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Quilts for Civil War Soldiers from Peacham, Vermont

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Letters and diaries written by people of Peacham, Vermont—both soldiers in the Union Army and women at home—put a personal face on the Civil War. The boys, as soldiers were called then, requested quilts from home to keep them warm through cold nights and to remind them of "days past." Mothers, sisters, and wives sent boxes with quilts to their male relatives. Ladies' aid societies also provided needed articles including shirts, sheets, "footings" [stockings], and quilts for army hospitals via the U. S. Sanitary Commission and the U. S. Christian Commission, as reported by local newspapers. In these ways, quilts comforted soldiers and created a connection with home. Making quilts also allowed women to actively participate in the war effort. First-hand accounts compellingly express the personal stories behind the Civil War.

Introduction

During the Civil War, women made quilts for Union soldiers stationed far from home. These quilts were sent from individual family homes and farms or through local ladies' aid societies and the two national civilian organizations providing relief to the soldiers, the U. S. Sanitary Commission and the U. S. Christian Commission. In total, historian Virginia Gunn estimates, Northern women provided 250,000 quilts to soldiers and hospitals from the beginning of the conflict in 1861 through the final days in 1865.[1] Although few Civil War quilts

remain today, letters and diaries of soldiers—words which put a personal face on this tragedy—are preserved in libraries and historical societies across the country. In addition, women at home also made entries in diaries describing their quilting, and some wrote letters. If those letters were sent to soldiers, few remain as soldiers kept their packs light. This essay describes the requests for quilts which came from soldiers born and raised in Peacham, a town founded in 1776 and located in the northern hills of Vermont (see figure 1).

Peacham, Vermont, at Mid-Nineteenth Century

In the 1860 census, Peacham recorded a population of 1,247. From this town, 122 men went to war to save the Union and abolish slavery. Ernest Bogart in his history of Peacham listed the men, or "boys" as they were then called, with their enlistment dates, changes in rank, and final acts—either discharge or death. Two-thirds of the Peacham solders lost their lives during the struggle, claimed Bogart, but only eight were killed or mortally wounded in battle. The rest died as a result of poor conditions in camps, hospitals, and Confederate prisons.[2] Almost all soldiers complained of these conditions, and those families who did not receive first-hand news from the camps could read about the deprivations in the letters written by a Vermont schoolteacher-turned-soldier, Wilbur Fisk, to Montpelier's *Green Mountain Freeman* which were reprinted in many local Vermont newspapers.[3] Among these was *The Caledonian*, a weekly published in St. Johnsbury, which covered the war activities of soldiers from Caledonian County, including Peacham. Each issue provided detailed descriptions of conditions in army camps and hospitals, and often carried pleas for materials such as bandages, blankets, sheets, and quilts to be made locally for the men away. When boxes were sent South from the St. Johnsbury railroad depot, *The Caledonian* listed their contents, commending the women who made materials for the comfort of the soldiers.[4] Personal letters and local newspapers often provide good sources for studying Civil War quilts.

Of the five Peacham soldiers whose letters have been preserved,

Figure 1. Scene of rural Peacham community with Congregational and Methodist churches in center, ca. 1900. From the author's collection.

three specifically requested quilts from home, another two men were mentioned as part of the quilt request, and one wrote of taking a friend's quilt after his death. When writing to fathers and male relatives, these soldiers concentrated on army leadership, battles, and the alarming number of deaths. When writing to mothers and women relatives, they described the cold and damp sleeping quarters, the poor food, and expressed fond memories of home. It was in these letters to mothers, wives, and sisters that requests for quilts were made. There was overlap, of course, as some soldiers wrote to both parents in one letter, but even in these letters, the requests for quilts were made directly to "Marm," as mothers were often called then. Quilts were mainly requested during the winter months when the weather was cold and soldiers were settled in permanent quarters, as quilts were not easily transferred from camp to camp and were impossible to carry during marching or in battle.

Quilting in Peacham

During the years leading up to the Civil War, Peacham farm women often made quilts. Some had won premiums at the annual county agricultural fair where "bed quilts" was a regular category with twenty-five cents awarded the winner. In 1856 Mrs. Jacob Way won for "Best

Figure 2. Album quilt made about 1850 for a Peacham woman going West; signatures include Mercy Blanchard Hooker, mother to Hazen Hooker; Catherine Blanchard Wheeler, mother to Austin Wheeler; Clarissa Blanchard Brown, aunt to both Dustan Walbridge and Isaac Watts. Quilt in Textile Collection of the Peacham Historical Association. Photograph from the author's collection.

bed quilt—silk" and Miss E. Sargeant for "Best bed quilt—fine work." A year later the "Best silk quilt" was awarded to Miss Sarah Chamberlin and the "Best patchwork quilt" to Sophia Wheeler. In 1861 the "Best bed quilt pieced by Miss Laura May Gilfillan of Peacham, a child less than 4 years," won the premium.[5] Quilting was a task learned early by Peacham girls, and outstanding quilting by women and girls of all ages was rewarded at the annual fairs.

Peacham diary and letter writers noted quilting as a matter of course for women. In 1849 when sisters Chastina and Sarah Walbridge married, each made a "pink and white quilt," as recorded in Chastina's diary.[6] When children went away from home for an extended period, mothers made quilts for them to take, as Roxana Watts did in 1856 when her step-son Lyman went to Middlebury College.[7] When a loved one, especially a woman relative, moved West, an album quilt made by her friends and family might be tucked in her trunk. Such a quilt was given to a woman from the Blanchard family when she left Peacham (see figure 2). The quilt's date can be identified roughly because two women signed their blocks with their birth names; one married shortly after 1848 and the other in 1851, indicating the blocks were made before their names changed. The names on the squares—Blanchards, Browns, Hookers, and Wheelers—identify the quilters but unfortunately the name of the departing friend is not known today.[8] With Peacham women known for their quilting, it can be no surprise that boys suffering in army camp wrote home requesting quilts for warmth and, maybe also for a touch of home, or as one Peacham soldier put it, "perhaps you can send one that has shielded me from the cold in days past" (see figure 3).

