Griffin A. Stedman, Jr: Student, Soldier, Legend

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Griffin A. Stedman, Jr.

Student, Soldier, Legend
For the stainless, young and noble brave
From the country for whom his life he gave,
With a patriot-martyr’s pride.’

A sculpted figure of a Civil War soldier occupies a place of honor in many Connecticut towns.

Most commonly, he appears as follows.

The infantryman stands with one foot forward, the butt of the rifle (rifled musket) between his feet, hands grasping the muzzle, left over right, accoutrements and bayonet suspended from his waist belt, and the coat's hood falling over the shoulders as a cape. He wears facial hair and the uniform hat which was known as the kepi when worn by an officer, sometimes as a “bummer” when worn by an enlisted man. The kepi was indeed generally worn; it is an authentic and realistic feature; slouch hats were popular in the Western theater. The soldier generally is of stone, usually granite, but sometimes bronze.

There is something special about such an object, as it provides a tangible link to the past. Thousands of local townsmen who long ago formed the state’s volunteer regiments, who engaged the Rebel army in legendary battles like Antietam, Gettysburg, and Cold Harbor, who perished in Andersonville prison, and who returned but never forgot, are encapsulated into this communal form. Interestingly, the Camp-Field Monument in Hartford gives the soldier an identity.

GRiffin A. STedMAN.
TYPICAL VOLUNTEER SOLDIER
OF THE CIVIL WAR,
CAPTAIN
MAJOR
LIEUTENANT COLONEL
COLONEL
BRIGADIER GENERAL
BORN AT HARTFORD, CONN., JANUARY 6, 1838.
KILLED AT PETERSBURG, VA., AUGUST 5, 1864.

1 Lydia Sigoumey, General Griffin A. Stedman, Jr. Died, August 6th|1864. Hoadly Collection, Connecticut Historical Society, Hartford, CT.
3 David Ransom, “Civil War Monuments of Connecticut,” at http://www.chs.org |04/27/2003| This is the Soldier’s Monument located at East End Park at Winsted in Winchester, CT.
4 Camp-Field Monument, inscription on the bronze plaque located on West face of the base.
5 Camp-Field Monument, Hartford, CT. Photograph taken by Suzanne M. Mittica, 04/16/2003.
The Camp-Field monument both distinguishes Griffin A. Stedman, Jr., and fuses his identity with that of the “typical volunteer soldier.” According to Kirk Eugene Savage, “[m]onuments had two stories to tell, . . . one about the hero or the event commemorated and the other about the society doing the commemoration.” Who was Griffin Alexander Stedman, Jr.? And how were his commemorators attempting to give his life meaning? These are questions that, when explored, may provide insight into the history and culture of the Civil War.

This paper discusses my research and findings regarding Stedman. The first part is a description of my process of familiarization with the man. It discloses materials used to uncover Stedman’s ancestry, establish his social standing, reveal his personality, explore his military career, learn about his death, and recognize the extent to which he was memorialized. The second part is an analysis of a recurrent theme found in the representation of Stedman: Chivalry. Existing scholarship regarding antebellum ideology, specifically the cultural categorizations of the Northern Yankee and the Southern Cavalier, is utilized to provide a context for, and reveal motivations behind, the literary transformation of Stedman (and others like him) into gallant knights. Ultimately, within the celebration of New England soldiers, in particular, there is found a Northern society challenging unflattering components of the Yankee stereotype and staking its claim on national character.

Part 1 – “of grand aims and lofty deeds”

A diverse collection of primary and secondary resources helped me to familiarize myself with Griffin Alexander Stedman, Jr., the man. My study began with the family he was born into on January 6, 1838. Historical documentation such as census records, property deeds, family genealogy, and colonial

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7 "Reminiscenses of the Eleventh, Griffin A. Stedman,” The Connecticut War Record, November, 1864.
8 Stedman’s photograph album, Watkinson Library, Trinity College, Hartford, CT.
records divulged family history and social status, and helped to challenge the description on the Camp-
Field Monument. From the size of, and statuary in, the Stedman family cemetery plot, I guessed that the
family was wealthier than the average. According to the 1850 census, the value of real estate owned by
Stedman’s father was $60,000. The 1860 census included Stedman’s father (whose occupation is
“Gentleman”), family members, and in addition, four people from Ireland labeled as domestic servants in
the Stedman household.” Interestingly, Stedman was listed as a student having $20,000 in real estate
and $30,000 in personal estate -- a considerable amount for one still in school.” As wealth alone did not
determine social status, I pursued an understanding of the Stedman family’s roots and character.

The most helpful resource for exploring the Stedman family tree was the online
Stedman/Steadman Families Genealogical Database. Easily navigable and searchable, this site assisted
me in identifying Stedman’s siblings, parents, grandparents, and general ancestry. I validated the
information in the website by cross checking it with information from other resources such as census
reports, a book of Stedman family genealogy (privately published by Mabel Johnson, Stedman’s niece),
Cedar Hill Cemetery records, and the Griffin A. Stedman Alumni Questionnaire. The Stedman family’s
American story began with its progenitor, Isaac Stedman (1605 – 1678). Its chapters were filled with
men13 of accomplishment and connections to the Revolutionary War,14 public office,15 Christ Episcopal
Church,16 and the Governor’s Foot Guard.17 My findings regarding his family established Stedman as
hailing from old New England stock in a continuum of prominence.

