

INTRODUCTION

John Badger Bachelder (1825-94), a New Hampshire-born artist with a minimum of military experience, was the most important historian of the Battle of Gettysburg in Nineteenth Century America. He arrived on the battlefield a few days after the armies had departed, and spent the rest of his life intimately connected with the battle, as well as the evolving park at Gettysburg.

Educated at Captain Alden Partridge's Military School in Pembroke and at an academy local to his hometown—Gilmingtton, New Hampshire—Bachelder eventually moved to Reading, Pennsylvania and began work at the school that would become the Pennsylvania Military Institute. In 1851, a year after he arrived, Bachelder became principal of that school. He gained further knowledge of the military working with the state militia, and was conferred a colonelcy by Governor William F. Johnston in that same year; this appellation stuck with him throughout his life.

In 1853, Bachelder resigned and returned to New Hampshire, where he married Elizabeth Barber Stevens and resumed his career as an artist. When the Civil War erupted in 1861, Bachelder had already begun collecting notes on Bunker Hill, planning to paint an accurate rendition of the battle. Finding reliable material hard to locate, Bachelder decided to accompany the Army of the Potomac and await the decisive battle of the rebellion, hoping to be able to examine the topography, interview participants, and publish a written and illustrated history of the engagement.

After reaching Gettysburg, Bachelder studied the terrain via horseback, then drew an isometric map of the battlefield. He visited field hospitals around the town, interviewed wounded soldiers of both armies, and gained information that enabled him to mark on his map the positions of every unit engaged during the battle. Six different colors showed the positions of regiments and batteries for all three days of the battle, in a

panoramic view of Gettysburg that was published in the fall of 1863.

Then, after seeking permission from Maj. Gen. George G. Meade, Bachelder visited the Army of the Potomac's winter quarters in the Brandy Station area. He claimed to have spoken with the commanders of every regiment and battery in the army. The result was several notebooks of firsthand accounts of the battle as seen by Union officers.

After the war ended, Bachelder's obsession with Gettysburg continued: he announced reunions on the field; he accompanied veterans over the terrain and hammered numbered, wooden stakes into the ground to identify various locales pointed out to him by participants; and he maintained his artistic interest in Gettysburg.

Believing the climactic Southern attack of July 3 to be the decisive act of the battle, Bachelder assembled a mass of data about "Pickett's Charge." He commissioned noted artist James Walker to paint "The Repulse of Longstreet's Assault at the Battle of Gettysburg," which appeared in 1870. Bachelder wrote an accompanying guidebook and toured widely with this massive canvas (it measured 7.5 by 20 feet), while lecturing across America. In 1873, Bachelder published a guidebook to the battle, which was well-received by the public. His guidebook included a black and white, fold-out version of the isometric drawing. Three years later, the federal government published a set of three Gettysburg maps that Bachelder had compiled. Based on the 1868 survey by Gouverneur Kemble Warren, the maps contained positions of units for all three days.

More important, Bachelder soon became involved with the Gettysburg Battlefield Memorial Association as a director (from 1880-81, and from 1883-94). Formed in 1864 to preserve the battlefield, the GBMA oversaw the acquisition of land as well as the erection of historical markers and monuments on its grounds. His knowledge of the battle earned Bachelder an appointment as Superintendent of Tablets and Legends; it was his responsibility to assure that all monuments contained accurate historical data. During the five years that Bachelder held the position (1883-1887), he became involved in deciding the physical composition of monuments, and the correct placement of monuments on the field. Unlike many of his contem-

poraries, he recognized the necessity of marking the Confederate lines of battle.

In June 1880, President Rutherford B. Hayes signed into law a bill that provided the sum of \$50,000 to be paid to Bachelder to write a detailed history of the battle of Gettysburg. The finished product—comprised of some 2,550 pages—was sent to Washington in October 1886. The four volumes were accompanied by 58 maps. Bachelder's manuscript was based on the official reports of both armies, and supplemented by the oral and written statements he received after 1863. Unfortunately, less than 10% of his history contained material Bachelder had amassed after the battle; his unwillingness to use more of his research notes remains a mystery.

Most likely, though, Bachelder failed to make full use of those first-hand accounts because of the controversies in which he found himself immersed. As a result of his lifetime of work at Gettysburg, Bachelder became more and more confident in his ability to understand what had happened on the battlefield, but his self-confidence was easily mistaken for arrogance. Thin-skinned veterans often complained that they knew more than Bachelder—they had seen the battle itself; he had not. Bachelder himself was as stubborn as the veterans, and easily angered when confronted; he was constantly embroiled in controversy, arguing with veterans of both armies. Southern officers claimed he had not collected enough material to accurately place their units, while the mass of conflicting testimony on the Northern side made his task much more difficult.

These quarrels proved detrimental to Bachelder's writing career; the government never published his manuscript, disappointed by its lack of originality. And although he advertised that an "Illustrated History of the Battle of Gettysburg" was forthcoming, he never published such a book. He did collect a number of engravings of generals and action scenes, but it is not apparent whether or not he began work on the text. At his death, he had published only a few works on Gettysburg: his guidebook, the descriptive booklet for Walker's painting, and numerous newspaper and magazine articles.

