



The Civil War and Montgomery

This is our first Town Meeting since the 150th anniversary of the start of the Civil War in April 2011.

It's fair to say every family in Montgomery was affected by the war. In 1806 Nathan Haile was born in Acton, Massachusetts. He grew up and married Mary Ann Tarbell (Tarble) and moved with her to Montgomery in 1826 where the population was less than 400. He was a farmer, and Mary Ann was a farm wife and mother. They lived on today's Rushford Valley Rd. just past the intersection of Regan Rd. Mary would give birth to five children over the next 12 years. Their youngest, Charles, arrived in these hills in September of 1842.

The Hailes probably lived a normal, peaceful farm life but trouble was on the horizon, and in July of 1861 President Lincoln would issue his second requisition to the States. Lincoln called for the States to supply the Union Army with half a million men under this requisition and Vermont would respond by forming the 2nd through 6th Regiments of Vermont Volunteers which included 27 men from Montgomery.

Vermont's first regiments were comprised mostly of three year volunteers and Charles Haile joined up. He was 18 and enlisted on September 4th. He would eventually travel to Camp Holbrook, a converted farm field just north of St Albans' present downtown (near the Vermont Federal Credit Union), mustering into the 5th Regiment of Vermont Volunteers, an infantry unit, with 11 fellow Montgomerians on Sept 16th. He would turn 19 there.

His unit received orders to move to Washington and they departed St Albans on September 23rd. There were just over 1,000 men and they filled two trains. They traveled to New Haven, CT and transferred to a steamer ship which operated in Long Island Sound and took them to Jersey City, NJ where they then boarded trains again for the final leg to Washington, DC. They arrived on the 25th and spent the night in a large and empty building used as transient quarters.

The Following is from the "Vermont in the Civil War" the 1888 history by George Grenville Benedict;

"The next day the regiment marched out to Camp Casey, on Capitol Hill, then covered with the tents of the army as far as the eye could reach. On the 27th the regiment had a tedious march of seven hours in a driving rain, to Chain Bridge. The distance was only eight miles; but the guide, becoming confused in the darkness, led the regiment out of its way, and it was after ten o'clock at night when the men lay down to rest on the wet ground

without supper or shelter. The regiment went into camp the next day at Camp Advance, on the Virginia side of the river, close by the camps of the Second and Third regiments. Here it remained ten days, devoted chiefly to drill and felling of the woods near the camps. On the 9th of October, the Fifth moved out to Smoot's Hill, so called from its former secessionist owner;—and went into camp at “Camp Griffin,” surrounded by the camps of the Second, Third and Fourth regiments, and with the camps of nearly the whole of General Smith's division, of some twenty thousand men, in sight from the top of the hill.

Not a little impatience and anxiety prevailed at this time in the regiment over the delay in the clothing and equipment. Three companies were as yet without muskets, and all without overcoats. The weather, fortunately, was not severe; and during the last half of October, coats, overcoats and under clothing were received and distributed, and the deficiency in arms supplied.”

Life in the military during the Civil War was hazardous, not only from combat, but from disease and exposure in the camps. Disease killed more soldiers than any other cause. In the Union Army 4 men died from sickness for every 1 man killed in battle, and deaths from disease were double those resulting from all other causes. According to an article on “Civil War Medicine” by Janet King, “Camps populated by young soldiers who had never before been exposed to a large variety of common contagious diseases were plagued by outbreaks of measles, chickenpox, mumps, and whooping cough. A simple cold often developed into pneumonia, which was the third leading killer by disease during the war, after typhoid and dysentery.”

Charles Haile’s regiment was particularly unlucky in this regard. Quoting Benedict again;

“During the fine October weather, the men were exercised in frequent drills and, largely by the efforts of Lieut. Colonel Grant... the regiment was brought into an excellent condition of drill and discipline.