Camp Conditions—Cold, Disease and Discomfort

The need for blankets haunted most of the soldiers throughout the war, but especially in the early years before supplies were well distributed. Addison Preston of the First Vermont Calvary Regiment wrote in the fall of 1861 to his mother in Danville, the town just north of Peacham, that the soldiers "suffer with cold" and have "slept in a shantee on straw with one blanket a piece." He concluded, "It comes pretty hard

Figure 3. In this September 5, 1863 letter to his parents in Peacham, Hazen Hooker requested a quilt. Courtesy of the Peacham Historical Association.

for the boys."[9] Wilbur Fisk of Tunbridge, Vermont, described the daily routine he and fellow soldiers followed, detailing in particular the poor sleeping conditions of the men as in February 1862 when the wind blew down their tents in camp in Virginia and a few months later on a march near West Point where the muddy ground served as their bed with rain "pattering constantly" their faces.[10]

One of the most eloquent letter writers was Hazen B. Hooker who enlisted from Peacham in August 1862, three months before his twentieth birthday (see figure 4). He had been warned by his cousin,

Figure 4. Hazen Hooker, detail from a group photograph with his fellow army volunteers, 1861. Courtesy of the Peacham Historical Association.

Sanford O. Hooker, who upon hearing that Hazen was preparing to enlist, wrote in February 1862 from Camp Ligel, Virginia:

> I will take the liberty to give you a word of advice if you are to commence a term in the military life. First is to be very carefull what you eat and drink for *this* is an evil that causes more deaths in the Army than powder and bullets . . . And never go out to stop over night [on guard duty] without your woolen and Rubber blankets for you have got to be carefull of your health. Out here if you get cold or do not feel very well you cannot go to a kind mother and get something fixed to cure you.[11]

In his first letter to his parents and younger brother in Peacham dated September 25, 1862, Hazen described what he found after his regiment reached Camp Ellsworth, near Alexandria, Virginia:

> We do not have so soft a bed to lay upon as we did at home. Last night we slept on the ground with nothing over us but the starry heavens and our

> blankets. I waked up about two or three O-clock and my blanket was most wet through by the dew. I was a little cold about that time, but pulled my blanket over my head and went to sleep . . . The nights are cool enough so we should not be any to warm with a sheet and two quilts if we were in Peacham, Vt.[12]

Hazen continued the theme of cold nights in his second letter home, written on October 21, 1862, updating his parents on camp conditions:

> We are having first rate times have enough to eat and drink and to wear day times but nights come rather hard. We have had half tents which we put down in the form of the letter A. We hang up a blanket at one end and let the other be open we lye with our heads upon our knapsacks a blanket and our overcoats over us. If we had a blanket to lay under we should be warm enough, but the ground is damp and cold and the wind blows under the tent so it makes it rather uncomfortable. But it is nothing more than I expected . . . anyone that enlists to go to war must expect to see hard times.[13]

Another Peacham soldier, Benjamin V. Merrill, like Hazen Hooker a member of the Third Vermont Regiment, Company G, also complained about cold nights. In a note to his uncle Hazen Merrill on October 22, 1862 sent in a patriotic envelope (see figure 5), Ben described the situation:

> We left alaxandria 2 weeks ago and came in the cars to Harpers ferrie then marched here 26 miles in 2 days it was tough marching with 70 and 80 pounds on my back and the sun as hot as it was any day last haying the days are as hot as ever they are in the summers in Vt and the nights are as cold as winter . . . I wish you to send me 5 dollas of the money that I sent from Burlington [induction camp] as I want to get an extra Blanket.[14]

Each soldier received the same provisions—two blankets, one woolen and one rubber. In the early days of the war, the boys accepted their provisions and made do. Shortly they realized that they could purchase added supplies, and many like Ben Merrill, supplemented their provisions, blankets being high on their list. Henry Whitehill from Ryegate described to his cousin in Peacham the possibility of getting added supplies at his camp "near Senice Creek in Maryland" in a letter dated October 24, 1862:

Figure 5. Envelope of Ben Merrill's 1862 letter from army camp to Peacham with illustration of "The Spirit of '61," catching the exuberant Northern response to the call for volunteers. Courtesy Peacham Historical Association.

> We have a sutler [army provisioner] in this Reg but he asks double price for every thing that he sells butter 40 cts a pound raisins the same cheese and sugar 20 cts a pound onions 10 cts a lbs milk 10 cts a quart cider 10 cts a pint apples a dollars a bushel so that you see that if we get any thing to eat but our rations we have to pay for it.[15]

Another Ryegate soldier, Thomas H. Brown, also complained of high prices. In November 1862 he wrote his wife that "I bot a pease of cheas to eat on the road and it went first rat I paid 30 cents a poin for it . . . so you can see I cant by much at that prise."[16]

Neither Henry nor Thomas noted the need for additional blankets, but both complained about the weather. Henry found that "the nights are very cold standing on picket . . . we have sleept out doors the most of the time since we left Brattleboro [training camp] without any tents." Writing again on January 5, 1863 to his cousin, Henry did not spare the details: "There has been a great deal of sickness in the Army there has been about 50 died in this Reg Six has died in our Co."[17] In December 1863 Harvey Scott from Cabot, west of Peacham, wrote of his fellow soldiers that "some [have] frozen to death."[18]

In his research on army camp life, historian Kenneth Link listed the hazards: cold weather with inadequate clothing and shabby tents; overwork with "interminable days of drilling, picketing, and waiting;" risk of disease, especially the childhood diseases of "measles, mumps, chicken pox, and whooping cough" but also the camp diseases of "diarrhea, dysentery, malaria, typhoid fever, and respiratory tract infections;" and "the disastrous effect of exposure and severe fatigue duty." The conditions of camp life resulted in thousands of soldiers being sent to hospitals where the conditions were not much better. In January 1862, the Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth Vermont Regiments reported the percentage sick as 23.30, 27.10, and 23.00 respectively. The Third Vermont Regiment, to which Hazen and Ben belonged, did better with only 9.33 percent or 84 of the 900 men sick.[19]

Being sick was one of "the worst thing in the hold army," wrote Thomas Brown, "I dont think the sick is helf taken cair of. A sick man ant that worth spending much time with but as long as he is able to do his Dute he must do it." Thomas added that he hoped he "never shall have to go to a hosptel it is a hard plase I can tell you."[20]

Cold weather and frequent illness plagued the Vermont soldiers. Army provisions were inadequate and few could afford to purchase additional supplies. Finally the men hit upon the solution; they began to request needed articles from home.

