washington: U. S. Government, 1866), 1: 78.

² *Ellsworth American*, November 9, 1860, November 11, 1861, and November 25, 1864.

³ For a good historiographical work on Copperheads in the Midwest see Robert H. Abzug, "The Copperheads: Historical Approaches to Civil War Dissent in the Midwest," *Indiana Magazine of History* 66, no. 1 (March 1970): 40-55.

⁴ See, for example, Frank L. Klement, "Catholics as Copperheads during the Civil War," *Catholic Historical Review* 80, no. 1 (January 1994): 36-57 and Joanna Cowden, "The Politics of Dissent: Civil War Democrats in Connecticut," *New England Quarterly* 56, no. 4 (December 1983): 538-54. Peter Levine has noted that much of the historiography on the Copperhead movement closely corresponds with the official report of the Provost Marshal General's Office, which was published in 1866. Yet, Levine found only a weak correlation with the description of Copperheads in his study of draft evaders, a correlation that grew weaker as the war went on. Levine found that, by 1864, men of every description and class were avoiding the draft in similar proportions. See Peter Levine, "Draft Evasion in the North during the Civil War, 1863-1865," *Journal of American History* 67, No. 4 (March 1981): 824-25.

⁵ Jennifer L. Weber, *Copperheads: The Rise and Fall of Lincoln's Opponents in the North* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 1-3.

⁶ Neil Rolde, *Maine: A Narrative History* (Gardiner, Maine: Tilbury House, 1990), 184-85.

⁷ Thomas F. Vining, *Census Records of Cranberry Isles and the Towns of Mount Desert Island: Volume 3 - 1860* (Southwest Harbor, Maine: V.F. Thomas, 2009), 53.

⁸ Town of Mount Desert, "Record of 1862." Mount Desert Island Historical Society.

⁹ James M. Parker to Letitia Parker, August 10, 1862. Mount Desert Island Historical Society.

¹⁰ R. H. Stanley and George Hall, *Eastern Maine and the Rebellion* (Bangor: R.H. Stanley, 1887), 40.

¹¹ *Bangor Whig & Courier*, July 6, 1861.

¹² *Machias Union*, September 17, 1861.

¹³ *Machias Union*, April 2, 1861.

¹⁴ *Machias Union*, April 23, 1861.

¹⁵ *Machias Union*, April 23, 1861 and April 30, 1861.

¹⁶ *Machias Union*, August 13, 1861.

¹⁷ *Machias Union*, October 22, 1861.

¹⁸ In the first weeks of the war, blue uniforms were not yet universally adopted by the federal forces. National Archives and Records Administration, "Compiled Military Service Record for Albert F. Salisbury" and Veteran's Memorial Museum Online, "4th Maine Infantry Regiment — 1861," <http://vetsmemorialmuseum.tripod.com/id36.html>, accessed December 24, 2013.