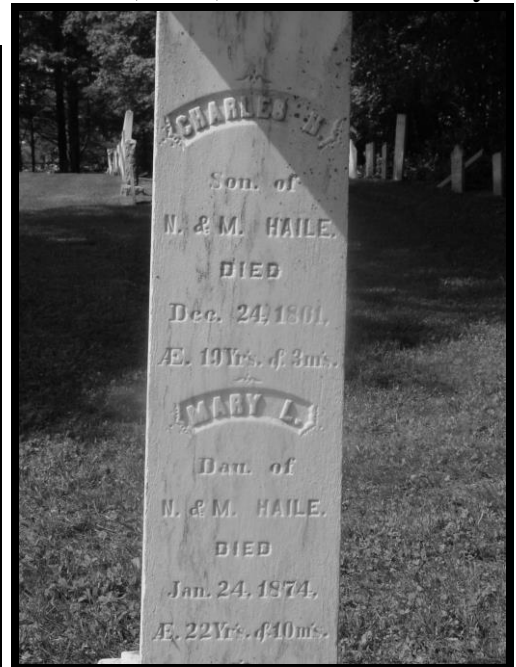
With November came cold nights and frequent rains which soon affected the health of the command. On the 10th of November, the morning report showed 250 men... excused from duty on account of sickness, seventy of them being in hospital with typhoid and other fevers, and measles. Several deaths occurred. The hospital tents were overcrowded with patients, and the sicker men were removed to a deserted mansion, two miles from camp.

The picket duty was lessened; and untiring efforts and care were exercised by the surgeons and officers to promote the health of the men; but the illness and mortality continued to be alarming. Up to the 23rd of November the deaths numbered seventeen.

From that time on, however, the health of the men gradually improved, and though there were occasional relapses, in times of exceptionally bad weather, the remainder of the

winter was passed in comparative health and comfort, and with no harder service than occasional picket duty.”

Montgomery’s Charles Haile would not be so lucky. He died just three months after arriving in Washington on Christmas eve from an unspecified disease. He hadn’t seen battle and wouldn’t see his 20th birthday. Charles Haile was the first soldier from Montgomery to die in the Civil War. He is interred in the lower (older) Center Cemetery.



Twenty five years later in May 1886, Montgomery veterans would join a growing national movement, establishing Vermont Post 95 of the Grand Army of the Republic or GAR. They would honor Charles Haile by naming their Post after him.

Similar to today’s American Legion, the GAR advocated for veterans, widows and orphans and tried to look out for each other in their day to day life. They played a key role in the creation of a national day of remembrance, Memorial Day.

Montgomery’s Charles Haile Post 95 organized the first formal Memorial Day commemoration in town 125 years ago, and for many years thereafter it was a much anticipated event. Memorial Day in Montgomery usually started in the morning when veterans and townspeople would meet on the Village Green and form up. The East Berkshire band would play music. Everyone would then proceed to the Village Cemetery where a memorial service was held and people would walk the cemetery decorating the graves with flowers, flags, and ribbons.

Then at noon the whole thing would repeat, forming up at the Center Common near the Baptist Church (the normal meeting place of Post 95) and then marching down Main Street to the Center Cemetery. There were usually decorated floats, and food, and speakers after the cemetery services as well.

Montgomery's population at the start of the Civil War was 1,260, about the same as it is today. According to U.S. Army regimental records, 103 men from Montgomery enlisted in the Union Army. Five were killed in action and 14 died while in the service. There are 69 Union Army veterans buried in our cemeteries.

According to the "Vermont Civil War" organization there were nearly 160 individuals born in, credited to, or buried in Montgomery that served in the Civil War. Of them, the youngest was 14 the oldest were 45. The average age was 25, while the median was just 22 (the 14 year old lied about his age.)

Principal Sources:

www.vermontcivilwar.org

"History of Franklin and Grand Isle Counties" by Lewis Cass Aldrich, 1891

"Montgomery, VT: A History of a Town" by Sara Taylor and W.R. Branthoover, 1990

"Civil War Medicine" by Janet King, RN, BSN, CCRN.

"Vermont in the Civil War" by George Grenville Benedict, 1888.

Wikipedia – Disease in the Civil War

Montgomery Historical Society Archives

Vital Records, Town Of Montgomery



Provided courtesy of the
Montgomery Historical Society
P.O. Box 47
Montgomery, VT 05470

Our Mission is to:

- preserve Pratt Hall, artifacts, structures and memorabilia of historical interest to residents of Montgomery and friends of the area;
- provide a venue for local exhibits and for artisans to share their talents;
- sponsor programs that assist in preserving town history and cultural events; and
- award scholarships to students on an annual basis.

How Can You Help?

- Become a member. Annual membership dues start at \$25, and beside the satisfaction of contributing to a great, local cause, it includes newsletters, discounts, and more. Members with TD Bank accounts can designate the MHS as their Affinity charity and the Bank will donate to the Society annually at no cost to the member.

- Volunteer time, materials, services or donate cash.
- Donate artifacts from Montgomery's history.
- Tell us your story.
- Designate the MHS as a beneficiary in your will or estate planning.

We appreciate your help in preserving our shared heritage.
Thank you.