

Maine History

Volume 48
Number 1 *Maine and the Civil War*

Article 8

1-1-2014

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Recommended Citation

Mitros, David. "Sheridan in The Shenandoah: The Civil War Memoir of Levi H. Winslow, Twelfth Maine Infantry Regiment of Volunteers." *Maine History* 48, 1 (2014): 160-184.
<https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/mainehistoryjournal/vol48/iss1/8>

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SHERIDAN IN THE SHENANDOAH: THE CIVIL WAR MEMOIR OF LEVI H. WINSLOW, TWELFTH MAINE INFANTRY REGIMENT OF VOLUNTEERS

BY DAVID MITROS

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THE CIVIL WAR memoir of Levi H. Winslow is an account of the activities of the Twelfth Maine Infantry Regiment during General Phillip Sheridan's Shenandoah Valley campaign in 1864. This campaign took Winslow and the Twelfth Maine to Virginia, where the regiment fought in several engagements including the battles of Winchester, Fisher's Hill, and Cedar Creek. Winslow recorded a narrative of the major events during the Shenandoah Valley campaign but also detailed what the experience was like for a common soldier. He mentions the battles that occurred, but also wrote about life in camp, the natural beauty of the region, and, like a late-nineteenth-century ethnographer, described the people of southern Appalachia in unflattering terms. The memoir describes the horrors of war, but also the jubilation of victory – especially the Union army's acclaimed victory at the Battle of Cedar Creek in October 1864. As one historian has noted, this battle included an incident known as "Sheridan's Ride," which "became one of the most

memorable episodes of the Civil War, soon celebrated in poem, story, and painting.”¹

The memoir was written after the events occurred. In the memoir, Winslow recounts his own experiences but also pulls from published accounts of the campaign. This fascinating work thus combines first-hand recollections with the author’s knowledge of the collective memory of the war. Based on the sources Winslow quoted, the memoir was written after 1868. However, one clue points to the fact that it might have been written as late as the end of the nineteenth century. Winslow’s respectful description of the Confederate enemy places this document within the sectional reunion genre so common at the end of the century.² Like many aging veterans who wanted their sacrifices remembered, Winslow likely wrote this account so friends and family would remember his service in the most horrific war in U.S. history. Perhaps he hoped it would be published.³

Winslow was born in Hallowell, Maine, on July 31, 1842, the son of Kenelm and Hannah (Cotton) Winslow.⁴ Little is known of Winslow’s childhood years. When he reached adulthood he moved to Byram, Maine, his place of residence at the outset of the Civil War. Winslow enlisted on October 14, 1861, and was mustered into the army on November 15.⁵ He served as a private in the Twelfth Maine Infantry Regiment, Company A. He reenlisted on January 4, 1864.

Prior to the Shenandoah Valley campaign, the Twelfth Maine had seen action on another front. Between 1861 and 1864 the regiment was a part of General Benjamin F. Butler’s New Orleans Expeditionary Force, which helped capture and later occupied the strategic southern port city. During the Gulf campaign, the Twelfth Maine participated in several notable military engagements in Louisiana, at Pass Manchac, Ponchatoula, Irish Bend, and Port Hudson.⁶ However, the regiment did not experience its most ferocious fighting until joining Sheridan’s army in the summer of 1864.

In the summer of 1863 the tide of the Civil War appeared to turn in favor of the North. The Union had achieved a major victory at the Battle of Gettysburg, while Vicksburg had fallen to Union forces commanded by General Ulysses S. Grant. Yet one year later the prospect for Union victory remained dim. Following the Union defeat at the Battle of Cold Harbor, June 1-3, 1864, the Army of the Potomac, on June 15, launched an assault against Confederate positions at Petersburg, Virginia. Despite having a force of forty thousand men, the Union army failed to break through a Confederate line of only 2,500 men commanded by General P.

G. T. Beauregard. After General Robert E. Lee arrived with reinforcements, the Union army carried on their assault so halfheartedly that General George Meade called off the attack.⁷

The war-weariness of the Union soldiers that summer is easy to comprehend. Since May 1864, a month of bloody fighting that included the Battle of the Wilderness and the Battle of Spotsylvania Courthouse, sixty-three thousand Union soldiers were dead, wounded, or missing. This amounted to three-fifths of the total number of casualties suffered by the Army of the Potomac during the previous three years. The assault on Petersburg continued in a long drawn-out siege that would last nine months.⁸ The inability of Grant's forces to end the stalemate at Petersburg dismayed many northerners. But in early September news came of Union victory on another front. Atlanta had fallen to General William T. Sherman.

Then another Union success came, this time against the Confederate army of Lieutenant General Jubal Early, whose forces had raided Washington during the summer, bringing his men within five miles of the White House. Throughout this period, the Twelfth Maine Regiment was attached to Sheridan's Army of the Shenandoah, Middle Military Division. The regiment was part of Brigadier General H.W. Birge's First Brigade, which comprised part of the Second Division commanded by Brigadier General Cuvier Grover. On September 19, General Sheridan led a successful attack against Early's fifteen thousand Confederates at Winchester. The Twelfth Maine formed a portion of the front line, with Winslow's Company A sent forward as skirmishers. As the regiment advanced, the Confederates, commanded by Early, were driven across an open field. An order was given for the regiment to halt and reform the line, but the Union troops, in their enthusiasm, kept advancing toward the confused retreating enemy. In so doing, the regiment exposed its flank, which came under deadly crossfire and had to retreat. The field was strewn with the dead of both sides. The First Brigade, which included the Twelfth Maine and five other regiments, lost one-fourth of its number in men killed, wounded, or missing.⁹ The regiment sustained heavy losses but ultimately succeeded in helping to rout the Confederates.