Family history identified, what of Stedman himself? Unfortunately, information about his youth
was in limited supply. According to Elizabeth Shields Stedman (sister), Stedman received private tutoring

10 U.S. Bureau of the Census. *Eighth Census of the United States*, 1860. The term “Gentleman” could be interpreted
   as being independently wealthy.
11 According to an 1842 property deed, Stedman purchased property from his father for a cost of “one dollar (+
   love + affection).”
12 Johnson, Stedman, and Allied Families. Compiled and privately published for Mabel Johnson by the American
13 Unfortunately, there is very little information regarding the women in Stedman’s family. Stedman’s mother,
   Mary Owen Shields (1815 - 1876) was from Philadelphia.
14 Stedman/Steadman Families Genealogical Database,” at http://www.tqsi.com/genweb/steadman/steadman.html/1
   (great-grandfather) served as deputy for Windham.
   Griffin Stedman (grandfather) was a founder of Christ Episcopal Church in Hartford.
17 Johnson, Stedman, and Allied Families, Compiled and privately published for Mabel Johnson by the American
   Historical Company, Inc. (New York, 1962). Griffi A. Stedman (father) was a Major in the Governor’s Foot
   Guard.
and attended Hartford High School." After high school, Stedman was accepted to Trinity College. It was during this point in my research into Stedman that I began to see the individual take form as an intellectual and gentleman. A useful work for understanding the type of student accepted to Trinity was the book, The History of Trinity College. Among the long list of admission requirements, including English and Arithmetic, were “Latin Grammar and Prosody, Virgil, Sallust or Caesar entire, Cicero’s Select Orations, writing Latin. Greek Grammar and Prosody, Jacob’s, Colton’s, or Felton’s Greek Reader entire, one Book of Xenophon’s Anabasis, the Gospels of St. Luke and St. John, the Acts of the Apostles, and writing Greek.” A vigorous curriculum followed acceptance. Stedman most likely participated in the required regimen of coursework and, as a senior, began his study of Law. In addition to Stedman’s academic work at Trinity, his social circle was a key find. Alumni files stored at the Watkinson Library at Trinity helped me to identify and connect names that appeared in other documentation related to Stedman. One such person was William Cogswell, with whom Stedman enlisted in the 5th regiment. Cogswell was a friend frequently mentioned by Stedman in letters and the one who delivered Stedman’s eulogy during the dedication ceremony of the Camp-Field Monument. Fortunately, an artifact from Stedman’s college days survived and now residing as part of the collection at the Watkinson Library. A photograph album, personally compiled by Stedman, captured the identities and faces of professors and students. Under each picture, the subject signed his name and message to Stedman. Certain names resurfaced during the course of my research; like Charles M. Conyngham, who joined the Pennsylvania Volunteers and William T. Maddox, who joined the Louisiana Volunteers. In the middle of this album was set a photograph of the student, Stedman. The well-dressed and dashing figure’s gaze is not forward, but off to the side and slightly raised. He appeared confident and promising. Stedman’s

18 “Griffin A. Stedman Alumni Questionnaire,” Watkinson Library, Trinity College, 1910
21 Griffin A. Stedman, Jr. to Charles J. Hoadly, 01/31/1861, Hoadly Collection, Connecticut Historical Society, Hartford, CT.
23 Griffin A. Stedman, Jr. to Charles J. Hoadly, 08/21/1863, Hoadly Collection, Connecticut Historical Society, Hartford, CT. Stedman writes, “I am provoked that Coggs. has not been promoted. men not fit to black his boots are promoted over him He deserves it + if he had a decent Colonel would get it.”
24 According to Peter Knapp of the Watkinson Library, there were no yearbooks at Trinity at this time. The photograph must have been privately produced by Stedman.
25 “Trinity’s Honor Roll for the Civil War,” Watkinson Library, Trinity College, Hartford, CT.
26 “Trinity Men Who Served in Confederate Army,” Watkinson Library, Trinity College, Hartford, CT.
education at Trinity College placed him in a special class, as many did not attend college during this time period; and prepared him for professional life.\textsuperscript{27}

After graduating from Trinity, Stedman embarked on a promising career in law at the firm of S.C. Perkins in Philadelphia. If it were not for a letter from Stedman to Charles Hoadly, written on January 31, 1861, very little would be known of this short period in Stedman's life. In the letter, Stedman wrote an extremely detailed account of his daily routine reading law and participating in mock trials.

As I told you before I am delightfully situated. Including myself there are four students in the office. . . . Picture to yourself the finest old gentleman you ever saw and you may imagine what Mr. S.H. Perkins is. . . . He questions each of us upon the titles we have read + explains by applying the principles to imaginary cases or illustrates by instances which have occurred in his own experience. During the time spent with him we learn a great deal of law. Upon every Friday evening the aforesaid griefless attorney conducts an examination with the text books, taking his questions directly from the analyses + indices of the books we actually recite all we have read during the week. . . .\textsuperscript{28}

The most poignant sentence in the letter was Stedman's declaration, "I have therefore determined to turn the coming year to the greatest possible account and at the [expiration] of it apply for admission to the bar either of old Conn. or some other sovereignty."\textsuperscript{29} In this letter, Stedman effectively related his ambitions, expectations, and prospects for his future. It was one of a series of letters written by Stedman to Hoadly, residing at the Connecticut Historical Society.