Boxes from Home

Historian Howard Coffin, in his popular book *Full Duty: Vermonters in the Civil War*, noted that "packages arrived from mothers and wives containing home-cooked food, underwear, socks, sometimes a quilt." He recorded this without a footnote as if it were common knowledge that quilts were among the supplies sent from home to soldiers.[21]

About a month after leaving Vermont, Hazen Hooker began asking for "a box" from his family. In fact, almost every soldier in close contact with his family did the same thing, and letters became lists of needed, or wished-for, items. Hazen's November 30, 1862 letter to his parents contained a long list:

> Ben [Merrill] has just wrote home to his folks to send him a box, and I want you to send me some things in the same box as it will not cost any more for a box to come that weighs 100 lbs than it will one that weights 50. Now *Marm* I want you to send me two pair of footings, for one pair of mine is entirely worn out and the other pair is just a going to "give out" and a pair of gloves, either wolen or buckskin. . . . I shall not care if the box is pretty large you can put in a parting between Bens lot and mine and fill it up brimfull of something I do not care what it is, appels, cakes, sasuage, sugar, any thing that will kept till it gets to me.[22]

A few days after Hazen sent this letter, his former Peacham Academy classmate Ben became ill, entered the hospital, and died on December 15. The cause of death is not known, for in cases like this the official record stated simply "of disease."[23] His death may well have resulted from poor conditions in the camp and hospital.

Hazen received a box in early 1863; it is unclear if this was the box he and Ben requested or a later one. He reported that the bread and pies were spoiled, but "the sasuage was good."[24] After Hazen requested boots, he reported that his Peacham friend, Harve Fuller, brought them "when he came and they are just the fit."[25] Amos Belknap from St. Johnsbury also was in need of boots, but in New Orleans where he was stationed in July 1862, "a good pare of boots made out of french calf skin was worth $40 Dolars . . . that is a little mite high."[26] In April 1863 Hazen requested another box and again outlined his specific needs:

> I want a pair of woolen shirts as soon as I can get them and a pair of footings and some eates of new sugar.[27]

Shortly after writing this, Hazen fell sick and went to the hospital where he spent more than a month. In a letter to his parents on April 19, 1863, he explained why he continued to work in the hospital after he recovered:

> The living is far better and it is easier every way. I should like to fire a few more shots at the Rebs. but if I stay here I shall not get a chance and I shall not mourn very much if I dont, but I must say that I love to start up and fire at them, after I have been at it long enough to get the fraid off, and it does not take but a few shots to drive that away.[28]

One of the advantages of hospital life was being on hand when visitors came to see patients. On May 31, 1863 Hazen wrote of seeing "quite a number of ladies here from the North taking care of their friends that ar wounded You cannot think how the sight of a mother or sister cheers the heart of a wounded soldier. It is worth every thing to him."[29] Being in the company of "ladies" must have been unusual, as soldiers often commented upon it. Forty-year old Thomas H. Brown wrote his wife in Ryegate that he "shall be glad when I get hom when I can see somethen eles but solders. I should like to see some of the Vt girls it has bin a long time sinc I saw a woman."[30] It is no wonder that Hazen, in a typical Vermont understatement, camouflaged his deep longing to see his mother when he directed her to "put on your white dicky and jump aboard the cars and come over some as soon as you can."[31]

In July Hazen finally returned to his regiment and was greeted by his Peacham friend, Lucius O. Morse, called Luch, who handed him four letters. "I have read them reread them and reread them," Hazen wrote his parents on July 15, 1863. "It was so long since I have had a letter, that it was like giving food to the hungry and rest for the weary."[32] Mail day was called "the greatest day we have" by another Peacham Academy classmate, Isaac N. Watts, a soldier in the 1st Regiment, Vermont Heavy Artillery. At the end of his 1864 diary, Isaac noted receiving 68 letters and writing 82.[33] This must have been a record as most soldiers like Hazen wrote once a month to their parents and an occasional letter to grandparents or friends. Most of Isaac's letters and the diaries he kept are preserved, but none of the sixty-eight letters written to him have survived.

In his July letter Hazen continued his description of his return to the ranks where he found the boys "tired and worn out and if you could realize half what they have had to go through you would not be surprised. What sorrow, misery, and suffering this wicked Rebellion has caused throughout the entire country. There is hardly a family or even an individual but what feels the effect of it in some way or not."

Hazen followed this lament with one of the most compelling stories from the pen of a Union soldier:

> I was on post on the bridge one night from 1 Clock till three, and during that time there were ten negroes came along and wanted to cross. We had orders not to lett any person go across. . . I went back a half a mile and told Major Nelson about it, and he said let them come in, which they did in good order. We set at liberty about fifty negroes while we were there and I was very sorry when we had to leave, for I liked the business very much. We don more to put down rebellion in those three days, than all the rest of the time of our service.[34]

Requests for Quilts

Thinking that the regiment had settled for the winter in Tompkins Square, New York, Hazen wrote in his September 1863 letter that he hoped to receive a box from home with supplies that would get him through the cold winter in better shape than he had experienced in the previous year. Here he first requested a quilt:

> If you had seen us a few days ago, where we lay on the ground you would have thought it was rather hard, but it is all over now we enjoy the present, forget the past, hope for the future. I want you Marm to send out an old quilt one that is not worth much. If we stay here all winter it will be worth every thing to us. Luch says tell his mother to send him one of the same kind. Luch and I tent together and if we can have two quilts we can sleep warm, perhaps you can send one that has shielded me from the cold in days past.[35]