Early and his troops retreated south to Fisher's Hill, where Sheridan pursued and successfully engaged him. The following day, during the Battle of Fisher's Hill, Winslow's regiment was held in reserve. Although it had to endure a barrage of enemy artillery fire, no one was injured. On September 22, after the enemy retreated, the regiment advanced as skir-

mishers. The next day they joined in the pursuit of the Confederates, who had escaped and fled sixty miles south to the Blue Ridge Mountains.¹⁰ Sheridan's forces proceeded to the Shenandoah Valley, known as the "breadbasket of the Confederacy." Here they waged total war against the civilian population by destroying barns, food supplies, and livestock. "The people must be left nothing but their eyes to weep with over the war," Sheridan proclaimed.¹¹ The regiment then encamped at Harrisburgh to be on hand to support the Union cavalry, if needed. On October 6, they fell back to Harpers Ferry, in the new state of West Virginia.¹²

On October 10, the regiment took up a position at Cedar Creek in Virginia. Six days later, Sheridan left his forces at Cedar Creek as he went on to Washington for a strategy conference. During his absence, Confederate forces under the command of Jubal Early launched a devastating early morning surprise attack. On October 18, the Confederates attacked the extreme left of the Union line, driving it back. Occupying rifle pits in the front line, the regiment came under heavy enemy fire and had to fall back to a safer position where the lines could be reformed. Here they waited until Sheridan, who had been away in Washington, finally reappeared in person to lead the Union forces on to a decisive victory. When Sheridan returned to the battlefield, he reorganized the hundreds of stragglers to reinforce his army. With his cavalry and infantry acting in unison, he chased Early's forces across Cedar Creek, transforming a rout into a victory, thus ending Confederate control of the Shenandoah Valley.¹³ During the conflict the regiment lost 102 men killed, wounded, or taken prisoner.¹⁴ Despite this terrible blow, part of Sheridan's army remained intact.

The regiment returned to camp at Cedar Creek and later moved to nearby Opequan Creek, where many men waited to be mustered out. Winslow re-enlisted and remained with the regiment for two more years. Sheridan's highly successful military endeavor, which remains controversial to this day, helped bring the war to a decisive conclusion. After participating in the Shenandoah Valley campaign in Virginia, the regiment would continue on to Savannah, Georgia, where it would be part of the Union occupying force.¹⁵

Winslow was mustered out April 12, 1866.¹⁶ After leaving the army, he returned to Hallowell but then moved to Massachusetts. On November 30, 1867, at the age of twenty-five, Winslow married Mary J. Pease of Dover, New Hampshire, at the Freewill Baptist Church in Lawrence, Massachusetts. At the time, he listed his occupation as "farmer."¹⁷ Winslow pursued studies at a business college in Lowell, Massachusetts,



The Battle of Port Hudson, Louisiana, 1863. The siege of Port Hudson took place from late May and until early July. The Union victory helped to secure the Mississippi River from the Confederates. The Twelfth Maine participated in this battle and others in Louisiana early in the war. The Twelfth later fought in Virginia in 1864. Maine Historical Society Collections.

from which he graduated. Later, he studied theology under a Dr. Barrows, who was a Methodist minister.¹⁸

In 1873, Winslow became a licensed minister. Six years later, he left the Methodist Church to join the Free Baptist Church and was ordained June 8, 1879, as a Free Baptist minister. For the next thirty-three years Winslow moved around northern New England as an itinerant preacher. During his ministerial career he was the pastor of congregations at North Woodstock and Strafford in New Hampshire; and at Lyman, North Parsonfield, and Edgcomb in Maine, where he also supervised religious schools. He was a member of the Free Will Baptist General Conference of 1886. He became pastor of a church at East Tilton, New Hampshire, in 1888.¹⁹ Federal census records place Winslow and his wife at Strafford, New Hampshire, in 1880; Laconia, New Hampshire, in 1890; Sutton, New Hampshire, in 1900; and Farmington, New Hampshire, in 1910. Mary gave birth to two children, but only one, Melvina, survived. Winslow died in Meridith, New Hampshire, on May 21, 1912.²⁰

Winslow's memoir came into my possession when the previous owner—my friend and colleague, Peter J. Meaney, O.S.B. of St. Mary's Abbey, Morristown, New Jersey—passed it on to me several years before he died in 2006. Father Peter was a Civil War scholar whose research on the Confederate chaplain Father Peter Whalon, known as "The Angel of Andersonville," was the basis for the documentary film *Fighting the Good Fight*. It was Father Meaney's wish to have Winslow's memoir made available to the public. In transcribing the memoir, Winslow's entries were minimally edited without violating the author's intent or stylistic integrity. The few misspelled or idiosyncratically spelled words that appeared in the original were corrected. Sometimes punctuation was altered or added to improve readability. In some instances words were added for sake of clarity. These appear in brackets. What follows is the memoir of Private Levi H. Winslow, in its entirety.

Sheridan In The Shenandoah

The memory of the late, sad, and cruel war is still fresh in the minds of the people composing this vast American republic. Therefore I do not recite these trying scenes, which I am about to during this hour, to make the heart bleed afresh, or to bring memories only to the mind; for it is written in indelible characters upon the nation stained with blood.

For some time there had been animosity existing between the North and the South on account of slavery. In 1861 the Southerners had matured their plan sufficiently to enable them to make a stand by themselves as a confederacy.

On the 12th of April they rebelled. They commenced the Civil War in earnest by opening a tremendous fire upon Fort Sumter, which was garrisoned by Maj. [Robert] Anderson with a few heroic men.

An army was called for by the president of the United States to put down the rebellion, and men were enrolled all over the country to fill it. I placed my name upon the list as a soldier of the United States the 14th day of October 1861 for three years, unless sooner discharged. In due time went into camp at Portland Maine.

After the regiment was officered, it was called the 12th Maine Regiment of Volunteers. The company to which I was assigned was Company A. This regiment was soon ordered to what was then called Camp Chase, Lowell, Mass., now known as the fair grounds. We waited here a month,

after which time, through a process of delay, we went to Ship Island, L.A., and joined [Maj.] Gen. [Benjamin F.] Butler's Army of the Gulf department.

Since the opening of that bombardment upon Fort Sumter to the present time, of which I am about to relate, there had been nothing but war, defeat, and victory, with a few decisive victories. War had been going on for three years between the contending parties. The country, both North and South, had changed their generals. The people were awaiting the result with breathless anxiety. Each party prayed for the success of their arms.

General [Ulysses S.] Grant had superseded other generals and had been placed in Command of the United States army. General R.E. Lee had been placed in command of the Confederate army. Both these men were very able and heroic; men who had received a thorough military training. General Lee was at this time in Petersburg. General Grant had laid siege to that city.

General [William Tecumseh] Sherman had driven General [John Bell] Hood from the city of Atlanta. He was preparing for his grand march across the country to the sea.

