



TOWNSHEND HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC.

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HISTORIAN SEARCHES FOR CIVIL WAR VETERANS' BURIAL INFORMATION

Charles E. Marchant identifies approximately 100 Civil War soldiers who enlisted in Townshend between 1862 and 1865. Of this group nearly 30 died in combat, as a result of wounds, or in most cases as a result of illness of diseases.

Marchant, a Townshend Cemetery Commissioner and Townshend Historical Society board member, talks with Tiz Garfield about the 6 soldiers for whom post-war information is not known.

Tiz: So, how do you go about this?

CEM: My plan is to find the burial location of each volunteer and see if they are properly identified as a veteran. I have relied on assorted Townshend Town Reports, Peck's Roster of Vermont Volunteers, pension records of individual soldiers, obituaries in local newspapers, and U.S. Government cemetery records.

Tiz: In this group of 6, did any return to Townshend after the war?

CEM: Not as far as I know. They do not appear in census records and they are not on the Grand List for the years after the Civil War.

Tiz: You told me that your first search was for Commodore D. Bush. How did that go?

CEM: Since Bush wasn't listed as buried in a Townshend cemetery, I began by asking Bush family members in Brookline whether they had a relative who fought in the Civil War. No luck.

I learned quickly to pay close attention to details. Records in Townshend mention U.S. Colored Troops (USCT) and because I wasn't aware of any black families living in Townshend, I wanted to think Bush was white.

But, just because a soldier enlists in Townshend does not mean that the person was from Townshend or lived here. In Bush's case, he came from another town, possibly Rockingham or Bellows Falls. He came to get a very high sign-on bonus, which for him was \$1,000.

Tiz: How much was the usual bonus?

CEM: Four others got \$625, but most received much less. Some were not given any bonus for sign-on.

Tiz: Did you find Bush's service record?

CEM: I searched Pvt. Bush's pension records and found 40 documents, beginning on August 8, 1865 and ending on November 15, 1915.

Tiz: Why did it take 50 years?

CEM: None of these documents were filed by Bush. His wife, Mary, applied for a widow's pension and for support of Commodore Bush's daughter by his first marriage. The reason for the long delay is that the government claimed that Bush was a "deserter." Mary spent all these years working to clear his name. This is the story:

Bush died June 3, 1865, apparently drowning after falling off a boat near Norfolk Virginia. It is clear that he ended up in the water, but testimony is at times conflicting.

"The boat lurched." "He was urinating over the side." "I heard a splash." "No attempt was made to rescue him." The time of day that he went overboard is also in doubt.

Tiz: Why the "desertion" claim?

CEM: Bush's unit was headed for Texas and his sign-up for 3 years was not over. So, apparently, the government chose to assume that he had gone overboard intentionally.

In the course of Mary's applications we find that she lived in Brattleboro, New Haven, and around New York City. She does not remarry. We also learn the names of some of Bush's leaders and fellow soldiers.

One can imagine the issues surrounding a black man, led by white officers, and a pension hearing run by white men dealing with a black woman who doesn't know exactly what happened to her husband.

In 1891, Mary was granted \$8 a month, later raised to \$12. Commodore's daughter never received anything.

Tiz: Going back to the Townshend records, do they show Bush's assignment?

CEM: Bush was assigned to Co. F, 41st US Colored troops. What is interesting is that Townshend didn't really know who he was. The Town Report lists the bounty as

being paid in 2 installments to "A Darkey." This is the largest sign-on bounty ever paid, and it was paid to a man who is not from Townshend and whose name is not recorded.

Tiz: Is there some way for us to honor Mary Bush's struggle to clear her husband's name?

CEM: Yes. The Townshend Cemetery Commission applied for and received a government marker for Commodore D. Bush. It will be dedicated at Oakwood

Cemetery just before Memorial Day, 2006. Leland and Gray students and the Townshend Historical Society will participate in this ceremony. Watch the newspapers for date and time.

Anyone wishing to contribute research on the remaining 5 veterans, or any of the other Civil War volunteers should contact me, **Charles Marchant, PO Box 132, Townshend, VT 05353.**

EXPO 2006 FEATURES VERMONT WOMEN IN HISTORY – JUNE 24 AND 25

Townshend Historical will present an exhibit on the Life and Times of Clarina Howard Nichols in the new Commercial Pavilion on the Tunbridge Fairgrounds.

If you have never taken the time to attend this event you have missed a fascinating experience. We need volunteers to help out in our booth for a two to three hour stint. Volunteers receive free admission tickets.

Call Marge Holt, 365-4055.



GRANT SOUGHT FOR RESTORING IMPORTANT HISTORIC RECORDS

Our archives committee has spent the winter cataloging contents of the Townshend town vault. The work is far from finished, but we have found important documents that need immediate attention to prevent further deterioration. One is the original Charter of Johnson's Gore, dated 1797. This is in pieces that need to be put together – a major conservation job. Other documents are: Original - Subscription and Incorporation Acts of Leland Classical and English School, 1835; Minutes of School District 1 in West Townshend dated 1793-1858. A quote from the latter, "Met to vote to pay nine dollars towards defraying the

expense of two schools...for the winter season." We have selected seven documents dating in the 1700s and 1800s that badly need restoration. Costs for this work are extremely high, as much as \$500 to \$1,000 per document. We will be applying for a grant of \$5,000 which will undoubtedly call for some amount of matching funds. If you wish to contribute towards this project we will keep your funds in our savings account, duly designated for the restoration fund.

Send check to: **Townshend Historical Society, PO Box 202, Townshend, VT 05353, marked for Restoration Fund.** *Your contribution is tax deductible as allowed by law.*