The memories a quilt evoked comforted the boys as much as did the warmth from the extra layers a quilt provided. Memories most often noted in the letters from the Peacham boys included "new sugar," "meating," "spring work," "apples," "potatoes," "sleighing," "sugar parties," "grand times," "milk" and "Peacham water." Historian Anne L. Macdonald, in her study of American knitting, included some comments on quilts for Civil War soldiers, pointing out that those who sent album quilts hoped to have a soldier in a remote hospital "cheered by the sight of some such familiar sign on sheet or counterpane, or gladly rest his weary head upon a pillow that bore a dear and well known name."[36]

Hazen's box arrived at Brandy Station, Virginia, in late November

just before he and Lucius were called to go to the front. Fortunately they were able to add the quilts to other supplies in baggage, as Hazen described in his delayed letter dated December 5, 1863:

> It has been a long time since I have written to you and no doubt you feel anxious to hear from one of the *Saviours* of our *Country*. A pretty hard campaign of eight days has ended and we are again encamped on the same ground we were when we started. We rec'd the box two days before we moved. We ate all the provisions except the butter before we started we managed to get the quilts carried on one of the teams so we have got them now. I was sorry when we had orders to move that the box came so soon but I changed my mind before we got back, for the wether was very cold at the time we were gone the ground froze every night hard enough to bear up an eight horse team.[37]

When regiments moved, anything a soldier could not carry would usually be left behind. Chaplain E. M. Haynes, historian of the Tenth Vermont Regiment, recalled when the soldiers moved from Stevenson's Station to Washington in December 1864:

> There followed the usual disestablishment that falls to the lot of armies moved by railroad and water transportation—that is, all unauthorized horses, a large number of which are generally accumulated in a campaign through an enemy's country, were turned over to Quarter-Masters. There are oft times a stool, and not unfrequently a bed-quilt, that have mysteriously made their way into camp and ministered wonderfully to the soldier's comfort, which must, on the eve of a march, be abandoned. We [soldiers] often parted with these articles with great reluctance; they became to the soldier things of vertu.[38]

The winter was long, and many of the men found that recreation helped pass the time. Hazen's parents may have written him after hearing about stories of drunkenness, profanity, and not keeping the Sabbath, behavior often attributed to soldiers but behavior strongly condemned in Peacham. Early in his army service, Hazen responded to these fears in a letter dated March 12, 1863, where he assured his parents of his high standards:

> There were two or three things which I made up my mind I would not do when I left home, which are these, that I would not use any profane lan-

> guage nor drink any spirits of any kind nor play cards . . . I think I have not done any of these three things since I have been away.[39]

He and Lucius found their own entertainment through the long stretches of time when there was little to do, as he wrote to his parents on April 2, 1864:

> Luch and I have been having a game of rough and tumble, and we both got pretty well exausted he has quietly layed himself down upon the bed pulled the big quilt over him and is taking a little repose.[40]

Quilts provided privacy as well as warmth; covered by a quilt, Luch could escape to his own world.

Hazen and Lucius were fortunate to receive their boxes. Harvey Scott was not so lucky as his wife wrote to his sister in Cabot in early September 1862:

> Harvey sent for a box five weeks ago I sent it to him with everything he wanted it has never reached him yet I feel very sorry for it cost me thirteen dollrs and it is all thrown away the officers took it most probably.[41]

Henry Whitehill evaluated the risk of not receiving his box, especially as he had ordered 50 or 60 "small cakes from 1/2 to 5 pounds each" of sugar from his Peacham cousin to sell to his fellow soldiers. He urged, "Be sure and nail the box up tight so that it will not break open."[42]

Quilts became a necessary item, so necessary that when a soldier died his quilt was taken by a friend. Newell H. Blanchard, suffering from the cold weather, wrote to his parents in Peacham how he came to have a quilt and he did not forget to instruct his parents to compensate the quilter:

> I suppose that Austin Wheeler body has got home I suppose his mother feels dereffal I took Austin Wheeler bed quilt and cup of buter & jam sow you see Mrs Wheeler about it I thought I would take the quilt for I had nothing but a Blanket so I took it.[43]

Newell had been in the army only four months and already knew what he had to do to survive. In this way, a quilt went from one soldier to another.

Two other Peacham soldiers put in requests for quilts from home: Dustan S. Walbridge and Isaac N. Watts, half-brothers from the farm area known as East Hill. Stationed outside of Washington, Dustan so enjoyed his box from home in March 1863, he noted it in separate letters to three of his sisters. To Sarah, who had moved with her family to Minnesota, he wrote first teasing about the unidentified photograph (see figure 6) she had received from him:

> I think it must be *me* in that *picture*, for I had a *box* about that time, with some good things to eate, and some nice warm quilts to keepe me warm—and I presume they have saved me from being sick this winter.

To his sister Clara who had moved to California, married, and settled there, he described the same box from home:

> The *box* that they sent us was received all safe—and it done us a great deale of good, the *quilts* and *pillows*, I dont know how I should have stood it without them—and then I had 15 lbs of nice *butter*, which made Uncle Sams bread slip down *so nice*.

A third account of the box went to Dustan's youngest sister Ella, who may have been instrumental in sending the box from Peacham to his camp near Washington:

> All last night we had a hard snow and blow storm and it is still storming we are in our little tents now, and if you could have seen us last night as the snow was swirling around, over and into our little tent, you would have pittied us. But then we did'nt suffer thanks to those quilts that the folks sent us.[44]

Dustan's younger half-brother Isaac N. Watts enlisted in "Uncle Sam's service" in August 1863 and went to Brattleboro for induction and training. There he and the other new soldiers received the usual provisions of one rubber sheet and one wool blanket. By the end of August, the cool nights set in and, anticipating even colder weather, Isaac wrote home:

> If any one is coming here from Peacham I believe I shall have you send down an old quilt or blanket. It is not cold enough to need one yet but I

Figure 6. Dustan S. Walbridge (1832–64) in Civil War uniform of a second lieutenant, taken in 1864, months before his death. From the author's collection.