Near this time, to heighten the victorious enthusiasm of the country, news reached us of the destruction of the rebel *Albermarle*, a celebrated Ironclad, which sent consternation to the hearts of the officers and men of the fleet in the Roanoke River. We had no light draft Ironclads to meet here, and our monitors were of too heavy draught for these shallow waters. Her destruction was planned by Lieut. W. B. Cushing, whose plans were victorious.

About this time news also reached us of the capture of the rebel privateer *Florida* in a Brazilian port. This pirate steamer had out-rivaled even the *Alabama* in the destruction of American commerce. She sent a thrill of sorrow among our merchant men as she had destroyed millions of dollars worth of property. The destruction of this enemy caused the people to rejoice.

General Butler had been relieved from the Gulf Department and General N.P. Banks had taken his place. Port Hudson, a rebel stronghold, had been taken. This left the Mississippi River open for navigation. Those troops that could be spared from the Gulf Department were sent to join General Sheridan, who had been placed in command of an army and sent into the Valley of the Shenandoah to watch and oppose General Early who was in command of a strong rebel force.

The Shenandoah Valley is a very beautiful and fertile region. "In that

fair vale, by nature formed to please," being one of the most fertile spots in our United States with a good climate, neither extremely hot nor cold. It has been called "The garden of Virginia." It is one hundred and twenty miles or more in length and from 12 to 30 miles wide, it being narrower at its commencement at Harpers Ferry and then widens as it goes back into the interior. It is sixty miles from Washington and accessible by railroad as far up the valley as Winchester, a distance of eighteen miles from Harpers Ferry. It is hemmed in by mountains on either side; on the right, by the Allegheny, and on the left by the Blue Ridge. It is well watered by small rivers and creeks making it one of the most delightful farming countries known; for what you put into the ground will grow. It produces grass, wheat, corn, and oats in abundance.

The people, in the style of their houses, seem to be peculiar to the Southern States. Their chimneys are built upon the outside on one end, and their fire places so fitted that they are inside the room. The chimneys are called cat chimneys. A cat chimney is built of split sticks plastered very thickly with clay.

On the style of their tools, wagons, and sleigh, the people seemed to be full fifty years behind the Northerners. For clumsiness and peculiarity in most of these things they could not be excelled. Some of their wagons were called stogy, and stogy they were. If they had been called stalky, the same would have fitted them just as well.

Previous to General Sheridan's taking command of the Union forces in the valley, the soldiers had met with so many reverses that they had named it the Valley of Humiliation.

General Early was at this time in possession of the valley, strongly fortified at Winchester with twenty thousand men. A bold and daring general capable of handling his army at an advantage. General Sheridan, his opposer, a shrewd calculator in warfare and a brave man. He was not afraid of danger when duty called, ever moving, admits trying scenes with a calm and dignified mien, with a word of encouragement here and a command there as occasion required. He had forty thousand men encamped on Bolliver [*sic*] Heights, with his Headquarters at Harpers Ferry.

For six weeks General Sheridan kept moving his troops up the valley a short distance, then he would fall back again. He watched the enemy very closely. So effectively did he keep up this backing and filling that General [John Bell] Hood was forced to suffer defeat at Jonesborough and obliged to evacuate Atlanta for lack of reinforcements.

It was upon one of these marches where the Union troops were chasing the rebels back into the interior of the country that I saw what to me

was an interesting sight, attracting my attention and riveting it upon my memory so firmly that the time can never effect it.

Platoons or Regiments of each army were placed across the plain and upon the sides of the mountains. To the eye of those who were upon the sides of the mountains, these troops could be seen for miles marching along at a fair quick step. The advance guard of the Union forces and the rear guard of the Rebel forces were in gunshot of each other. Every now and then the rear guard of the rebel troops would turn and fire upon the advancing foe who were pushing them back into the interior of the valley. Every time the Rebels fired upon our troops the fire was returned and vice versa. Each army moved along in beautiful order presenting a pleasing military array. This would have formed one of the most beautiful military pictures ever portrayed to the mind had it not have been that amidst that scene men were trying to shoot each other down. As it was as a war picture it was a beautiful one to see such a body of troops marching in such an array.


These scenes that are transpiring in this beautiful and fertile valley contrasts strongly with the natural scenery. Nature teeming with life had ripened her fruits. She was smiling with her bounties upon man. In the fields stood repined grain corn, wheat, oats, and other crops for the harvest. The reddened autumnal leaves were slowly falling to the ground. The rising sun shed a flood of warm rays upon the valley, and as it sunk behind the western mountains its beams decked the hills in gorgeous beauty.

While horrid war was going on in the midst of so many blessings, men in their bitter antagonism were shooting each other down. "Lo! We feel the wild upheaval of a nation's hidden fires; Right is battling with the evil, And the smoke to heaven aspires. War tumultuous and red-lighted; Sweepeth with sirocco blast, And our green young land is blighted, As the tempest whirlleth past. Not the death throw of the nation, Is this wild and awful hour, Tis its painful transformation, To a nobler life of power."²¹

After a while we passed up the valley and encamped at Berryville. Here we remained a few days. On the 16th of Sept., 1864, a party from the various regiments was drawn into line and started under proper officers for brigade headquarters. Here others joined the guard. After due time this picket guard was mounted, marched off, and posted according to orders. Three men was stationed upon each post. Things were beginning to wear the aspect of our having a pleasant time as we supposed. We soon however found that castles in the air came to naught; for we

To Arms! Citizens!

OUR COUNTRY CALLS!!



Come on Sons of Maine!

"OUR BRETHREN ARE ALREADY IN THE FIELD, WHY STAND WE HERE IDLE."

NOW IS THE TIME!

Col. Shepley's Reg. & Gen. Buller's Grand Division.

BEST CHANCE YET OFFERED!

Scarboro' should raise a Company, and all able-bodied men who wish to join, may do so, by applying immediately.

Recruiting Office at

CHAS. C. G. THORNTON, Recruiting
HORATIO HIGHT, Officers.

October 1st, 1861.

Tucker, Printer, 65 & 71 Exchange Street, Portland.

This broadside from the fall of 1861 sought recruits for the Twelfth Maine Infantry Regiment, commanded by Colonel George F. Shepley. Private Levi H. Winslow served in the Twelfth Maine throughout the war. Maine Historical Society Collections.

were ordered to deploy as skirmishers, leaving one of our number upon each post to guard the camp.