Of all of the resources, Stedman's letters were unparalleled in illuminating his personality. They were written from such places as Philadelphia, Fredericksburg, Suffolk, Newport News, and Gloucester Point. Nearly all addressed to "My dear Hoadly"\textsuperscript{30} and signed "your attached friend, Griff Stedman,"\textsuperscript{31} the letters were intimate and transmitted a range of emotions Stedman experienced as a budding law student, concerned alumnus, loyal friend, uncompromising soldier, and proud commander. In several letters, Stedman asked for news about friends in other volunteer units. In a letter written on 0812111863,
Stedman inquired about William Cogswell and Charles Conyngham (friends from Trinity), and Robert Stedman (his younger brother who joined the Navy). He wrote,

I am [provoked] that Coggs. has not been promoted -- men not fit to black his boots are promoted over him. He deserves it + if he had a decent Colonel would get it. How was Conyngham wounded. . . . Bob is ordered to St. Louis. I suppose he will go onto some gun boat. I wish he could go on some large sea going vessel . . .

Many letters requested a visit from Hoadly. On Nov. 11, 1863, from Gloucester Point, VA, Stedman wrote,

Why under the sun don’t you come down and see a fellow! You will never have a better chance - my regiment is in this place, opposite Yorktown. As you know I need not tell you that this place is historic, in that the ground we tread is sacred. But come down and see for yourself where tyranny was wounded in that iron hul of his, under which He sought to crush millions of freemen! I will show all the localities of Washington + Cornwallis fame even the shop in which old [Cornwallis] was being [shaved] when the news of Washington’s approach was brought to him.

The letter, in particular, illustrated loneliness felt by Stedman. Other letters conveyed the utter frustration Stedman felt during the early months in the military. In June, 1862, Stedman took ownership of his failing regiment and tried to improve it. He recognized the need for a commanding officer and threatened to resign if his regiment was not given a leader. Stedman wrote to Hoadly,

I write you in a fit of desperation and propose to [tax] your friendship to some extent. I see that the Governor calls for another regiment. My objective is to obtain a transfer into that or some other. I only would like my old position in the Fifth if possible but I must get out of this . . . For months the Eleventh has been without a Colonel I have not been able to perform simply the duties of Major but am looked to for the execution of duties which I have not sufficient authority properly to discharge. the circumstances of the regiment are notorious throughout the divisions and so keenly do I feel the mortification that I [shun] all officers and especially Head Quarters. I have done what I could in my position but that is little. . . . I long to belong to a regiment which shall [stand] first in its Brigade.

According to other sources, Stedman was entirely correct in his assessment of his regiment. Soon after this letter (and perhaps due to Stedman’s threat of resignation), Colonel Kingsbury was brought in to lead the regiment. Based on Stedman’s descriptions of Colonel Kingsbury in his letters, it was obvious that Stedman considered Kingsbury a role model. I found several testimonials to the effectiveness of Colonel Kingsbury. One example was the transformation of the regiment described in the Military

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32 “Trinity’s Honor Roll for the Civil War,” Watkinson Library, Trinity College, Hartford, CT. Robert Shields Stedman was an Engineer in the U.S. Navy
33 Griffin A. Stedman, Jr. to Charles J. Hoadly, 08/21/1863, Hoadly Collection, Connecticut Historical Society, Hartford, CT.
34 Griffin A. Stedman, Jr. to Charles J. Hoadly, 11/l 1/1863, Hoadly Collection, Connecticut Historical Society, Hartford, CT.
35 Griffin A. Stedman, Jr. to Charles J. Hoadly, 06/02/1862, Hoadly Collection, Connecticut Historical Society, Hartford, CT.
and Civil History of Connecticut during the War of 1861–1865. Under Colonel Kingsbury's strict rule, the 1st regiment went “from being the most disorderly and slovenly in the division . . . [to] perhaps, the cleanest and most orderly. Officers and men of other regiments crowded to witness its battalion-drills.”

Soon after Colonel Kingsbury was lost in the battle of Antietam, Stedman was promoted to Colonel of the 1st Connecticut Vols. His command of the regiment clearly followed in the footsteps of his mentor, Kingsbury. In November of 1863, the proud Stedman wrote to Hoadly about his regiment,

I consider mine the most thoroughly disciplined, and perhaps the best drilled regiment from the state. They always appear better than those they are brigaded with, . . . regiments that can not compare in any respect with mine are better known in the state. I wish you would blow a horn for us and suggest to the good community that we are not all gone, there being three hundred left: to fight.

Perhaps the most striking letter that revealed Stedman's character was written to Hoadly on January 22, 1863. Stedman described an unusual method for warming his troops, and how it backfired on him (a little).

I remember many dismal days in Hartford, but compared with this they were halcyon. . . . On account of the rain and cold, . . . I ordered a ration of whiskey to be given out but owing to my own carelessness more was distributed than I had intended. The men took it upon an empty stomach, and I need not tell you that I had some work to bring them back to camp. Fortunately more were boisterous, the liquor effected only their knees, and sadly interfered with the alignment in ranks. Considering the fault my own, I could not be angry with them, and consoled myself with the thought that none would take cold. Such the case, and I think my weakening their heads I strengthened their constitutions. but could you have seen some of them as they endeavored to keep in ranks on our way back to camp you would have considered mine a regiment of comic actors. . . . I learned the lesson cheap for the doctor reports not a single cold from the terrible exposure of those thirty hours.