> presume it will be before we leave here and it will not cost much to send it back home. . . A great many have colds and diarheea.[45]

Like Hazen Hooker and Ben Merrill, Isaac had graduated from Peacham Academy. He taught school during the slow times on the farm. Although his spelling was a little irregular, he must have been among the more scholarly of the soldiers, for he added a postscript to his sister Alice:

> A fellow came to me to back an envelope to a young lady whose name he could not spell to save his life. I thought that was rather a bad fix.

Soldiers teased their fellow army friends who were quick to marry when they returned home. Henry Whitehill wrote his cousin in Peacham on February 9, 1864 about just such a incident when he "saw Daniel Craige . . . the other day . . . about two miles from here I hear that he has gone the way of the world with Lydia Whitehill may peace and joy go with him."[46]

Hazen Hooker, too, noted the many marriages taking place in Peacham. On February 13, 1864, back in Virginia, he wrote his parents:

> You wrote that all the boys that came home on furlough got married. Well now if I were to tell you that was the seccond object I have in view in wishing to come home you would not believe it. I find it is not good to be alone therefore having duly considered the matter I shall pass it by for the time being.[47]

By April, he gave further instructions to his parents to "marry off all the old maids and batchlers in town, and after this is done halt"—presumably so there would be girls left for the returning soldiers.[48]

The Quilters

Quilt historian Barbara Brackman reports that Civil War quilts are "extremely rare," and there are no known Peacham quilts of that period in the textile collections at the Peacham Historical Association, Fairbanks Museum, or Shelburne Museum.[49] Here, however, are the sto-

ries of some of the Peacham women and what happened to the soldiers who received their quilts.

Hazen Blanchard Hooker, writer of the expressive letters, was born in 1842 to a farm family with hard-working parents, Orman P. Hooker and Mercy (Mary) Blanchard Hooker.[50] His brother, Herbert, four years younger, kept a diary in 1863 and 1864 with brief entries, listing all the letters received from Hazen and the many funerals of Peacham soldiers. Their mother, Mary, was one of the signers of an album quilt given to a departing Peacham woman around 1850. From this it may be assumed that she was a quilter, and because the requests for quilts were directed to her, she may have made the quilts sent to Hazen.[51] On May 5, 1864, Hazen was killed at the battle of the Wilderness. His family did not learn the sad news until May 16 when Herbert wrote in his diary "Heard Hazen was killed."[52] Hazen was the first Peacham boy to die in action, more than three years after the war began. The family suffered twice that spring for on March 7, according to Herbert's diary, cousin Sanford Hooker also died. Hazen's friend, Lucius O. Morse, was mustered out of the army in July 1864 and then disappeared from the Peacham records.

Benjamin V. Merrill was born in 1843, the eighth child of David Merrill and the fourth child of David's second wife, Mary Hunt Merrill. Ben's father died in 1850 after serving as minister at the Peacham Congregational Church for ten years, and his mother died the year before he enlisted. Ben had four sisters and his quilt request may have been to them. There are no sources indicating that any of these sisters were quilters, although the younger two, Augusta and Mina, were close friends with their neighbor, Laura Bailey, a seamstress, who in her 1864 diary of sewing activities wrote of the "Merrill girls" visiting her, possibly to sew for the soldiers.[53] In a town where men and women often married neighbors it is not unusual, although touching in this case, that in 1883, Ben's younger sister Mina married Hazen Hooker's younger brother, Herbert.

Dustan S. Walbridge was born in 1832, the oldest son and fifth child of Daniel and Roxana Brown Walbridge. In 1851 Dustan went to the California gold mines where he did not "make his pile," to quote a common phrase of the time. Returning to Peacham in 1857, he took up his trade as a wheelwright and married in 1860 Abbie Hardy, a class-

mate of his younger sisters. Maybe the same search for adventure that took Dustan to California in 1851 at age eighteen made him enlist in 1862 at age thirty. It is hard to tell if the quilts sent to him were from the Watts farm where he was raised after 1840 when his mother, a widower, married Lyman Watts or from his wife, Abbie, twenty years old with a baby when Dustan joined the army. The following spring on May 10, 1863 Dustan wrote that Abbie had sent him a box which included "some footings" his sister Alice had knit.[54] In the war effort on the home front, women eagerly helped outfit their soldiers and produce hospital supplies, and Alice wrote in her diary that she tried to "*knit* two hours" a day, a task she dreaded.[55] On June 3, 1864 at what historian Howard Coffin labels "The Slaughter of Cold Harbor," Dustan was wounded. He died two weeks later in a Washington hospital with his young wife by his side.[56]

Isaac N. Watts, born in 1842, the first child of the marriage of Roxana Walbridge and Lyman Watts, was raised on Peacham's East Hill with his sisters and brothers including Dustan. Knowing that he would be drafted on his twenty-first birthday, Isaac enlisted against his father's wishes. His letter home requesting a quilt came from the Vermont induction point at Brattleboro. This quilt may have been one made by his mother Roxana or grandmother Olive before their deaths in 1862. Both were known quilters as revealed in family diaries and letters. His sisters Alice and Ella were also quilters.[57] After the war, Isaac returned to his father's farm, married the neighbor's daughter, and lived at the Watts farm until his death in 1881.

Austin Wheeler who died in an army hospital had been born around 1842, the only child of Alexander and Catherine Blanchard Wheeler. His mother was one of the signers of the 1850 album quilt given to a Peacham woman when she went West. Therefore, the quilt Newell Blanchard took after Austin's death in December 1862 may have been made by Catherine Wheeler, a known quilter. According to Bogart's listing of Peacham Civil War soldiers, Austin, part of the 1st Vermont Heavy Artillery, died "December 15, 1862 of disease." Newell survived the war although he was captured by the Confederate Army at Weldon Railroad, Virginia, in June 1864 but was paroled at the end of November. After mustering out in June 1865, there is no further information on him.[58]

A recognized outcome of the war appears to have been what Howard Coffin called "war-induced wanderlust."[59] The boys returned home, settled in for a while, and then like Lucius Morse and Newell Blanchard, they left. Of the Peacham boys who survived and whose letters have been preserved, only Isaac Watts remained in town. He organized the effort to construct a town monument to the Peacham soldiers who lost their lives in the conflict. It stands today a beautiful memorial on a hill overlooking the town.[60]