After we had deployed as skirmishers and moved forward a short distance, we encountered the enemy. Shots were exchanged for quite a number of minutes. A comrade by my side was wounded in the hand while I barely escaped receiving a minnie ball in my head. I was lying behind a stump. I had risen up and fired my piece in the direction of the smoke of one of our enemies' guns, which indicated his position. I had scarcely sheltered my head before zip came a bullet grazing the top of the stump and passing through one corner of my haversack, passed by on its errand of death without accomplishing its mission.

One or more of our brigades advanced in battle array to see how strong the enemy was, but as they saw our forces advance they vanished. The foe was no longer to be seen, proving it to be but a reconnoitering party to see where the Union troops were stationed and, if possible, to learn something of our movements.

After foraging a considerable, the brigades returned to camp and the picket line to their duty. While upon this foraging expedition I saw a soldier fire into a flock of sheep. He stopped and looked, expecting to see one killed. To his surprise they were all alive and unharmed. He looked and fired again. The same result followed. At last others had come and carried them all off but one. He stopped after loading his rifle and looked at the gun. He looked at the sheep. He took the gun to his shoulder. He rested it a moment. He fired and the sheep was his.

The encampment remained as it was until the morning of Sept. 19, when orders came early to strike tents and fall into line. Our tents were very small A tents. Each soldier had one piece of tent cloth. Sometimes some of the shrewd ones would get an extra piece. Two men put their pieces together and formed one tent. When they had the third piece it made a very comfortable shelter for the occasions to keep off the sun, dew, and rain, but when there were but two pieces the shelter was not very good. These tents the boys called dog tents. The pieces were four feet and 1/2 long and about the same wide. The length made the height and width and depth of the tent. These pieces of tent cloth had a row of bottom corners to fasten into the ground. They were put up by driving two crotched sticks into the ground about three feet long, with a little cross pole to form the roof. They were then buttoned on to each other, thrown over the poles, and fastened into the ground by putting pins into the loop holes into the four corners. It was the work of a very few moments to unbutton those pieces, pick up, and fall into line. Having struck

tents the troops formed in line at the beat of the long roll. On a short time they were in marching order.

They moved rapidly forward for a few hours. At 9 or 10 o'clock they halted. Skirmish lines were thrown out. The troops took the positions assigned them.

The Sixth Corps filing off to the left, except Gen. [James B.] Ricketts Division, took possession of some rifle pits and a wood on the enemy's right. The Nineteenth Corps and Gen. Ricketts's division of the Sixth Corps were in the centre. The eighth corps took their position on the left of the enemy's line. The command was given forward. The skirmish line pushed on. In a moment or two the skirmish line encountered the skirmish line of the enemy and opened the battle of Winchester. A general charge was now made upon the rebels. This charge was met by a terrific yell together with a volley of musket grape and canister balls, which told heavily upon the brave and heroic men of Gen. [Cuvier] Grover's divisions.

The battle raged strong and fierce. The rebel Gen. Early, fearing disaster, pressed his troops sternly on with yell after yell more terrific than we can describe. The Union line begins to sway. They struggle manfully to gain the contest. At last they gave way, so terrible was the fire upon them. They began to break just as the order was given to retreat. As this order was given every man in the centre of the line made a stampede to the rear for safety. The hero of the hour was Capt. [William T.] Rigby of the 24 Iowa Regiment of whom history has so nobly spoken but not exaggerated. The danger cannot be fully told that that noble and heroic captain withstood in that hour. Behold that Capt. amidst this stormy retreat, coming along as cool and calm as if there was no danger near, with a few men equally undisturbed. An officer belonging to the artillery riding up to him says, "Capt. you are not going to retreat any further." He replied, "certainly not." Turning to his men he gave the command. "Halt, Front, three cheers men!" That little band cheered as heartily as if they had gained a victory. They gave heart to all who heard it. They stayed there a short distance from the enemy in a field about two acres wide at the point nearest the woods lying flat upon their faces on ascending ground. In this position they kept up a continual firing with no other troops very near them. They stayed the tide of battle until the reserve forces could be drawn up. That captain held the enemy in check for half an hour. How much longer I cannot tell you as I left them to find my own regiment. How I found that heroic band, I got lost from my regiment in the retreat and being attracted by the firing, kept going to the

front. Instead of my own regiment I found Capt. Rigby and his men. In a short time the reserve forces were drawn up, and the broken line was formed. Again the contest was renewed.

The battle now raged fierce and wild as could be determined by the sound. Here an officer came along and requested the commanders of the reserve forces to press on, saying the rebels were slowly gaining ground. The battle still rages fierce and wild. Such a scene no graphic pen or picture can portray, for paint it in as glowing colors and as vivid as what you can, it will still lack in its hideousness. The sound of the artillery will be wanting as it sends its solid shot through the air with its buzz . . . and the bursting shells with their screech. Buzuzuzz . . . on in their course cutting off limbs of trees with a crash splinting fence rails, killing horses and men. At the same time the din of musketry could be heard. The bullets flew thick and fast with their zip, zip, zip. Thus the battle raged, Generals, Colonels, and so so [*sic*] on down the line. Each officer encouraged his men as volley after volley of the enemy's shot was met and returned with heroism.

(A shell [fell] that did not burst.) While this battle was raging so fiercely Gen. [George Armstrong] Custer with his brigade of cavalry made a long circuitous route and appeared upon the scene of action when he was most needed and at a time when the enemies of the Union were having all they could do to withstand the Union forces. All at once the rebels beheld to their surprise Gen. Custer with 24 men coming toward them in their rear with uplifted and gleaming sabers. On, on they come as they bore down on them in full gallop in their rear. They came down the descent of a hill and jumped a stone wall. As they leaped the wall some of the horses pitched headlong, horses and riders rolling down the hill together. Still they come, battalion after battalion, leaving behind them their unlucky companions perchance crushed to death. The rebels saw at once their only hope of safety was in being taken prisoners. Almost instantaneously up went the butts of six hundred or more rifles signifying their surrender. The Union troop now shouted victory.

It became the rebels turn to fly for refuge. They presented to the eye one chaotic mass. They left their dead and dying upon the field of battle. To the eye of those who saw that brigade of cavalry as they came in sight, the scene was a thrilling one. The suddenness of their appearance when not needed, their descent upon full gallop, their jump over the wall, their turning the tide of battle in less time than one can tell you of it. The cavalry men pursued with vigor the retreating forces allowing them no time for rest. They pursued them all night and drove them into their strong-

hold at Fisher's Hill. While the cavalry thus pursued them, the infantry bivouacked in the valley.