This letter brought out Stedman's humor in the midst of serious concern and responsibility. While Stedman's letters to Hoadly provided a more personal view of his activities in the military, other sources offered a context for the soldier's experiences.

Shortly after Fort Sumter was attacked in April of 1861, Stedman postponed, or rather exchanged, his life as a law student for that of a soldier. From the inscription on the Camp-Field Monument, I knew of his progression from Captain to Major to Lieutenant Colonel to Colonel to Brigadier General. What I needed to understand was the nature of his military service. Where did he go? In which

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39 Griffin A. Stedman, Jr. to Charles J. Hoadly, 1/11/1863, Hoadly Collection, Connecticut Historical Society, Hartford, CT.
40 Griffin A. Stedman, Jr. to Charles J. Hoadly, 01/22/1863, Hoadly Collection, Connecticut Historical Society, Hartford, CT.
battles did he fight? How did he prove himself? One of the biggest challenges I faced, trying to research this Civil War soldier, was the utter enormity of the information pool. In February of 2003, I attended a presentation at the Connecticut State Library titled, "Finding Your Man: Connecticut's Civil War Soldiers," which highlighted research methods for studying a Civil War soldier and sources for obtaining the best information. Diana McCain, historian and author of *Connecticut's African American Soldiers in the Civil War, 17867 – 1865*, recommended first identifying the soldier's unit and then studying regimental histories. My research indicated that Stedman first joined the Washington Greys (in Philadelphia), but soon after returned to Hartford to join the First Regiment Colt's Revolving Rifles (formed by gunmaker Samuel Colt).

The Colt regiment was short-lived, and reformed into the Fifth Connecticut Volunteers, of which Stedman was appointed captain of Company I. Stedman; along with the Fifth Connecticut was mustered into service on July 22, 1861 and left Hartford amidst great fanfare on July 30th. On November 27, 1861, Stedman was commissioned Major of the Eleventh Connecticut Volunteers. With this regiment Stedman remained. To trace Stedman's steps, I focused primarily on the regimental histories of the Connecticut Fifth and Connecticut Eleventh, found in sources like *The Military and Civil History of Connecticut during the War of 1861 – 1865*, *The Record of Service of Connecticut Men in the Army and the Navy of the United States During the War of the Rebellion*, *The Annual Report of the Adjutant General of the State of Connecticut*, John Niven's *Connecticut for the Union*, and Mary Livermore's *My Story of the War*. As a member of the Connecticut Volunteers, Stedman was involved in engagements such as Newberne (March 14, 1862), Antietam (September 17, 1862), Fredericksburg (December 12 to 15, 1862), Suffolk (April 24, 1863), Swift's Creek (May 9, 1864), Drewery's Bluff (May 16, 1864), and Cold Harbor (June 3, 1864); and the siege of Petersburg (June 15 to August 6, 1864). To better comprehend these battles, I consulted books about the battles (such as James McPherson's *Crossroads of freedom: Antietam*), visited battlefields (such as Cold Harbor), interviewed park rangers, and watched documentary

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41 *The Record of Service of Connecticut Men in the Army and the Navy of the United States During the War of the Rebellion* (Hartford: Press of the Case, Lockwood & Brainard Co., 1889), p. 220. This was due to a dispute over Colt’s desire that members of his regiment enlist as regulars.


43 "Departure of the Fifth Regiment," *The Hartford Daily Courant*, 07/30/1861. According to the article, "There was another sultry summer day, another crowd upon the streets, swarming on the balconies and waving handkerchiefs from the windows, and another glistening array of armed men, . . . ."

films. As this information ranged from one to several generations removed from actual incidents, I needed to be very careful about relying on that data. The most helpful and trustworthy resource for pinpointing Stedman’s military activity was the online *Official Records of the War of the Rebellion*. This site assisted me in locating reports written by, and about, Stedman. These reports, written from the field, shed light on Stedman’s knowledge of military maneuvers and the situations in which he was engaged.

The abovementioned mix of historical documentation enabled me to study Stedman’s endurance of the enemy’s heavy fire, an aide de camp’s poor direction, and injury during the advance on Antietam bridge, as well as his command leading the charge through a vicious crossfire at Cold Harbor, described in the second part of this paper. It also clarified Stedman’s final days at Petersburg.

In order to understand the circumstances surrounding Stedman’s death, I consulted the historical documents and also visited Petersburg National Battlefield Park. According to the *Adjutant-General’s Report*,

> On the 5th of August, Colonel Stedman’s Brigade was called to the front line by an attempt of the rebels to blow up a fort near the Hare House by a mine. Colonel Stedman, though long unwell from continued exposure in the field, was in command. He was struck by a random shot in the side, causing a very painful and mortal wound, and on the following morning at a few minutes past 7 o’clock, that most heroic, accomplished and patriotic officer died.