In May 1893, Secretary of War Daniel S. Lamont appointed Bachelder one of three commissioners who were to supervise the department's growing interest in marking and expanding

the Gettysburg battlefield. Just two weeks before Bachelder's death on December 22, 1894, Daniel E. Sickles had introduced legislation to authorize the War Department to accept ownership of the battlefield. Bachelder, who could see that the GBMA was unable to accomplish everything that it needed to do, fully approved of Sickles's bill.

Tragically, Bachelder's reputation seemed to have died with him; he quickly disappeared into obscurity. His widow, Elizabeth Barber Stevens, passed away in 1914; seven years later, her sisters Amanda and Charlotte Butler Stevens donated a large collection of Bachelder's Gettysburg material to the New Hampshire Historical Society.

The Bachelder Papers remained in the New Hampshire Historical Society for decades, unknown to and unused by historians of Gettysburg. They were rescued from obscurity by Dr. Edwin B. Coddington, a professor of history at Lafayette College in Easton, Pennsylvania. Coddington had an abiding interest in writing a fresh history of the battle. He began work in the late 1950s by searching out manuscript collections that had been little-used by previous authors.

Like other historians, Coddington did not know anything about Bachelder. In a New York antique shop, Coddington's daughter found one of Bachelder's pamphlets: the one that describes Walker's painting of Pickett's Charge. Alerted to the importance of Bachelder's expertise, Coddington began searching for the original painting, with no success. Then, he saw a reproduction of the Walker painting in Bruce Catton's *The American Heritage Picture History of the Civil War*, published in 1960. The book credited the photograph to the New Hampshire Historical Society.

Coddington wrote to the historical society and received a reply two months later: Yes, the Bachelder Papers were housed with them, but no one seemed to have ever used them, and the librarians had no idea how much material they contained. Dr. and Mrs. Coddington eagerly drove to Concord and spent three weeks examining boxes and bound volumes. There, they found every historian's dream—an unused manuscript collection of vast importance to the subject at hand. The notes Coddington gathered formed an important part of his most famous work, *The Gettysburg Campaign: A Study in Command*, published posthumously in 1968.

After Dr. Coddington alerted the historical society to the importance of the Bachelder Papers, a visitor to the society told them about a Bachelder descendant still living at the family homestead in Nottingham, New Hampshire. The society's director informed Coddington of this discovery, and the professor returned to New Hampshire to see the man, who proved to be Francis C. Carleton, a grand-nephew of Bachelder's. Over the next few months, Carleton searched the Nottingham mansion as well as the attic at Bachelder's home in Belmont, Massachusetts. He did find additional Bachelder material, and allowed Coddington to use several of Bachelder's unpublished sketches in his *Gettysburg Campaign*. The letters in Belmont were microfilmed by the Massachusetts Historical Society.

Other Bachelder material was scattered across the nation. For example, the Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery in San Marino, California, has custody of some of the Bachelder material in the John P. Nicholson Collection. Nicholson, a veteran of the 28th Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry, was one of the three commissioners appointed by Secretary of War Lamont in 1893. His large collection of Civil War books and papers includes additional Bachelder letters and notes. The Gettysburg National Military Park Library has several Bachelder items among the surviving GBMA material located there. The park library also has the War Department's copy of Bachelder's unpublished battle history. Unfortunately, the notebooks of information Bachelder collected from Army of the Potomac officers during the winter of 1863-64 were most likely destroyed in a fire when lightning struck some buildings on the farm in the late 1920s. The notebooks did not appear in any of the recent auctions of Bachelder material from the Carleton estate.

But the material in the New Hampshire Historical Society is by far the largest and most important collection of Bachelder's papers in existence. The collection includes correspondence he received from veterans of both armies on various aspects of the battle, comments on his maps and isometrical drawing, arguments regarding the marking of Confederate positions, and other questions related to Gettysburg. The collection also includes his rough draft for the government-sponsored history of the battle, two letterpress books, copies of Union and

Confederate battle reports (probably compiled by Bachelder prior to the publication of the Gettysburg volumes of the *Official Records*), and bound volumes of typescripts of many handwritten letters to Bachelder.

The hundreds of letters in the Bachelder Papers consist primarily of missives to Bachelder from men who participated in the Battle of Gettysburg. Most of these letters were written by Union officers—lieutenants, captains, majors, lieutenant colonels, colonels, and generals—who described their recollections of the engagement. By the mid-1870s, some Confederate officers began to write Bachelder about their experiences at Gettysburg. Many officers wrote to fellow veterans to check details, then mailed these answers to Bachelder. A few officers copied their diaries and sent the transcriptions to Bachelder. These first-hand accounts cover the entire course of the battle from the first shots on the morning of July 1 to Lee's retreat from the battlefield. Other letters cover monument controversies such as the argument between 12th New Jersey and 111th New York veterans, comments on Bachelder's maps, and the pros and cons of marking the Confederate lines of battle.

Gettysburg researchers, regardless of their specialties, will find material of interest in the Bachelder Papers. Previously, in addition to the New Hampshire Historical Society, only the Gettysburg Park Library had a microfilm copy of most of the Bachelder Papers. The cooperative effort by David and Audrey Ladd, Morningside, and the New Hampshire Historical Society, will enable Gettysburg enthusiasts to use with ease one of the most important Gettysburg manuscript collections ever published.

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