The battlefield at Winchester presented to the eye a gloomy aspect even to the Union soldiers who participated in the battle, thus sharing in its goodies. Behold lying upon the battlefield at Winchester the Union men and rebels who had seen their last battle and fired their last gun, never more to be aroused by the morning roll call as the Orderly Sargent should call "fall in, fall in," but there they lay awaiting the future roll call of the dead. General Sherman hath well said war is cruelty, you cannot refine it. Every heart would ache to behold such a scene as did those who saw those noble heroes dying upon this battlefield. Many a mothers' heart has been obliged to feel the weight of sorrow by the sad, sad news of her boy's death. Many a faithful and loving wife hath been crushed by the news of husbands being slain in battle. What a weight of sorrow few can tell. Yet war brings its glories as well as its miseries. But the miseries far exceed the glories. The result of this victory was five cannon, six or seven small arms, and five thousand prisoners.

After the infantry had rested a while they were ordered forward and were finally drawn up in line of battle before Fisher's Hill. Here we waited a short time before there was heard a shout, a charge, and a volley of musketry, and all was quiet. Fisher's Hill was taken. The flying troops were pursued all night; cannonading was kept up along the line of march, shelling the woods at every available point. So briskly were they pursued that from time to time, squads of prisoners were taken, besides army and camp equipage, which was strewed all along the line in the confusion of their flight. It seemed as if Early's whole command was nearly demoralized. They were driven twenty-two miles from Fisher's Hill. As the result of this victory, eleven hundred prisoners were taken, sixteen pieces of artillery, caissons, wagons, mules, horses, and harnesses.

The Union army returned on the route they had previously taken. Upon arriving at Cedar Creek they went into camp. After the soldiers broke ranks before many of them pitched their tents, they started pell mell in different directions. Some went for the chicken coop, others for the pig pen. I saw one pen of five hogs. The hogs were killed and dragged out in as many minutes. Around on the greensward near the pen, men were quartering and skinning them. In the bustle of the camp, there were men pitching tents; some were cooking, some were carrying fence rails for fuel, and others were seen bearing into camp something to cook. All seemed jovial.

Here the line of encampment was pleasantly situated and well laid

out. Here we encamped nearly a month. During this time we were at rest. The cavalry watched the enemy. They had skirmishes with them at short intervals of time. Nothing of note took place with the infantry. There was the general drill, parades, picket and guard duties, with the addition of building breastworks, which was soon and easily done as far as I could observe. I took my own turn at the spade with others. As there are always some pleasures in camp to take away its monotony, this was our experience among the transactions which took place here.

Our camp was soon covered by breastworks situated upon a commanding eminence, and most of the men began to feel quite at home. There was one story that went the rounds among the sixth corps. A tall six-footer belonged to one of the companies. The mail from home had arrived. Many of the men had received letters, among them this large man. The captain of that company soon after went out of his tent, and looking around, a little one side, saw this fellow crying bitterly. The Capt. stepped up to him and said, "John, what is the matter?" Sniffing he replied, "I was wishing I was in father's barn." "What would you do in your father's barn?" "Go into the house darned quick."

As the dawn of day arouses the laborer from his slumbers to again resume his daily task, so it was with the Union army at Cedar Creek. On the evening of the 18 of October, the sun had sunk to rest behind the Virginian mountains. Night's sable veil had fallen over the land. The tap of the drum had been sounded. The camp fires had gone out. Quiet prevailed. The inmates of the encampment were resting sweetly. Nothing was heard save the tread of the lonely sentinel as he paced to and fro on his beat, save here and there an occasional challenge as a soldier strolled too near his line in the darkness of the night.

In a distant camp commanded by Gen. Early, the scene is far different. "Old Early camped at Fisher's hill, resolved some Yankee blood to spill; he chose the time when Phil was gone, the Yankee camp to fall upon."²² There in that Confederate camp men are hurrying to and fro in preparation for marching. Soon they are in line marching towards the Union camp. As they move on they breathe anathemas upon the Union soldiers or the "darned yanks" as they called them, saying, "we'll teach them what the southern boys can do."

"At night, like thief of some bereft, he marched his troops around our left, With orders strict, unite the boys, do nothing that would make a noise, 'Get out of the way,' says Gen. Early, 'I've come to drive you from the valley.' While they were on their mission bent, we yanks were sleeping in our tents."²³ Soon they arrive at the foot of a large mountain



Colonel George F. Shepley, a Portland attorney, commanded the Twelfth Maine at the outset of the Civil War. He later became military governor of Louisiana once the Union took control of that state. Maine Historical Society Collections.

called Massanutten, standing at the left of the Union line; every place but this was guarded. This mountain was thought to be impregnable, so there were not any pickets stationed at its base. There it stood four or five thousand feet above the level of the sea, steep and rugged.

General Early thought as Napoleon Bonaparte did when told that there was barely a chance to cross the Alps; [He] said he would take the chance. Turning to his men he gave the command, "En avant! Advance!" Up, up they went, and victory was gained by the Emperor. So Genl. Early commanded his men to cross over Massanutten and surprise the Union forces encamped at Cedar Creek. A detachment of about three hundred or more climbed over this mountain coming down its steep and rugged sides; so dangerous was the march that some of the number who were taken prisoners said that they were obliged to go a large part of the way single file, hand over hand, clinging on to the bushes very carefully, for one false step would have sent them down the steep declivity a lifeless mass. There was barely a chance; they took that chance and arrived safe near the Union line without their being discovered. They formed their line, they deployed. They swooped down upon several picket posts; they gobbled up the guard. This together with the dense fog, which covered the valley and hills around, gave them a chance to form in line of battle, unknown to the Union army, that was reposing so quietly. After moving forward quite rapidly for a few moments, the order could probably be

heard along their line, "Charge, double quick march!" They advance; on they come. They yell and shriek; they give such yells as the grey coats were able to give. They came down upon our sleeping encampment, ere we were aware of it. And we were wrapped in the arms of Morpheus. Until the Rebs, with rousing volley, warned us to sleep, was death and folly. Old Early carried out his plan, surprising [Gen. George] Crook and his command, who had not time to form; so sudden came the leaden storm.