This account was supported by the documentation in the *Official Records*. In addition to mentioning the mine explosion and Stedman’s injury, the reports indicated a drive to promote Stedman. Wrote General Benjamin F. Butler to Hon. E.M. Stanton, Secretary of War,

> [at 6:30pm] yesterday the enemy sprang a small mine in front of the Eighteenth Corps, near Petersburg, about forty yards in front of our works. They did not make an assault. A fresh artillery fire was opened along the whole of our line. The casualties small. I regret to say that Colonel Stedman, Eleventh Connecticut, is dangerously wounded. I beg leave to renew my application that he receive promotion by brevet for gallant and meritorious services.

The promotion was accepted. Ultimately, Stedman’s military career was best summed up by Maj. Gen. Edward O. C. Ord, U.S. Army commanding Eighteenth Army Corps,

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45 Griffin A. Stedman, Jr., “Report on Antietam,” Watkinson Library, Trinity College, Hartford, CT.
46 A visit to Petersburg National Battlefield that included a tour of the Crater provided much needed information about the nature of a mine explosion. Stedman received his fatal wound while reconnoitering after such an explosion.
[w]e lost one of the finest officers of this corps, Col. G. A. Stedman, commanding Second Brigade, Ames' division, who was mortally wounded while in company with General Ames reconnoitering the ground and preparing to meet any attempt of the enemy assault.\footnote{49}

Thus ended the military career, and promising life, of Griffin A. Stedman, Jr. Shortly after Stedman was killed, the Hartford Courant reported,

\begin{quote}
Thus in the morning of life, having entered upon a career full of glorious promise, Col. Stedman has been stricken down. Richly endowed with those generous and attractive qualities that endear one to his associates, Col. Stedman leaves a large circle of friends who will deeply mourn his loss.\footnote{50}
\end{quote}

Stedman's remains were returned to Connecticut and a grand funeral took place in New London, CT, on August, 13, 1864.\footnote{51} Thereafter, for weeks, months, and years, commemorations to honor the fallen soldier, and Hartford native, appeared. A few examples follow.

Fort Stedman, Petersburg, VA.\footnote{52}
Commemorative flag presented to the Eleventh Connecticut Volunteers from Julia A. Beach, “in memory of the pure and valorous Commander, Colonel and Brigadier General Griffin A. Steadman, Jr. fallen before Petersburg, August 6th, 1864.”

Stedman’s gravemarker at Cedar Hill Cemetery, Hartford, Connecticut.


57 Griffin A. Steedman, Jr. Monument, Cedar Hill Cemetery, Hartford, CT. Photograph taken by Suzanne M. Mittica, 04/16/2003. According to records from Cedar Hill Cemetery, the date of Stedman’s interment is May 20, 1875.
The Camp-Field Monument, Hartford, Connecticut. Ron Bolin, who currently portrays Stedman for school groups touring the Old State House.

Other commemorations included the Stedman Post No. 22 of the Grand Army of the Republic, Stedman Street, and the Gen. Griffin A. Stedman Jr., Memorial Scholarship at Trinity College. James Deetz classified objects like these as material culture, "that sector of our physical environment that we modify through culturally determined behavior." The description on the Camp-Field Monument, when compared to Stedman's real life, exposed a dimension between representation and reality. The next part of this paper explores the cultural forces that inspired a particular representation of Stedman.

58 "THE INAUGURATION in Hartford, Thursday, October fourth, 1900, of the CAMP-FIELD MONUMENT," Trinity College Bulletin, Vol. 1, No. III. Watkinson Library, Trinity College, Hartford, CT. On October 4th, 1900, a crowd of citizens, dignitaries, and veterans of various Connecticut Volunteer Regiments gathered to dedicate this monument which commemorates their service during the Civil War and honors Stedman in particular.
59 Camp-Field Monument, Hartford, CT. Photograph taken by Suzanne M. Mittica, 04/16/2003.
60 Ron Bolin, of the Old State House, Hartford CT. Photograph taken by Suzanne Mittica on 04/12/2003.
63 "Scholarship Honors Hero of the Civil War," Newspaper clipping, Watkinson Library, Trinity College, Hartford, CT. This scholarship was established by Stedman's niece Mabel Johnson in the 1950s.
The first part of this paper discusses my investigation into Griffin A. Stedman, Jr., and details the process of exploring his family, education, career, military service, and untimely death. By focusing exclusively on the man, I am able to establish Stedman as a patriotic individual who emerged from Hartford’s elite to become a leader in the Connecticut volunteer regiments. What more can be learned from a study of “one of Connecticut’s best and bravest sons”\(^6\)? A clue is present in a letter written on May 2, 1881 by Stedman. In his description of a slave woman who works as the staff laundress, Stedman explains, “[s]he considers me her knight and says that she knows the Major will not see her imposed upon that as long as she can be near the Major she feels safe.”\(^6\) In this one statement, Stedman acknowledges and, arguably, prides himself in his role as the woman’s guardian. Stedman’s words imply his vision of himself; and they are not chosen at random. A fellow soldier recalls conversations with Stedman.

