

CARIBOU VETERANS' MEMORIAL PARK STATUE.

When the Caribou Veterans' Memorial Park Statue was unveiled on 30th May 1818, the few newspapers that covered the event had to put it on the last page, as the United States, like the rest of the world, was holding its breath in anticipation of news from the Great War. While evidence suggests that the campaign for erecting the statue was \$500 dollars strong by May 1916 – roughly a year before the United States entered World War One – the creation of a statue commemorating the lives of soldiers lost in battle could not have been more relevant.

The statue certainly held a central place in Caribou itself: it stands at the intersection of three roads, in the middle of the historically rich triangle at the core of this small town in Aroostook County, Maine. To the West is Main Street, one of Caribou's longest and most central roads. To the South is Nylander Street where the town's only museum stands. To the East is Lyndon Street, Lyndon being the area's former name before it was permanently changed to Caribou on 8th February 1877.

The soldier statue in Caribou was funded in its entirety by Ansel G. Taylor Woman's Relief Corps (WRC) No. 97, and it stands testament to the WRC's pledge 'to perpetuate the memory of those who sacrificed much and sometimes all in the Great War of the Rebellion (The American Civil War)' and as a show of gratitude to any veterans, of any war, who risk their lives for freedom. The WRC is a post-Civil War organization: recognized in July 1883 as auxiliary to the Union's Grand Army of the Republic (GAR), its members promised to support to the families of Civil War soldiers who lost their lives, while also making sure that their sacrifice would not go unrecognized by future generations. The creation of the WRC marked the convergence of the efforts of different women's groups which had been dedicated to war and post-war aid work into one national body. Be it through nursing, volunteering, or fundraising for charitable causes, women had worked hard for the war effort, and harder still to win the official, national recognition which the WRC established. The group's commemorative endeavors played a part in securing that

recognition, and demonstrating the increasingly public role women had taken in debates about the commemoration of the Union army's dead and its veterans. The Caribou statue is a perfect example of this, as it is the product of a small, local group that managed to leave a mark on the way war veterans were commemorated, and are still being commemorated, in the United States today.

The particular group of women who erected the statue takes its name from Ansel G. Taylor, a member of Company F of the 1st DC "Bakers" Cavalry, who died in Portsmouth, Virginia on 7th July 1864, and was soon declared a local hero. Though his body was never returned to his native Caribou, a cenotaph commemorates his sacrifice at the Evergreen Cemetery, less than half a mile south of the statue. Besides the WRC No. 97, another local branch of the Grand Army of the Republic, Post 95, also bears his name. As one of the requirements of setting up a local branch of national organizations such as the GAR or WRC was to name it after a deceased person, and as both groups were based in Caribou, Taylor, their local hero, was clearly a natural choice.

The Caribou Veterans' Memorial Park Statue depicts a young, parading soldier with both hands firmly clasping a flagpole, from which a granite flag hangs. The figure's right foot is extended forward as though the soldier may step forward at any moment, although the rest of his body appears quite stationary. Both the granite flag and the soldier's clothing are stiff and still, and, in combination with the soldier's relaxed expression, they suggest a certain calmness and peace. Indeed, the granite soldier does not bear arms; instead, two granite rifles form a cross below the statue's principal inscription, which is centered on the pedestal's front panel and reads:

In Memory of
The
Defenders Of Our Country
And Flag
1861-65.

Though the statue is not dedicated to a particular soldier or regiment, it is safe to assume that the Ansel G. Taylor Woman's Relief Corps had their namesake in mind

when erecting it. As Caribou was still considered a village when this monument was erected, it seems likely that the women of the corps would have been keen to honor the particular sacrifices of soldiers from this tight-knit community. For communities that were hundreds of miles away from the heart of battle, local heroes such as Taylor offered focal points for remembrance, ways of coming to terms with the violence and bloodshed of the Civil War. In fact, Taylor's great grandson, Austin Poland, was chosen to unveil the Caribou statue, showing the community's appreciation of Taylor's sacrifice decades after the event. At the same time as the statue offered many families a means of honoring their fallen, its namesake placed each man's individual story at the heart of its commemorative gesture.

When the statue's dedication ceremony took place in May 1918, fifty-three years had passed since the end of the Civil War. For most of the people present that day, the Civil War was either a distant memory or an event passed from generation to generation through stories, songs, and history books. The ceremony began with music which was followed by a children's choir, and group prayer. Following these formalities, Austin Poland undertook to unveil the statue, and honor a great grandfather he had never met. The ceremony was a success, as *The Bangor Daily News* observed:

All the speeches which were short, breathed the spirit of loyalty and paid glowing tributes to the heroes in whose honor the beautiful new statue has been erected. The Women's Relief Corps have worked for many years to raise funds for this monument, and to them is due great credit for thus securing such a splendid symbol of the American spirit.