- ¹⁹ Abraham Lincoln to Horace Greeley, August 22, 1862, in Philip Van Doren Stern, ed., *The Life and Writings of Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Modern Library, 1999), 719.
- ²⁰ *Ellsworth American*, November 15, 1861.
- ²¹ *Machias Union*, December 17, 1861.
- ²² *Ellsworth American*, October 4, 1861.
- ²³ *Machias Union*, August 20, 1861.
- ²⁴ Provost Marshall General, *Final Report*, 163.
- ²⁵ Stanley and Hall, *Eastern Maine*, 172.
- ²⁶ *Ellsworth American*, August 8, 1862.
- ²⁷ James M. Parker to Letitia Parker, October 11, 1863. Mount Desert Island Historical Society.
- ²⁸ Eben Hamor, Journal, Book No. 1, Strout Family Collection.
- ²⁹ *Ellsworth American*, September 5, 1862.
- ³⁰ *Ellsworth American*, September 19, 1862.
- ³¹ *Portland Transcript*, September 12, 1862, in Murray Bowden, "The Problem of Conscription in Maine during the Civil War" (master's thesis, University of Maine, 1948), 82.
- ³² *Ellsworth American*, August 8, 1862.
- ³³ *Ellsworth American*, November 21, 1862.
- ³⁴ *Ellsworth American*, February 20, 1863.
- ³⁵ *Ellsworth American*, October 10, 1863.
- ³⁶ *Ellsworth American*, October 23, 1863.
- ³⁷ *Ibid.*
- ³⁸ A. D. Bean to John S. Hodsdon, September 4, 1863. Maine State Archives.
- ³⁹ *Ellsworth American*, May 27, 1864 and June 4, 1864.
- ⁴⁰ Stanley and Hall, *Eastern Maine*, 179.
- ⁴¹ *Ellsworth American*, September 30, 1864.
- ⁴² Emily Savage (hereafter, "ES") to Augustus Chase Savage (hereafter, "ACS"), March 20, 1865. Mount Desert Island Historical Society.
- ⁴³ ES to ACS, September 12, 1864. Mount Desert Island Historical Society.
- ⁴⁴ *Ellsworth American*, July 15, 1864.
- ⁴⁵ Thos G. Getchell to A.D. Bean, June 20, 1864. National Archives and Records Administration, Waltham, RG 110 (Provost Marshal General's Bureau) Maine Acting Assistant Provost Marshal General, *Letters Received from Districts 2d – 5th Dist (1863-65) Circulars, Lists of Deserters and Reports*.
- ⁴⁶ *Ellsworth American*, April 22, 1864.
- ⁴⁷ *Ellsworth American*, May 6, 1864.
- ⁴⁸ Frank W. Gross to A.D. Bean, November 4, 1863. National Archives and Records Administration, Waltham, RG 110 (Provost Marshal General's Bureau) Maine Acting Assistant Provost Marshal General, *Letters Received from Districts 2d – 5th Dist (1863-65) Circulars, Lists of Deserters and Reports*.
- ⁴⁹ Augustus Stevens to Gen. John L Hodsdon, August 21, 1862, Adjutant General, War Department, *Absent Soldiers 1862*, Maine State Archives.
- ⁵⁰ Augustus Stevens to Gen. John L Hodsdon, Sept 2, 1862, Adjutant General, War Department, *Absent Soldiers*, Maine State Archives.
- ⁵¹ Samuel T. Savage (hereafter "STS") to ACS, January 27, 1864. Mount Desert Island Historical Society.
- ⁵² "1860 United States Federal Census Record for Harvey Nickerson," Ancestry.com, accessed December 24, 2012. http://search.ancestry.com/iexec?htx=View&r=an&dbid=7667&iid=4231249_00630&fn=Harvey&ln=Nickerson&st=r&ssrc=&pid=44474887.
- ⁵³ "Maine, Divorce Records, 1798-1891 about Harvey J. Nickerson," Ancestry.com, accessed December 24, 2012. <http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?rank=1&new=1&MSAV=0&msT>

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⁵⁴ ES to ACS, October 6, 1864. Mount Desert Island Historical Society; Bowden, "The Problem of Conscription," 90.

⁵⁵ ACS to ES, July 23, 1864. Mount Desert Island Historical Society.

⁵⁶ ACS to ES, February 10, 1865. Mount Desert Island Historical Society.

⁵⁷ ES to ACS, March 27, 1865. Mount Desert Island Historical Society.

⁵⁸ ES to ACS, March 30, 1865. Mount Desert Island Historical Society.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ ES to ACS, April 6, 1865. Mount Desert Island Historical Society.

⁶¹ ACS to ES, April 7, 1865. Mount Desert Island Historical Society.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Stanley and Hall, *Eastern Maine*, 195.

⁶⁴ Stanley and Hall, *Eastern Maine*, 304.

⁶⁵ Robert Pyle, Civil War Database, Mount Desert Island Historical Society.

⁶⁶ Provost Marshall General, *Final Report*, 74.

⁶⁷ Provost Marshall General, *Final Report*, 82.

⁶⁸ *Ellsworth American*, August 8, 1862.