How late we used to sit talking of the world and its manners, . . . How we tried to discuss that exquisite politeness, that delicate chivalry, which graced the last days of Francis, old Regime, and that wonderful spirit of devotion, and consistent purity which characterized the days of Knighthood. These were favorite themes with the Colonel.\(^6\)

Interestingly, themes like gallantry and chivalry, so favored by Stedman, also appear in the writings of his contemporaries – most strikingly in commemorations to fallen soldiers. What is the significance of the metamorphosis of New England soldiers into gallant knights? The second part of this paper seeks to answer this question. To do so, it considers the cultural climate of antebellum America, reveals the

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\(^6\) I respectfully borrow the title from Mark Twain’s 1889 classic to introduce the cultural basis for representations of Stedman. I will introduce Stedman as a Connecticut Yankee quite different from Twain’s Hank Morgan.


\(^6\) Griffin A. Stedman, Jr. to Charles J. Hoadly, 05/02/1 862, Hoadly Collection, Connecticut Historical Society, Hartford, CT.

development of two regional stereotypes: the Southern Cavalier and the Northern Yankee, and connects them to the actions of New England student soldiers and words of their commemorators. It proposes that New England, troubled by unflattering components of the Yankee stereotype, found in its student soldiers (like Stedman) material to boost its self-image.

Existing scholarship suggests that Stedman’s America was the product of a culturally estranged North and South. According to Susan Grant,

"from the Revolution that they had in common, North and South constructed separate, contradictory ideologies increasingly at odds with each other. In time, North and South came to see in the other a threat to the American national ideal. Each side accused the other of betraying the legacy of the Founding Fathers and denying the sacrifice of the revolutionary generation."

Out of this tension emerge two regionally charged assertions of fulfillment of the democratic vision of the country’s founders and, subsequently, the condensation of the agrarian South and the industrious North into two character types: the Cavalier and the Yankee.

The Cavalier, identified by William Taylor in his book Cavalier & Yankee: The Old South and American National Character, is a product of antebellum America mythmaking. He is descended from William the Conqueror and the Norman knights,” related to Thomas Jefferson, “the product of an aristocratic and chivalric Virginia,” and incarnated in Southern planters. James McPherson explains,

"planters subscribed to the code of chivalry with its requirements of honor, courtesy, gallantry toward women, and noblesse oblige. This helps to explain the popularity of Sir Walter Scott’s novels in the South: the planter class could identify with the knights of Ivanhoe and the Scottish aristocrats of the Waverly novels."

Perhaps its mythical heritage inspired Southern interest in the military. McPherson notes,

"The martial spirit seemed to be stronger in the South than in the North. . . . More Southern than Northern volunteers fought in the Mexican War. . . . From 1841 to 1861 the general in chief of the U.S. army was a Southerner. During the 1850s, two of three brigadier generals and all but one commander of the army’s geographical divisions were natives of the South. All four secretaries of war from 1849 to 1860 were Southerners."

On the eve of the Civil War, the Cavalier is powered by a grand ethos and military experience. Opposing the symbolism and strength of the Southern image is its foil, its Northern counterpart, the Yankee.

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Like the Cavalier, the Yankee, is identified by William Taylor as product of antebellum America mythmaking. He is descended from the conquered English Saxon, related to John Adams, who represents “the Puritanical spirit of a New England, and is embodied by New Englanders. Taylor writes, “the acquisative man, the man on the make, became inseparably associated with the North and especially New England. In the end, the Yankee -- for so he became known -- was thought to be as much the product of the North as the planter--Cavalier of the South.”” As the characterization was applied, however, greater emphasis was placed on greed than ambition. In his book, The Inner Civil War: Northern Intellectuals and the Crisis of the Union, George M. Frederickson notes, “prewar Northerners with a concern for ‘gentility’ had often smarted under Southern attacks on the commercial basis of Northern society and had been disturbed by the comparison of the ‘Yankee,’ allegedly obsessed with the pursuit of wealth, with the Southern ‘Cavalier,’ who had a true sense of aristocratic life.” On the eve of the Civil War, New Englanders, in particular, are facing a burdening stereotype in addition to the army of the Confederacy. The transition from “acquisative man” to effective soldier is not a smooth one. Theoretically, the Northern Yankee, when compared to the Southern Cavalier, does not have the right stuff. Understandably, there is retaliation against this idea present in the actions of a group of New England student soldiers, and in the commemorations of those who celebrate them.

It is nearly impossible to comprehend the courage and dedication of soldiers who set aside their own interests to fight, and sometimes die, for their country. William Cogswell said of Stedman, “without ever a thought of a military career, engaged in preparation for a professional calling, polished in manner and surrounded by all the attractions which make life inviting, he, when the flag was threatened, like thousands of his countrymen rallied to its support.” Several young men who shared Stedman’s social status and college education, also parallel his service to the Union. Some scholars suggest that these

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79 On average, on-third of the students from New England colleges served in the war. From Trinity, 76 served.
young men find, in the Civil War, an extraordinary opportunity to participate in an important event. Frederickson writes,

"[t]he young intellectuals who fought seem to have agreed that the war had rescued them from an aimless literary or scholarly existence. . . . It was not so much a change in the national character that was signified, however, as a change in the attitude of the gentleman-intellectual toward society and active life. . . . He was ready to make an heroic effort to find his place in the America that was coming into being."

