

Foreword

ANY serious researcher looking to dig into the Battle of Gettysburg knows there are two sets of primary sources that constitute the starting point for any legitimate inquiry into those events. The first is the *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies in the War of the Rebellion*, a compilation of approximately 130,000 pages of 8-point type that represented (at the time) the known official reports of the participants, as well as the official correspondence of those participants pertaining to the events documented therein. These reports were typically written a short time after the events addressed, and are some of the best contemporary sources in existence of the events described. The three books that make up the three parts of Volume 27 of the *Official Records* are the starting point for any serious research into the Battle of Gettysburg.

Nearly as important is *The Bachelder Papers: Gettysburg in Their Own Words*, a three-volume set consisting of more than 2,000 pages of compiled primary source materials published in 1994 by Morningside House, Inc. of Dayton, Ohio. *The Bachelder Papers* are a veritable treasure trove of primary source material and absolutely indispensable to anyone looking to document the events at Gettysburg from a primary source perspective.

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John B. Bachelder was a painter, photographer, and historian who spent most of his adult life documenting military history. He began with the 1775

Battle of Bunker Hill, but found the lack of extensive firsthand accounts frustrating. The outbreak of the American Civil War, however, was an opportunity to witness and document a major battle. After spending months with the Army of the Potomac, the Battle of Gettysburg provided the opportunity he was seeking. Bachelder toured the battlefield and spent many years interviewing veterans. His expertise led to an appointment as the Superintendent of Tablets and Legends for the Gettysburg Battlefield Memorial Association in 1883. He was determined to make sure that the memorials erected on the battlefield were placed in proper positions and that they contained accurate information. In and of itself this was an important contribution, but Bachelder was determined to do more.

In 1880, President Rutherford B. Hayes signed into law a bill appropriating \$50,000 to Bachelder to write a detailed history of the Battle of Gettysburg. Senator Wade Hampton of South Carolina, who had fought with Jeb Stuart's cavalry at Gettysburg and was severely wounded leading his troopers on East Cavalry Field on July 3, described Bachelder's activities in a report to U.S. Senate Military Affairs Committee on March 17, 1880. "It appears that Mr. Bachelder, having the advantage of a military education, and love of history, went to the front early in 1862, more than a year before the battle of Gettysburg, to be in a position to collect data when the most important battle of the War was fought," explained the former general. "After working up the details of several engagements," he continued,

he reached the battlefield of Gettysburg before the dead were buried, remaining for eighty-four days, making plans of the field, visiting the wounded in hospital, and by permission taking the convalescent officers over the field, by whom their positions and movements were pointed out and established. During this period books full of notes from these actors were secured within a few weeks of the battle. With this information and sketches thus secured, he visited the Army of the Potomac, spending the winter of 1863-64 in consultation with the officers of every regiment and battery, whose conversations and explanations were carefully noted and preserved. At the close of the war, Mr. Bachelder issued an invitation to the many officers whose acquaintance he had made to visit Gettysburg with him for historical purposes, which was accepted by over one thousand; forty-nine of them generals commanding. From the acquaintance thus secured has resulted, during the past sixteen years, a most valuable correspondence regarding the battle of Gettysburg.

In researching his official history of the battle Bachelder conducted extensive interviews with veterans. He solicited correspondence from them describing their participation in the battle, and they discussed what they viewed as inaccuracies in the official battle reports. The result was a massive collection of primary source accounts. They eventually served as the basis for his history of the battle. The government, however, decided not to publish it, primarily because it utilized only a small percentage of the accounts he had spent years collecting. (Morningside published Bachelder's *History of the Battle of Gettysburg* in 1997.)

The primary sources collected by Bachelder were not published as a set until 1994 for several reasons: The collection included roughly 2,550 pages; only a small percentage of those pages included the Confederate side of the battle; and the correspondence had to be transcribed and typeset in order to be printed. The correspondence, which spans a period beginning shortly after the battle in 1863 and runs all the way to 1894, almost certainly represents the largest single collection of primary source correspondence outside the *Official Records* regarding the Battle of Gettysburg. These letters were eventually donated to The New Hampshire Historical Society (Bachelder's home state being New Hampshire), where they languished for decades, mostly unknown and largely forgotten. As a result, most of the early works interpreting the battle failed to include the invaluable firsthand insights contained in these letters.

Edwin B. Coddington was the first to make extensive use of these documents in his masterful (albeit posthumously published) 1968 work *The Gettysburg Campaign: A Study in Command*. The study is still considered by many to be the definitive account of the campaign. Because the letters were housed in an obscure depository and had yet to be transcribed, they continued to languish there.

Enter the husband and wife team of David L. and Audrey J. Ladd, who undertook the massive and painstaking task of organizing the letters in chronological order and transcribing them. This was no small task given the wide variety of handwriting skills by these former soldiers. Audrey undertook the transcribing, which was proofed by David, who also annotated them where appropriate. He also indexed them. Without their hard work, the three-volume *The Bachelder Papers* would not exist. Robert Younger, the founder and late publisher at Morningside, blazed the trail of

independent Civil War publishing and made many significant and lasting contributions to the study of Civil War history, but none more important than *The Bachelder Papers*.

For the first time the full primary sources compiled by John Bachelder were readily available to anyone wanting to use them. Much of my own work on cavalry operations has focused on the Battle of Gettysburg, and I have used these papers extensively. They offer, in my opinion, the single best primary source on the fighting on East Cavalry Field I have uncovered to date.

The Bachelder Papers, however, were expensive to print, the print run was small, and the set sold out quickly. Sadly, Bob Younger passed away and Morningside closed shop. For many years the set has been hard to find and many times more costly than the original retail price. So costly, in fact, that most people cannot afford it. Like most historians, I was worried this wonderful resource would no longer be available to the buying public at anything approaching a reasonable price, and writers of future treatments of the battle would therefore fail to utilize them. Fortunately, my fears ultimately proved to be unfounded. I was tickled to learn in late 2019 that my friends at Savas Beatie had made arrangements with Audrey Ladd (David having passed some years ago) and The New Hampshire Historical Society to return *The Bachelder Papers* to print.

The volume you now hold is the first installment of a facsimile reprint of the original Morningside edition, with the addition of this new Foreword the publisher, Theodore P. Savas, graciously asked me to contribute. Now that *The Bachelder Papers* are once again readily available, I commend them to you as a truly remarkable collection of rich primary source material that greatly adds to the trove of material available to help us to interpret Gettysburg. The set is indispensable to any Civil War book collection. Whether you are a serious historian or simply enjoy reading about Gettysburg, this set is for you.

Kudos to Ted and his staff for resurrecting such a superb source and making it available once more for a reasonable price, and kudos to you for deciding to add it to your library. That is a decision you will never regret.

Eric J. Wittenberg
Columbus, Ohio