As an article from *The Bangor Daily News* from 1st May 1916 notes, the WRC no. 97 was 'not a large corps in point of numbers, but great in enterprise', and the group's small size perhaps helps to explain why so little information about their activities, besides the statue's creation and dedication, can be found today. Newspapers only mention them in passing, usually documenting their interactions with other WRC branches at dinner parties or regular meetings. But women such as those of the Ansel G. Taylor WRC were responsible for the way future generations would understand Union soldiers, their service, and the causes for which they were fighting – and they can play a significant role in reminding us of the quiet, often forgotten

efforts that women across the North put into the representation and commemoration of the Union dead in the decades following the war.

These efforts weren't always publicly visible or manifested in the same memorial stone from which the Caribou Soldier was carved. Before the creation of the WRC, different groups of women throughout Maine created objects which continue to serve a commemorative purpose today, acting as tangible evidence of the efforts they put into caring for their men and the memories of their men, not just after, but also during the Civil War. A case in point is [Susannah Pullen's Civil War quilt](#), which, like the Caribou statue, was carefully crafted by a small group of women who were also from Maine. Susannah Pullen's Sunday school class of fourteen girls finished compiling their quilt in Augusta, Maine on 1st September 1863. The quilt was the product of both individual and collaborative effort, as each woman was responsible for penning around ten inscriptions on one square piece of fabric, approximately 16.5 x 16.5 inches each, before they stitched all 15 pieces together. The principal colors of the quilt are the patriotic red, white, and blue, and many geometric shapes and patterns adorn both sides of the quilt. Once finished, the quilt was sent to the front as a means of physical comfort to wounded soldiers in the war's field hospitals. As soon as the war was over, however, the quilt became living proof of the care and effort women put into the war.

Approximately 150 inscriptions were penned on the fabric's surface but many of them have faded over time. Fortunately, a transcription of each line was made in the early twentieth century, so the sentiments of Susannah Pullen and her class survive today, providing us with the insight into the experiences of these northern women in wartime, and the various ways they found of caring for soldiers at the front.

The inscriptions were meant to inspire hope in those who read them: they are often uplifting, even funny, and range from Bible verses through patriotic slogans, practical advice, riddles, and jokes. One woman took a clear, practical approach: 'In order to affect sound sleep, eat not heartily after sundown especially after a heavy march or desperate battle'. This, unknown woman assumes a caring, almost motherly tone, adapting her advice to fit the conditions of the war, even if she never experienced marching or battle.

The inscription that shows best on the quilt today, and can almost be deciphered if examined closely, is a comical riddle with a military focus:

Why is the compass reversed in the state of New York?

It has its West Point in the East.

While this woman clearly sought to appeal to the soldiers' sensibilities, the inscriptions on the quilt, when taken as a whole, are almost like a compilation of anonymous letters, sent by strangers with the purpose of connecting with the ailing soldiers fresh from the battlefield.

In the good humor and helpful advice they share, these messages are intended to remind soldiers, far from home, that people back home are thinking and caring about them. More lighthearted inscriptions – such as, 'If you are good looking send me your photograph. Direct to the name in the large square' – make the quilt a commemorative item that is less concerned with the solemn celebration or remembrance that commemoration usually entails. Instead, the quilt as we encounter it today helps to create a collective memory of Union troops that is more personal, and which takes into consideration their need to be comforted and cared for.

The women who created this quilt may well have found comfort in it as well: many would have had friends and family members fighting in the war, and it may be that providing comfort to any soldier enveloped in its folds gave them hope that their loved ones would be cared for in a similar way. The fifteen women involved in the creation of the quilt wrote their names on their respective piece of fabric, as all of them were keen to receive news from the front, or confirmation that their work has been received and appreciated. Pullen's part of the quilt best explains this decision:

We have many dear friends connected with the army & any proper letters from any persons embraced in the defense of our country, received by any whose names are on this quilt shall have a reply. Tell us if nothing more its destination. We meet with many others to sew for you every Wednesday and your letters would prompt us to more exertions for our patriots.

Amazingly, the reactions of those ‘patriots’ survive in the archive today. When the quilt was donated to the National Quilt Collection of the National Museum of American History, Washington, DC, in the 1930s, it was accompanied by two letters, written by soldiers who were admitted to the Carver and Armory Square Hospitals in Washington D.C. One of these letters, written by Sergeant Nelson S. Fales on 22nd November 1863, confirms that the quilt and its inscriptions reached their intended targets, in more ways than one: ‘Dear madam,’ Fales writes,

I have had the pleasure of seeing the beautiful 'Quilt' sent by you to cheer and comfort the Maine Soldiers. I have read the mottoes, sentiments, etc., inscribed thereon with much pleasure and profit.