Quilts Made by Ladies' Soldiers Aid Societies

In addition to individual quilts being made and sent to family members fighting in the war, women at home, including those in Peacham, made quilts to fill urgent appeals for articles needed in Union camps and hospitals. *The Caledonian*, in St. Johnsbury, ran an article on October 11, 1861 with the title "A Good Time to be Patriotic." It listed the "Articles Most Wanted," including: "Quilts of cheap material, about seven feet long by fifty inches wide."[61]

Two weeks later, the newspaper reported that "the Peacham people have just dispatched a box for the soldiers in the 3d and 4th regiments, containing articles amounting in value to nearly one hundred dollars. Among the *substantials* were sixty-five pairs of woolen socks and fifteen woolen blankets." Also listed were six quilts from Lyndon, "quite a large number of blankets and heavy quilts" from Essex Center, and eight quilts from St. Johnsbury—all towns in Caledonian County.[62]

In June 1863, the Ladies' Soldiers Aid Society of St. Johnsbury numbered eighty members, according to the newspaper, and as a result of their weekly gatherings they had been able to send "31 bed quilts," plus the following articles to the Union army: "61 dressing gowns, 30 flannel shirts, 16 flannel drawers, 356 cotton shirts, 115 cotton drawers, 26 pairs mittens, 65 pairs feetings [stockings], 34 pair slippers, 16 night caps, 212 towels, 111 sheets, 5 blankets, 34 coats, 12 pairs pants, 3 caps, 9 vests, 11 pillows, 109 pillow cases, 26 pillow sacks, 8 bedsacks, 3 testaments, 1 bundle soldiers' tracts, 20 pads for wounded limbs, a large quantity of bandages and lints." As of June 1, the treasury for the group listed total donations and revenue from events

$413.71; expenses of society $243.26, bringing the remaining funds to a total of $170.45.[63] The newspaper kept the public aware of the time and place for the weekly meetings, and frequently the society held lectures and concerts to raise money to buy the supplies needed for making the articles sent to army hospitals.

The Peacham Ladies' Soldiers Aid Society also sponsored fund-raising events. In 1863 on Christmas evening, the group had an entertainment at the Peacham Academy "consisting of music and tableaux, which was a 'good thing,' and from which they realized about $50." This was in addition, reported the newspaper, "to a collection taken up on Thanksgiving day which amounted to over $60."[64] The December entertainment given when the Society "got short of funds" was described by sixteen-year-old Alice Watts in a letter to her niece in Michigan:

> We had an old folks concert and tableau at the Academy had an admittance fee and got our $46. I was a bridesmaid in one of the tableaux—Dressed in white, white kids, a pink sash, wreath &c—We were all fixed up as if it was a real wedding and not *make believe*.[65]

The funds raised allowed women to purchase needed materials for their sewing projects, and early in January, the Peacham Society sent off a box "containing several pairs of shirts, feetings, slippers, sheets, quilts, and several other articles." Some of these items may have been made by local seamstress Laura Bailey who noted four times in her 1864 diary that she went to the Soldiers Aid Society to sew, "at Dr. Parkers," "at Mr Guys," "up to the Temperance hall," and another time at an unidentified location.[66] In her early 1864 letter to her niece, Alice Watts wrote "the women meet to sew for the soldiers once a week."[67]

By spring 1864, the demand for more "coverlids, pads, and bandages" for the wounded in hospitals encouraged the societies to labor "very earnestly." By the end of May, the St. Johnsbury Society dispatched two barrels of articles which included among the usual items "10 quilts." This group began meeting twice a week in three sections of the town in order to fulfill the hospital requests. The newspaper reported: "The cry comes from the hospitals of Fredericksburg, 'our supplies are exhausted,'—Are our people aware of the emergency?"

On June 10 the Society sent off another "instalment of comfort for the hospitals," again including "10 quilts."[68]

Most of these boxes were sent either to the U. S. Sanitary Commission or the U. S. Christian Commission. Both coordinated civilian relief operations although the latter claimed to look after the spiritual needs of the soldiers as well, and at least one Peacham-born-and-raised son, the Rev. L. S. Watts, joined the Christian Commission, wearing himself out giving sermons and conducting prayer meetings.[69] Historians studying the home front during the war have made much of the competition of these two relief groups, but in the St. Johnsbury area, women's groups seemed to answer the calls from both of these national distributors of supplies to the Union army.[70] By the end of 1864 these two commissions were urging ladies "to exert themselves to the utmost, before the intense cold of winter sets in, in forwarding coverlids, quilts, dress-gowns, drawers, shirts, socks, and mittens."[71] So committed to the war effort were women in their local communities that they not only took over work usually done by their male relatives, but also collected much-needed money, sewed supplies including quilts, and took care of wounded soldiers when they returned home. Judith Ann Giesbert in *Civil War Sisterhood* estimated more than 7,000 soldiers aid societies were formed in towns throughout the North and West.[72] Nineteenth-century women realized that wars were not won on the battlefield alone; the home front ably served as well.

Conclusion

From the letters and diaries of soldiers in the army and of women at home, personal stories reveal themselves in the first-hand accounts of the Civil War. Soldiers suffering on cold nights and women exhausted from extra farm chores express their personal emotions, concerns, and hopes in letters going back and forth from army camp to homes and farms. The town of Peacham, Vermont, provides a perfect microcosm for today's researchers of the Civil War years as many primary sources are preserved in the town hall and historical society. Among the human events revealed are the pleas from soldiers, cold and homesick, to their mothers, wives, and sisters for quilts to relieve their discom-

fort. Peacham women, long recognized for their quilting ability, were happy to comply. Working alone or in ladies' aid societies, they made bandages, sheets, blankets, and quilts. Few soldiers may have requested quilts from home, but those who did wrote in a compelling and flattering way which brought results. Peacham boys, Hazen Hooker, Ben Merrill, Lucius Morse, Dustan Walbridge, and Isaac Watts, either wrote about quilts or had their fellow soldiers include them in their requests. Quilts were mainly used for warmth, but also they created a connection with home, as often expressed in the letters. Army hospitals also benefitted from the labor of women in towns who organized their efforts through ladies' aid societies, heeding the call for much-needed supplies from the national commissions who tried to keep the army hospitals supplied.