Another in the corps of New England gentleman soldiers, quite similar to Stedman, is Henry Ward Camp. From Hartford, college educated (from Yale), and reading law (with Hon. John Hooker)\(^82\) at the outbreak of the Civil War, Camp wastes little time in joining the 10\(^{th}\) Connecticut regiment. The eagerness with which both men serve is evident in their writings. Following are excerpts from letters written by the new soldiers early into the war.

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We groan in spirit of having to stay here [New-Berne] while the fight at Richmond is so fierce, . . . Nothing else that the war can bring forth will furnish cause for so proud a satisfaction as to have thrown one's weight into the scale while the balance yet trembled.\(^83\)

We have little expectation of an early advance -- for every thing we know to the contrary this will be our spot for the summer and except that I desire to see more active service I should be quite content to remain here.\(^84\)
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Henry Ward Camp does "not wish to pass through this epoch of grand events without participating in them. . . ."\(^85\) Neither does Griffin A. Stedman, Jr. Both young men achieve success in the military; they are members of a group of New England "Brahmins [that] had been tested in battle at places like Ball's Bluff, Antietam, Fredericksburg, and Gettysburg and removed all doubts of their vigor and character."\(^86\) Stedman's actions at Cold Harbor, in particular, reveal his leadership and military capabilities.

In 1864, Stedman is a Colonel in the 2nd Brigade of the 2nd Division of the 18th Army Corps.\(^87\) At 4:30 in the morning, on June 3\(^{rd}\), Grants offensive at a crossroads just outside of Richmond, called

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84 Griffin A. Stedman, Jr. to Charles J. Hoadley, 05/02/1862, Hoadly Collection, Connecticut Historical Society, Hartford, CT.
Cold Harbor, begins. Within minutes of the commencement of the attack, Stedman’s brigade becomes caught in a deadly cross-fire. Gordon Rhea describes,

"[a]s they emerged into the field, the soldiers of Stedman’s lead regiment, the 12th New Hampshire, tried to discern the contours of the rebel position. ‘A line of breastworks runs zig-zag; one in front, the other on our left,’ a New Hampshire soldier noted. We cannot see a man in these works, for a dense cloud of battle smoke rests all along the line.’ Law’s Alabamians, however, could see the approaching Federals clearly."

Desperately trying to survive, the men resorted to digging trenches. In his official report, Stedman describes them as, "... under a heavy fire, losing many officers and men. In this position they threw up, with cup, plate, and bayonet, an infantry parapet of considerable strength." In a later report, Stedman lauds his troops.

Immediately a heavy fire of musketry was poured upon the whole left flank, mingled with grape and canister. So intense was this flank fire as to confuse the rear and push it constantly to the right, but with determined bravery the column pushed on over a perfectly open and level field, which is considered the most effective obstacle that can be opposed to advancing troops. . . . I must respectfully beg the general commanding to consider the extreme difficulty of success against the obstacles with which the brigade contended, and the bravery and gallantry of the troops will be acknowledged.

For Stedman’s leadership during this battle, he is recommended for a promotion to brevet general.

Brigadier General John H. Martindale writes,

"[t]he principal labor of superintending and constructing these intrenchments was devolved on Colonel Stedman, commanding Second Brigade. He demonstrated his practical knowledge as an engineer in the construction of these intrenchments. For his conduct during these operations, and which has been uniformly excellent during all the time he has been under my command, I take this occasion to recommend him for promotion to the rank of brigadier general. This is due him for his services, and is especially desirable to establish him against all contingencies in the command of his brigade."

This documentation is critical in showing that Stedman is recommended for promotion based on his ability, rather than social status. Interestingly, Stedman was aware of this recommendation, but reports the following to Charles Hoadly.

A matter of considerable interest to me is that a recommendation from Gen’l Martindale strongly endorsed by Gen’l Smith and Butler is now before the War Dept. for my promotion to the part of Brigadier General. It is my second recommendation which has gone forward for me. . . . the paper will no doubt be pigeonholed by the President. But I am quite satisfied to serve knowing that in

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the eyes of all my superiors, and these good soldiers and judges, I am qualified and by my services have earned it.  

Stedman is one of many New England student soldiers who defy the selfish and non-soldierly figure of the Yankee. In his interpretation of James Russell Lowell’s “Commemoration Ode,” Fredericksen writes, "[the] martial valor of these former scholars, he proclaimed proudly, had disproved the belief of Southern ‘Cavaliers’ in the plebeian origins of Yankee ‘Roundheads’ and demonstrated once again that ‘the best blood’ is that which ‘hath the most iron in it." A new image of the New Engander is being cultivated.

On June 4th, 1864 (the day after Cold Harbor), the seasoned and sensitive Stedman assures his mother, “God has protected me wonderfully. I have seven ball holes through my clothing but am untouched." A month and two days after writing this letter, Stedman receives a mortal wound and dies in Petersburg. It is a great blow to the Hartford community. In the days, weeks, and years following Stedman’s death, recollections of his life and reflections on his death fill newspapers, speeches, and commemorative items. Those grieving him want to share him, and utilize chivalric imagery to give his life meaning. A few examples follow.

Our association determined that if within our means, this monument should be surmounted by a portrait statue of some typical Connecticut Volunteer, . . . We readily and unanimously decided upon that of General Griffin A. Stedman, a Hartford boy of Revolutionary soldier ancestry, who completed his education here at Trinity College, . . .