Evidently, the quilt achieved its desired effect, as the soldiers seemed to enjoy it, and what Fales describes here as ‘profit’ could possibly suggest its positive impact on the war effort.

If we correlate soldierly morale with military success, we begin to see the ways in which the quilt, in lifting a soldier’s spirits, might also have been said to have a positive effect in the outcome of battle. These northern women who couldn’t be further from battle, still managed to sew their way onto the battlefield. They contributed to the war in their own way, shared the concerns of the soldiers, and were anxious to see the war draw to a close. Pullen in particular was looking forward to a time when the Civil War would be a thing of the past, and in her part of the quilt she requested to have it returned once the war was over:

The commencement of this war took place Apr. 12th, 1861. The first gun was fired from Fort Sumter. God speed the time when we can tell when, and where, the last gun was fired; & ‘we shall learn war no more.’ If this quilt survives the war we would like to have it returned to Mrs. Gilbert Pullen, Augusta, Me [...] This quilt completed Sept. 1st 1863.

Her appeal was indeed satisfied as the quilt was eventually returned to her. Before that time, her words reminded those soldiers wrapped up in the quilt’s warm folds that the war would one day be over. Despite the uncertain circumstances in which the quilt was made, Pullen imbued this object with hope for the future: it is exactly this hopeful spirit that makes the quilt so comforting.

The quilt was created by women on the home front, yet the endeavors of patriotic women like Pullen did not stop there, as a long line of care began with women at home and ended with women at the front, actively caring for wounded soldiers.

Sarah Sampson, an agent of Maine's Soldiers' Relief Association, is one of the women who made this possible, as she delivered Pullen's quilt to the hospitals in Washington. Maine Soldiers' Relief Association, an organization quickly set up during wartime, promised free assistance, advice, and information to hospitalized officers or soldiers from Maine, particularly those hospitalized in Washington, where many wounded soldiers were transported and where Sampson was most active.

Sarah Sampson, born in Bath, Maine, was married to Charles A. L. Sampson, the captain of Company D of the 3rd Maine Regiment, which fought in the First Battle of Bull Run in July 1861 and the Battle of Fredericksburg in December 1862, to name a few. When the war broke out, she felt that it was her duty to support her husband and her country, and she followed him to the battle front, helping wounded soldiers in any way she could and seeing to their safe transportation to a hospital, despite her lack of training. In one post-war report to Maine's Adjutant General, Sarah wrote:

We invariably found the soldiers grateful for what we brought them, but more so that we had come ourselves. Some told us they had not seen a woman for three months.

Evidently, the mere presence of women in the heart of battle was sometimes enough to rally the troops. Other records from volunteer nurses also record the same soldierly gratitude towards the women who helped them recover.

The letters of Rebecca Usher, another Southern Maine volunteer nurse from Hollis, record the behavior and character of the soldiers with whom she interacted. Usher worked at the General Hospital in Chester, Pennsylvania, where wounded soldiers who could not march to Washington were sent to recover. In a letter to her sister Jane, dated 9th January 1862, she writes:

Since I wrote I have had a case of Diphtheria – a Philadelphian from the battle of Fredericksburg, he was slightly wounded and took cold [...] He is an intelligent, high toned, noble hearted fellow, and is so much afraid of troubling me and so grateful for any service rendered him, that it oppresses me.

Women such as Usher, who had a personal interaction with Union troops, not only cared for the men they encountered, but undertook to humanize and individualize them as well. Where military records would simply add names to conscription registers or remove them to casualty lists, women who served as nurses worked, through private modes of correspondence, to remember the lives and experiences of men who might otherwise have become statistics. Later in her letter, Usher writes:

We hear a great deal of the demoralizing effects of war. I do not see it here, I believe the men in my ward will compare favorably in moral character with the same number of men anywhere, in any class of society.

The letters that nurses sent back home also reported on the state of the war and most importantly the condition of the army, and here, Usher reassures her sister that morale is high, despite sickness and injury. More importantly, voices of women such as Usher promoted this idea of patriotic unity to which many other women and women's groups dedicated their lives. A brief glance at the lives of Usher's sisters is proof enough of this. Her sister, Martha Osgood, founded the Buxton-Hollis Soldiers' Aide Society; another sister, Sarah Ellen Usher Bacon was active in the Maine Camp Hospital Association in Portland; and her sister Jane, to whom the above letter was addressed, helped raise funds for soldiers through concerts. The story of the many and varied women's groups across the US does not begin with the WRC: the establishment of the corps in 1883 is the result of over two decades of work and dedication.