A task women performed as part of their routine work in their home —the making of quilts for their family—became another way in which women away from the battlefield could help support the war effort. Their caring gesture with the needle was greatly appreciated by their sons, husbands, and brothers. Quilts provided warmth on cold nights and also warmed the souls of the soldiers, reminding them of "days past." Today in Peacham and many small towns in New England "frayed flags quilt the graveyards."[73]

Notes and References

1. Virginia Gunn, "Quilts for Union Soldiers in the Civil War," *Quiltmaking in America: Beyond the Myths*, ed. Laurel Horton (Nashville, TN: Rutledge Hill Press, 1994) 80–95, see especially 92.

2. Ernest L. Bogart, *Peacham: the Story of a Vermont Hill Town* (Montpelier: Vermont Historical Society, 1948), 322.

3. Howard Coffin, *Full Duty: Vermonters in the Civil War* (Woodstock, VT: The Countryman Press, 1993), 115.

4. *The Caledonian* (St. Johnsbury, VT newspaper), 7 June 1861 to 14 April 1865.

5. Ibid., 18 October 1856, 3 October 1857, and 20 September 1861.

6. "The Journal of Alfred and Chastina W. Rix," 23 August 1849, 22 September 1849, Rix Family Papers, California Historical Society, hereinafter cited as CHS.

7. Alice Watts to Charles Watts, 18 February 1856, Private Collection, hereinafter cited as PC.

8. The album quilt made for a Blanchard woman is in the Peacham Historical Association, hereinafter cited as PHA. For detailed information on dating this type

of quilt, see Barbara Brackman, "Signature Quilts: Nineteenth-Century Trends," *Quiltmaking in America: Beyond the Myths*, ed. Laurel Horton (Nashville, TN: Rutledge Hill Press, 1994), 22–23.

9. Mary Preston to her son, Henry Preston, 15 October 1861, quoting letter from her son in the army, Addison W. Preston. Kitchel Center, Fairbanks Museum and Planetarium.

10. Emil and Ruth Rosenblatt, eds., *Hard Marching Every Day: The Civil War Letters of Private Wilbur Fisk, 1861–1865* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1983), 9, 25.

11. Sanford O. Hooker to "Dear Cousin H [Hazen Hooker]," 2 August 1862, PHA.

12. Hazen B. Hooker to parents [Orman P. and Mercy (Mary) Blanchard Hooker], 25 September 1862, PHA.

13. Ibid., 21 October 1862.

14. Benjamin V. Merrill to "Dear Uncle [Hazen Merrill]," 22 October 1862, PHA.

15. Henry Whitehill to "Dear Cousin," 24 October 1862, University of Vermont Library, Special Collections Department, hereinafter cited as UVM.

16. Thomas H. Brown to wife [Lydia Chandler Brown], 24 November 1862, Vermont Historical Society, hereafter cited as VHS.

17. Whitehill to "Dear Cousin," 5 January 1863, UVM.

18. Harriet J. Scott to sister-in-law quoting letter from her husband in the army, 24 December 1863, UVM.

19. Kenneth Link, "Potomac Fever: The Hazards of Camp Life," *Vermont History* 51:2 (Spring 1983): 69–88.

20. Brown to wife, Undated fragment 03, VHS.

21. Coffin, 57.

22. Hazen Hooker to parents, 30 November 1862, PHA.

23. Bogart, 328; *The Caledonian*, 23 January 1863, obituary noting his death "near Fredericksburg."

24. Hazen Hooker to parents, 8 March 1863, PHA.

25. Ibid., 2 February 1863.

26. Amos Belknap "Dear Friends," 26 July 1862, St. Johnsbury Athenaeum.

27. Hazen Hooker to parents, 19 April 1863, PHA.

28. Ibid.

29. Ibid., 31 May 1863.

30. Brown to wife, Undated fragment 10, VHS.

31. Hazen Hooker to parents, 5 September 1863, PHA.

32. Ibid., 15 July 1863.

33. Isaac N. Watts to "Dear Sister [Alice Watts]," 10 November 1864 and Diary 1864, memoranda at end, UVM. For the complete letter, see Jeffrey D. Marshall, ed., *A War of the People: Vermont Civil War Letters* (Hanover, NH: University of New England Press, 1999), 278–79. Thanks to Jeffrey Marshall for searching his manuscript for quilt quotes, although none turned up.

34. Hazen Hooker to parents, 15 July 1863, PHA.

35. Ibid., 5 September 1863.

36. Anne L. Macdonald, *No Idle Hands: The Social History of American Knitting* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1988), 105. Thanks to archivist Selene Colburn for pointing out this quote.

37. Hazen Hooker to parents, 5 December 1863, PHA.

38. Chaplain E. M. Haynes, *A History of the Tenth Regiment, Vermont Volunteers* (Newport, VT: Civil War Enterprises, undated reprint of 1870 book), 136. Thanks to Civil War enactment expert Peter H. Yarusewicz for providing me with this quote.

39. Hazen Hooker to parents, 12 March 1863, PHA.

40. Ibid., 2 April 1864.

41. Harriet J. Scott to sister-in-law, 9 September 1862, UVM.

42. Whitehill to "Dear Uncle," 5 April 1864, UVM.

43. Newell H. Blanchard to "My Dear Father [Ralph Blanchard]," 21 December 1862, PHA. For the complete letter see Lorna Quimby and Kristin O'Hare, "Archives and Manuscripts: Blanchard Family Papers in the Peacham Historical Association" in *Vermont History* 67 (Summer/Fall 1999): 97. Thanks to Lorna Quimby, PHA President and Archivist, for help in locating and transcribing Civil War letters in PHA.

44. Dustan S. Walbridge to "My Dear Sister [Sarah Walbridge Way]," 3 March 1863; to unidentified person [Clara Walbridge Rogers], fragment of letter, Spring 1863; to "Dear Sister [Ella Watts]," 5 April 1863, PC.