They brought us to our feet almost instantaneously. At the same time the command could be heard all along the lower end of the line, "Fall in, fall in," as each officer and orderly sergeant were brought to their feet by those terrible yells. It was to no avail. The Union camp was completely surprised and routed. While those of us in the centre of the line were forming in the breastworks looking out in front of the enemy, they came upon us in our rear with great velocity. Before we were aware of it, some of our own number was wounded, and no enemy in sight on our front. We turned. Behold to our surprise, the eighth corps, which formed the upper end or left of the line, had broken and was running rapidly by us on the retreat. The rebels followed close at their heels taking battery after battery. As they take a piece of artillery they turned it upon the retreating army. It now became the 19th Corps turn to fly for refuge. Our officers, seeing no other way before them, ordered retreat. As the retreat was sounded before we could get away, several comrades from the 12th Maine, together with our first lieutenant, were taken prisoners. The Six Corps rapidly executed a change of front and by great gallantry succeeded for a time in holding the enemy in check. The effect of this was only to cover the general retreat. As we retired, the enemy pursued us with great vigor. They cut off many of our trains and inflicted serious loss. The Union Army is now flying before the foe.

While this was going on at Cedar Creek, another and different scene was transpiring at Winchester 20 miles away. The commander of that flying army had taken a quick journey to Washington and returned as far as this town. He thought best to remain over night so as to make a safe journey on the morrow. Little did he expect to be aroused so early by his guard, responding to him that cannon and musketry could be heard in the distance, but this it was. Starting up, he listened. He heard the sound of musketry and the booming of cannon nearer and nearer. He said, "My boys are engaged in battle, and I know not how it is with them." He immediately turned to his groomsman and ordered him to saddle his noble steed at once.

“Up from the South at break of day, bringing to Winchester fresh dismay, the affrighted air with a shudder bore, like a herald in haste to the chieftain’s door; the terrible grumble and rumble, and roar telling the battle was on once more, and Sheridan twenty miles away.”²⁴ “And wider still, those billows of war thundered along the horizon’s bar, and louder yet into Winchester rolled the roar of that red sea uncontrolled, making the blood of the listener cold; as he thought of that fiery fray, with Sheridan twenty miles away. As he mounts that black and fiery steed, the din of battle is sounding still nearer. But there’s a road from Winchester town, a good broad highway leading down; and there thru the flash of the morning light, a steed as black as the steeds of night was seen to pass as with eagle flight, as if he knew the terrible need. He stretched away with the utmost speed, hills rose and fell, but his heart was gay.”²⁵ Flying as it were, he leaves Winchester in the distance behind him. He learned at once of the fate of his noble army. He rode as rapidly forward as possible, while that army was still on the retreat, “With Sheridan fifteen miles away.”²⁶ His encampment is in the hands of the rebel forces. A number of those forces have stopped to take the supplies that are left within the encampment; rifling the sutlers tents, they start for the rear [taking] everything of value. While others pursued with vigor the retreating forces.

This Union camp was so situated that as the soldiers retreated they had to go down into a ravine and then rise again on another eminence equal in height with the one just left, a sweeping gunshot off from the first, so that as we arrived upon the top of the hill a storm of rebel bullets came thick and fast around us. Here in the ravine I came near being a prisoner and joining my comrades as I was obliged to lie down to rest for a moment. It was but for a moment. Instantly the thought of a rebel prison came up before me. Then I gathered for the continuance of the race. I looked down to my legs and said, “Do your duty.” They responded nobly. As I arose to the top of the hill, such a storm of bullets I never saw before, neither do I wish to again. Those missiles flew thick and fast. It seemed as if they were striking upon every spit of ground except the one I was standing upon and that it was going to strike that spot next. But I did not stop to see.

While passing over this hill an amazing incident took place even in the midst of so much danger. A comrade who was flying for refuge in front of your observer was sprinkled with dirt, which was forced against him by a cannon ball. As the dirt struck him it made him take a zig-zag course, and a more frightened fellow you never saw, so that for a mo-

ment I was obliged to laugh. It was but for a moment, and had the comrade seen me, the tide of laughter would have turned. Another cannon ball came through the air with a buzz, and this time it threw the earth upon me. It made me curl down my head and increase my speed.

On, on! The army flies. It tried from time to time to form the broken lines. The enemy tried to keep the advantage they had already gained. They pressed rapidly upon the retreating army, obliging it to give way several times before it could make a successful stand. At last the receding troops gained a point of woods. At this time there was a lull in the battle. Our officers took advantage of this temporary calm. They formed their lines into a line of battle. Here a detachment from each company of the 12th Maine Regiment went and found the ammunition wagon. After barely escaping the skirmish line of the enemy they gained their own regiment.

Meanwhile Sheridan pressed forward to his routed troops, his horse speeding like wild fire “under his spurning feet the road like an arrowy alpine river flowed. And the landscape flowed away behind like an ocean flowing before the wind. And the steed like a bark fed with furnace ire swept on with his eyes full of fire. But lo, he is nearing his hearts desire; he is snuffing the smoke of the roaring fray. With Sheridan only five miles away.” “The first that the General saw were the groups of stragglers and then the retreating troops.” “What was done—what to do? A glance told him both. And striking his spurs with a terrible oath.”²⁷ As he neared his army he was greeted with applause. We heard those shouts in the distance. As those joyous cheers broke more clearly upon our ears, we wondered what those triumphant shouts could mean. Ah! See! Sheridan has arrived. Have reinforcements come to our rescue? The flying troops turn back. The woods ring with joy. “He dashed down the lines mid a storm of Hurrahs, and the wave of the retreat checked its course there because the sight of the master compelled it to pause.” “With foam and with dust the black charger was grey. By the flash of his eye and his nostrils play. He seemed to the whole great army to say, “I’ve brought you Sheridan all the way from Winchester town to save the day. Hurrah, hurrah for Sheridan Hurrah, hurrah for horse and man.”²⁸ And the rebel horde has stopped in its headlong career. Our reinforcement is but a man, but the man in himself was an army. He brought new courage and vigor to his troops.

It was reported that as General [William H.] Emory saw his commander coming, he rode up to him, saluted, and said, “We are whipped general.” Sheridan looked at him and replied in tones of irony, “You may

be, but your men haint." It is now 11 o'clock. The troops had been on the retreat four hours. The General upon his arrival rode along the line. He spoke words of encouragement to his men. He said, "Boys we'll have our old camp ground back tonight."