This statue [the Camp-Field Monument] is faithful, but cannot convey to you the indescribable something in his bearing and manner by which you realized that you had met a man. It fails to disclose the kindly smile that made you feel a welcome words cannot express. He was strong of heart and true of purpose, and withal tender as a woman; self-reliant, but always considerate of others.

He was an aristocrat in the noblest acceptance of the term, when aristocrats were the representatives of mental power and culture, of moral strength and purity, of grand aims and lofty deeds, and of the most exquisite sentiments perpetuated in the pages of romance. Conceive Tennyson’s Sir Galahad, or any of King Arthur’s mail-clad champions; imagine Kingsley’s Francis Leigh, or any of Queen Elizabeth’s pure and chivalrous courtiers; conjure up, in short, a nature with the purity, delicacy, and innocence of a maiden, bound to the valor, firmness, and power of a hero, a hundred charming weaknesses blended with adamantine strength of principle, an elegance of thought that did not impair the mind’s inexorable firmness, an affectionate disposition that lessened not the strength of character, a number of iron qualities bound together with

91 Griffin A. Stedman, Jr. to Charles J. Hoadly, July 12, 1864, Hoadly Collection, Connecticut Historical Society, Hartford, CT.
93 Griffin A. Stedman, Jr. to his mother, June 4, 1864, Watkinson Library, Trinity College, Hartford, CT.
garlands of roses, -- and you have an idea with what eyes I viewed him to whom I bowed in the
fullness of my hero worship.69

The language, rich with imagery, found in commemorations to Stedman is strikingly similar to that in a
book called The Knightly Soldier, written by Chaplain H.C. Trumbull. The book, published in 1892, is a
biography of Henry Ward Camp whose life (described earlier), and sacrifice, resemble that of Stedman. It
discusses Camp's experiences at Yale College and his life as a soldier in command of Company D of the
Connecticut 10th Regiment. Most significantly, it contains testimonials to Camp's character. A few
examples follow.

“For my part, I believe him to have been as good a man as was George Washington in his youth, . . . .”

“I can conceive nothing knightlier than Henry Camp, the soldier. All the graces of valor, loyalty,
and generosity must have set upon him, and made him the very flower of our heroic youth.”

“He is deeply mourned by all who knew him, a gentleman, a soldier, and a Christian.”

“Brave and cool in every emergency, of spotless character and refined intellectual culture, he was
one of the brightest ornaments of the volunteer service, -- a soldier ‘without fear and without
reproach’.”

Worthy of note is the consistency with which these two student soldiers are presented. Connection to the
Founding Fathers, and themes of purity, refinement, and gallantry are stressed. Ironically, as Kirk
Savage points out, “[t]hese kinds of juxtapositions -- King Arthur and ideal womanhood, power and beauty
-were commonly invoked to suggest the visible range of human virtues synthesized in the single figure of
[Robert E.] Lee, . . . “91 In presenting the New England soldiers in a fashion similar to the epitome of the
Southern Cavalier, New Englanders are declaring themselves a formidable match. Furthermore, the
gentleman qualities and military accomplishments of New England's student soldiers are provided as
evidence to boost the Yankee image from selfish profiteer to noble caretaker of America.

Douglas Eliason writes, “despite the achievements of his short life, it was the potential that
Stedman showed which made him so appealing to so many. He was so young and so promising, both in

without reproach” is the exact language on Stedman’s grave marker
74 Kirk Eugene Savage, “Race, Memory, and Identity: The National Monuments of the Union and the
military and civil life, that he was the perfect representative for those lost in the war. Interestingly, Stedman's extraordinary life and chivalric commemoration merged to demonstrate what was gained in the war. A restored union and a refurbished New England — quite an accomplishment for a Connecticut Yankee.

In conclusion, my research into the life and commemoration of Griffin A. Stedman, Jr. proved to be a valuable experience that provided insight into the history and culture of the Civil War. My pursuit of Stedman took me to the Trinity College Library, Watkinson Library, Connecticut State Library, Cedar Hill Cemetery, Connecticut Historical Society, Old State House, Cold Harbor National Battlefield, Petersburg National Battlefield, and various Internet sites. The materials I encountered confirmed some early impressions and also offered surprises. More often than not, existing questions were answered with new ones. Overall, I discovered the process for researching a Civil War soldier from Hartford and, most significantly, that there are several places and resources to tap. Special thanks goes to Peter Knapp of the Watkinson Library, Gerry Caughman of the State Capitol, and Irene McHugh of Cedar Hill Cemetery — their approachability and expertise regarding their collections provided valuable assistance to me.

For further research on the topic of Stedman, I would access the original service records of Union and Confederate Civil War Soldiers maintained at the National Archives Building in Washington, DC. I would also visit Antietam National Battlefield and other sites where Stedman was engaged.

103 1st Regt. Conn. Inf. National Flag, Accession Number: 1990-000-004-A, Connecticut State Capitol, Hartford, Connecticut. Reproduction of photograph taken in the Connecticut State Capitol's Visual Flag Survey, July 18, 1990. The story of 1st Regiment's battle colors is as mysterious as it is fascinating. Some time during the war (most likely in 1864) the original flag was embroidered with battle names, furled, and sewn together with a new flag. Perhaps for sentimental reasons, both flags were carried into battle.