45. Isaac N. Watts to Alice Watts, 11 September 1863, PC.

46. Whitehill to "Dear Cousin," 9 February 1864, UVM. Lydia Whitehill of Groton attended the Peacham Academy in 1861; Card File of Women Students, PHA.

47. Hazen Hooker to parents, 13 February 1864, PHA.

48. Ibid., 30 April 1864.

49. Barbara Brackman, *Quilts from the Civil War* (Lafayette, CA: C&T Publishing, 1997), 54. Thanks to Ann Lawless at the Fairbanks Museum and Celia Oliver at Shelborne Museum for their responses to my requests for Civil War quilts.

50. For genealogical information on Hazen Hooker and most of the Peacham soldiers and their families, see Jennie Chamberlain Watts and Elsie A. Choate, compilers, *People of Peacham* (Montpelier: Vermont Historical Society, 1965).

51. Brackman, "Signature Quilts,"20. In this article Brackman seems to make the assumption that the maker of individual blocks recorded her name. More study is needed on the relationship of the quilters of blocks in friendship quilts and the name appearing on the block.

52. Herbert Hooker, Diary, 16 May 1864; added later to the entry for Hazen's actual death date, May 5: "Hazen killed in battle," PHA. *The Caledonian*, 20 May 1864, listed recent casualties by name of town including "Hazen Hooker, son of Orman Hooker was killed in battle in the Wilderness . . . was 21 years old." Thanks to Jeanne Richardson for transcribing Herbert's diary. For a good description of the battle in the Wilderness, see Coffin, 233–43. May 5, 1864 was the most costly day in all the war for the state of Vermont; one thousand Vermont soldiers lost their lives.

53. Laura Bailey, Diary, 9 March, 1 July, 17 September 1864, PC.

54. Dustan S. Walbridge to Ella Watts, 10 May 1863, PC.

55. Alice Watts to Augusta Gregory Mills, 6 January 1864, Walbridge-Gregory Family Papers, CHS. For further information on women's work on the home front, see Jeanie Attie, *Patriotic Toil: Northern Women and the American Civil War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998).

56. Coffin, 253–60. The story of the Walbridge/Watts family of Peacham can be found in Lynn A. Bonfield and Mary C. Morrison, *Roxana's Children: The Biography of a Nineteenth-Century Vermont Family* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995). Reference to facts given in this paragraph can be found on pp. 126–34, 182.

57. Lynn A. Bonfield, "Four Generations of Quilts in One Nineteenth-Century Rural New England Family," in Lynne Z. Bassett, ed., *Proceedings of a Symposium at Old Sturbridge Village, June 13, 1998: What's New England about New England Quilts?* (Sturbridge, MA: Old Sturbridge Village, 1999), 34–47. This essay describes the quilting history of the Walbridge/Watts family. For information on the military career of Isaac Watts, see Bonfield and Morrison, 162–66. Isaac saw active service when his 1 Regiment of the Vermont Heavy Artillery became part of the 6 Army Corps. He fought in some of the most famous battles of the war, from Spotsylvania and Cold Harbor, on to the campaigns in the Shenandoah Valley, and the final march to Richmond.

58. Bogart, 325, 330. Official information on soldiers is found in Theodore S. Peck, *Revised Roster of Vermont Volunteers in the War of the Rebellion* (Montpelier: The Watchman Publishing Company, 1892). The deplorable conditions suffered by Union soldiers in Confederacy prison camps is one of the tragic stories of the war. Newell, captured at Weldon Railroad in Virginia, was one of 401 men from this action who ended up in Andersonville, Georgia, where more than half died within six months; Coffin, 273. Another Peacham soldier, Mark M. Wheeler, survived Andersonville where he made a map of the prison which is in the Peacham Historical Association and often brought out for school classes. Mark's legend lives on in the much-repeated story of his mother coming to the farm door and not recognizing the dirty slumped-over man who was her son returned from the war.

59. Coffin, 357.

60. There are forty-three names inscribed on the Peacham Monument. For a study of its erection and Isaac N. Watts's dedication speech, see Mary C. Morrison and Lynn A. Bonfield, "The Peacham Civil War Soldiers Monument," *The Peacham Patriot* (PHA newsletter) 11 (May 1996): 1–7. Bogart, 322, lists only thirty-two Peacham men who died in the war. It is unclear why there is a discrepancy.

61. *The Caledonian*, 11 October 1861.

62. Ibid., 25 October 1861.

63. Ibid., 12 June 1863. The records of the Burlington Relief Association list 153 members, although it is not clear when this list was compiled. At their first meeting on April 22, 1861 resolutions were accepted, expressing "the deep interest of the meeting in the present crisis of the country & in the men who nobly volunteer to defend her cause and declaring the willingness of every member of the associa-

tion to labor in preparing the outfit of those who were called upon *suddenly* to join the army, & to make any reasonable exertions to promote their comfort & health." Minute book and membership list, UVM. See also, Coffin, 287–88.

64. *The Caledonian*, 8 January 1864.

65. Alice Watts to Augusta Gregory Mills, 6 January 1864, CHS.

66. Bailey, Diary, 4 March, 28 April, 27 May, 10 August, 1864, PC.

67. Alice Watts to Mills, 8 January 1864.

68. *The Caledonian*, 20 and 27 May, 10 June 1864.

69. Lyman S. Watts folder, Choate Genealogy Files, PHA. See also, Bonfield and Morrison, 151, 237. Another local man who served in the Christian Commission was Isaac Farley Fletcher of Lyndon. He was one of the 4,800 delegates sent to the front by the Commission. When asked later what Isaac did in the war, his relatives replied, "Oh, he peddled tracts in the South." See *The Independent* (Lyndon, VT newspaper), 2 August 2000, Harriet F. Fisher, "A Glance Back," article on her ancestor.

70. Judith Ann Giesberg, *Civil War Sisterhood: The U. S. Sanitary Commission and Women's Politics in Transition* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2000), 195.

71. *The Caledonian*, 9 December 1864.

72. Giesberg, 5.

73. Coffin, 15.