Aids and orderlies are now seen galloping on horse back in different directions along the line, bearing orders to the different commanders. The lines are being formed in a more formidable manner. Slight breast-works are being thrown up. The boys are working with a will. New courage has taken possession of their hearts; they know their commander is present; they have seen his pleasant countenance. It was more hope-inspiring than a battalion of soldiers would have been.

While the Union army was preparing to meet the rebels, you could see in the faces of the boys as they worked, a determination which took the place of surprise. Why? Sheridan said we shall have our old camp-ground back tonight. The boys in blue saw that their commander meant what he said. They worked with a will, which seemed to say, "I'll work for it sir." His troops had been in flight four hours. Never did a general's presence ever inspire his soldiers with more confidence than his. His straggling men turned back as fast as they could and swelled the ranks of the main line. There was not more straggling, no more anxiety regarding their safety. The cheerfulness which they exhibited seemed to say at once, "We are sure all will be well now."

General Sheridan upon his arrival went directly to the front and superintended every movement of his army. He watched the enemy with utmost caution. He was seen in places of great danger. Meanwhile the contending army prepared to resist if possible the foe who had invaded their valley. During the meantime I was sent to report to the surgeon of my regiment for duty.

We waited a few steps in the rear of the line. It was but for a few moments. The line had been formed. One o'clock the enemy made another onset, which was met by a volley of musketry. It cut into their ranks and made sad havoc amongst them. Such a volley as was poured forth at that time is not always heard on the battle field. It was one continual roar along the line, the sound dying in the distance. It made the hair of one's head stand on end. The doctor thought the rebels were fast upon us. This volley was accompanied by a ferocious yell. After this volley of musketry, the doctor, as quick as thought, placed himself in the saddle and galloped away a few rods. I grasped my bundle of blankets and followed at full speed. But hark! With that terrific volley of musketry the Union forces drove that rebel host before them. The doctor and I followed after.

GLORY TO OLD MAINE.

DEDICATED TO THE TWELFTH MAINE REGIMENT.

AN—“*Glory Hallelujah.*”

Rally round our standard, ye gallant men, and true,
 With Colonel Shepley at the head, we're bound to “put them
 through,” [can do,
 We'll show the Southern traitors what the down-east boys
 In Shepley's gallant Twelfth!
 Glory! Glory! Glory to old Maine,
 Glory to the Union we're fighting to maintain.
 Glory! Glory! Glory to old Maine,
 And Shepley's gallant Twelfth!

From Northern wilds to Kittery, from every hill and plain,
 Our glorious watchword echoes back in the same exultant
 For Liberty and Union, for the honor of old Maine, [strain,
 And Shepley's gallant Twelfth.
 Glory! Glory! Glory to old Maine, &c.

Glory to our leader, as we hurry to the wars;
 Glory to our noble State—Glory to the cause,
 The Union, Constitution, and enforcement of the laws,
 And Shepley's gallant Twelfth.
 Glory! Glory! Glory to old Maine, &c.

The time for compromise has passed; unsheath the glittering
 blade; [shade,
 Let the memory of WASHINGTON, *Mount Vernon's* hallowed
 Inspire the noble patriot hearts of Butler's bold Brigade,
 And Shepley's gallant Twelfth.
 Glory! Glory! Glory to old Maine, &c.

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Lyrics to “Glory to Old Maine,” a ballad dedicated to the men of the Twelfth Maine. Maine Historical Society Collections.

Soon we arrived where the rebels charged upon the Union army. Here was a sight to behold, the rebel dead and dying lay along the line as far as the eye could see, one here, two there, and in several places four were seen lying side by side. Scattered all along the line of retreat lay many of the chivalrous young men from the south. As fine looking young men as could ever boast of southern blood.

On! On! They went back again at night faster than they came down in the morning with General Sheridan at their heels. "Get out of the way," says Phil to Early. "You are too late to get the valley."²⁹ On their retreat they threw away guns, haversacks, and clothing. Sheridan determined to punish that rebel horde who dared to interrupt his sleeping camp. He pushed with vigor his cavalry forward at every available point. They occasionally cut off a squad of the retreating foe. At the same time the infantry moved forward very rapidly. As they arrived at Cedar Creek they found Gen. Early trying to make a stand, thinking if possible to save his army from further disaster, for by this time he felt concerned as to his safety. But it was of no avail.

The Union troops, now elated with the success which they had so recently met, determined to dislodge their enemies from the encampment, which they had previously occupied. With cheer after cheer they rushed forward and drove them back to the interior of the valley. Our encampment is now regained and in the hands of its former occupants. A portion of the infantry bivouacked upon their old camp ground. General Lewis A. Grant's Brigade of infantry [the Vermont Brigade] went as far as Fisher's Hill. The cavalry went as far as Woodstock.

While the Union troops were pursuing their enemy as they arrived at Strausburg, they saw what to them was a cheering sight. There were ambulances, supply wagons, cannon, and other things that went towards making up the supply of an army, jammed in, in perfect confusion. The bridge, which crossed the creek at this place, had given way. This bridge was as wide as the turnpike so that it would admit three teams abreast in their travel. It was 9 feet high. The rebel army was on the retreat. As those teams arrived upon the bridge, it broke and precipitated wagons, horses, and their riders into the stream below. Such was their flight that those teams nearest the bridge shared the same fate of those upon it, so that twenty-five or thirty wagons were smashed into the creek, killing horses, while their riders barely escaped. It was afterwards ascertained that one of the batteries had been ordered forward to intercept their flight and had been successful in weakening the stringer. The timbers being a little rotten, so that the weight of those teams, together with the jar

in their flight, finished the work, cutting off their line of retreat completely, suddenly and utterly confusing those teamsters, and they scarcely knew [what] to make of it. After General Lewis A. Grant's brigade had taken possession of Fisher's Hill, his troops went into camp and remained three or four weeks. On the morning of October 19, 1864, the rebels captured the Union provisions, sutler provisions, sutlers tents, twenty-four cannon, and twelve hundred prisoners. The victory found the Union camp again in our possession. We recaptured our own twenty-four cannon and captured twenty-four others. Besides these we took forty caissons, three battery wagons, ten battle flags, three hundred horses and mules, sixty-five ambulances, fifteen thousand rounds of artillery ammunition, fifteen hundred eighty small arms, and a considerable amount of commissary stores. We also recaptured many of our own men who had been taken [as] prisoners and twelve hundred from the ranks of the enemy. It was a pleasing sight to go down to Gen. Sheridan's headquarters and see this captured property placed in rows. Especially as we remembered how Gen. Early had surprised and routed the Union army, Early having all the advantage possible, and then to see how it changed like a panorama in favor of the Union forces as soon as Sheridan arrived.

(Early's Defeat) Several weeks now passed away, during which time neither army seemed disposed to assume the offensive. General Early strongly entrenched himself at New Market, sending his cavalry down the valley to watch the movements of Gen. Sheridan. There were occasional skirmishes between the hostile horsemen, but no movement of any importance took place. Both armies were diligently recruiting their energies. Rebel guerrillas were everywhere busily watching for supply trains, mail carriers, and any weak party of foragers.

On the 9 of November Gen. Sheridan broke camp at Cedar Creek and moved his whole army five miles back to Newton. The rebel Cavalry followed. November 10, Gen. Sheridan went five miles further towards Winchester to a place called Kearn Farm. The rebel cavalry slowly followed and engaged in a sharp skirmish with our rear guard. From here Gen. Sheridan retired to Winchester. Gen. Early, thus invited, moved down the valley and took position at Strausburg. The community knew not what to make of this retreat followed by the rebel army, which had been nearly annihilated at Cedar Creek. Our retrograde movement was made that we might be nearer the base of our supplies. The forage in the vicinity of Cedar Creek had been entirely exhausted. The annoyance from bands of rebel guerrillas was great. Sheridan determined to so

thoroughly lay waste to the country that they might not find any subsistence.

During the first week in December, Gen. [Wesley] Merritt's division of cavalry crossed the Blue Ridge and made a grand raid through Loudon and Faquir [*sic*] counties, which were the chief haunts of [General John Singleton] Mosby and his men. Some idea of this grand raid may be had from the statement that General Merritt captured and burned horses, cattle, swine, factories, and grain to the amount of two million, five hundred eight thousand, seven hundred fifty-six dollars worth of property.

Soon after this, perceiving there would be no further movement in the valley on the part of the enemy, Sheridan sent his infantry to other parts of the field. On the 27 of February Gen. Sheridan left Winchester with a mounted force consisting of two full divisions and a brigade of mounted men, taking only four pieces of light artillery. In three days he marched 83 miles, drove Gen. Early from Staunton, pursued him 13 miles further to Waynesboro where he captured 1,300 men and 11 guns. He then rode down to the James River canal and damaged that, so as to obstruct the transportation of supplies to the army at Richmond. Gen. Early's army is now brushed away.

Gen. Sheridan remains undisputed master of the Shenandoah. And horrid war has ceased in this beautiful and fertile valley. Well does the country deserve to honor the name of Gen. Sheridan.

Notes

1. Paul Andrew Hutton, "Phil Sheridan's Frontier," *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* 38, no. 1 (Winter 1988): 21. On this battle see also Raoul S. Naroll, "Sheridan and Cedar Creek – A Reappraisal," *Military Affairs* 16, no. 4 (Winter 1952): 153-168. For assistance in researching Levi H. Winslow's life and for providing source materials on Winslow and the Twelfth Maine Regiment, I express my grateful appreciation to the following persons: Michael Morris, reference librarian, Meredith Public Library, New Hampshire; Jamie Rice, research librarian, Maine Historical Society; Paul Friday, volunteer librarian, New Hampshire Historical Society; Carroll O'Connell, chairman, Sutton Historical Society, New Hampshire; Donald C. Davis, genealogist, Sutton, New Hampshire; Deborah E. Roberge, Maine Genealogical Society; Earle G. Shettleworth, Jr., Maine state historian; and Emily A. Schroeder, reference services, Maine State Library. I also wish to thank the Morris County Heritage Commission for allowing me to use text I wrote relating to Sheridan's Shenandoah Valley campaign, which appeared in *Gone to Wear the Victor's Crown: Morris County, New Jersey and the Civil War, A Documentary Account*, a 1998 publication I produced for the commission while employed as its archivist.

2. Paul H. Buck, *The Road to Reunion, 1865-1900* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1937), pp. 220-235.
3. No published version of the memoir has been located. This appears to be the first time it has been published.
4. G. A. Burgess and J. T. Ward, *Free Baptist Cyclopedia: Historical and Biographical* (n.p.: Free Baptist Cyclopedia Co., 1889), p. 706.
5. *Annual Report of the Adjutant General of the State of Maine for the Year Ended December 31, 1862* (Augusta, ME: 1863), p. 331.
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7. James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1988), pp. 740-741.
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12. Whitman and True, *Maine in the War for the Union*, p. 297.
13. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, pp. 779-780.
14. Whitman and True, *Maine in the War for the Union*, pp. 297-298.
15. Whitman and True, *Maine in the War for the Union*, pp. 297-298.
16. Special Schedules of the Eleventh Census (1890) Enumerating Union Veterans and Widows of Union Veterans of the Civil War, M123, Records of the Department of Veterans Affairs, microfilm reel 40, 7-741, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C.
17. Massachusetts Vital Records: Lawrence, 1847-1905, 21-22, microform, Lawrence Public Library, Lawrence, MA.
18. Burgess and Ward, *Free Baptist Cyclopedia*, p. 706.
19. Burgess and Ward, *Free Baptist Cyclopedia*, p. 706.
20. "New Hampshire Death Records, 1654-1947," index and images, <https://familysearch.org/pal:MM9.1.1/FSV2-YZH>.
21. Quotation from Jesse Truesdell Peck's poem "The Great Republic," from his book *The History of the Great Republic, Considered from a Christian Stand-Point* (New York: Broughton and Wyman, 1868), p. 696.
22. Quotation from lyrics of the popular song "Battle of Cedar Creek," (G. P. Hardwick, 1863).
23. Quotation from lyrics of the popular song "Battle of Cedar Creek," (G. P. Hardwick, 1863).

24. Quotation from Thomas Buchanan Read's 1864 poem "Sheridan's Ride," stanzas 1-7, published in Thomas Buchanan Read, *A Summer Story, Sheridan's Ride, and Other Poems* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Co., 1865), pp. 75-77.
25. Read, "Sheridan's Ride," stanzas 15-22.
26. Read, "Sheridan's Ride," stanza 23.
27. Read, "Sheridan's Ride," stanzas 33-41.
28. Read, "Sheridan's Ride," stanzas 42-55.
29. Quotation from "Battle of Cedar Creek."