Though commemorative objects like the quilt and collections of letters may pale in comparison to grand displays of remembrance such as statues and parks, they still provide an intimate insight into the feelings the Civil War produced. Moreover, such items are perhaps easier to digitize, and because of that, their impact and reach today is greater than it has ever been. Usher's letters can currently be viewed on the website of the [Maine Memory Network](#) due to the contribution of the Maine Historical Society. In addition, Pullen's quilt belongs to the [National Quilt Collection](#), which is part of the Division of Home and Community Life textiles collection at the National Museum of American History, Kenneth E. Behring Center. The collection currently consists of over 500 quilts, most of them acquired through donations, and it is the product of an effort which started in the 1890s. Though the quilt cannot be put on public display for preservation purposes, it can still be found on the [Smithsonian's virtual](#)

[tour of the collection](#), financed by Patty Stonesifer and Michael Kinsley through [The Seattle Foundation](#).

As Civil War remembrance in the twenty-first century takes on new, digitized forms, a distinction can be made between the traditional monumentality of statues like the one in Caribou and the more modern approach to remembering the voices and concerns of the Civil War era as seen by the quilt and nurses' letters. Ultimately, these memory objects remind people of the efforts of both men and women during the Civil War; yet where the quilt and the letters are more verbal and relatable, the Veterans' Park in Caribou is a silent, more solemn, commemorative space.

The park on which the Caribou statue stands has only recently been dedicated as a Veterans' Memorial Park. Before that, the statue was simply known as the Caribou or Soldier Statue. In 2009 Doug Michaud, a Vietnam War veteran, and Carroll St. Peter, a 20-year honorably retired technical sergeant in the U.S. Air Force, decided to continue the efforts of the WRC No. 97, launching a fundraising campaign to turn the entire spread of the triangle adjacent to Nylander Street into a place where the memory of all war veterans can be appreciated. Where the women of the WRC were concerned with the personal sacrifices of the community which resulted from the Civil War, the Veterans' Park was to be the product of a wider perspective, taking centuries of patriotic endeavors and sacrifices into account.

Four years later, the park was completed at an estimated total cost of around \$45,000. For the dedication ceremony on 27th July 2013, the 60th anniversary of the Korean War armistice, a new flagpole was raised a few meters to the north of the statue. The flagpole was placed in the center of a five-pointed star, and the flag that flew from it had previously been raised at the United States Capitol, and was brought to Caribou at the request of Susan Collins, Maine's U.S. Senator and a Caribou local. The host of the ceremony, Phil McDonough, chairman of the Veterans' Memorial Park Association, paid homage to all the people that made the park a reality, but most importantly to all those veterans the park aims to honor. Maine State Senator Troy Jackson addressed the crowd:

For someone like myself, who has never served in the military, it is incumbent upon us to honor the memory of our veterans. This park is a perfect place to do so.

Amid this commemorative solemnity, Carol McElwee, a Maine State Representative and resident of Caribou, commented on how her own personal experience of patriotic celebration is also linked with the place, and her remembrance of how many past Memorial Day parades ended there. As public events such as the dedication ceremony aim to establish monuments like the Caribou statue as a national commemorative symbol, the residents' memory helps to individuate the statue from the multitude of other monuments across the country, stressing its importance to the local community.

After all, this is the spirit that has always surrounded the statue. Erected by the WRC no. 97 during the First World War, the statue has been reminding Caribou residents of the personal losses the community suffered during the Civil War for over a century. As time goes by, the story of the small, northern women's corps is as important as ever, as it can shed some light on the numerous, oft-forgotten women who left behind an incredible collection of humble memorabilia that intimately remember and honor the soldiers of the Civil War.

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'Rebecca Usher on injured soldiers, war, Pennsylvania, 1863', contributed by Maine Historical Society, Maine Memory Network,
<<https://www.mainememory.net/artifact/81016>>.

- Full transcription at <<https://www.mainememory.net/media/pdf/81016.pdf>>.

A scan of the original letter written by Rebecca Usher on injured soldiers in 1863, as well as a transcribed version of it, made by the Maine Memory Network.

'Request from Maine Soldiers' Relief Association', contributed by Maine Historical Society, Maine Memory Network,
<<https://www.mainememory.net/artifact/5387>>.

A scan of an open letter, written by the Maine Soldiers' Relief Association on behalf of the state's soldiers, asking for help from the public.

Links to Other Organizations

'Caribou', Maine Civil War Monuments, Maine Government Website,
<<https://www.maine.gov/civilwar/monuments/caribou.html>>.

The entry of the Caribou Statue to the official Maine Government Website, which records all Civil War Monuments of Maine.

'1863 Susannah Pullen's Civil War Quilt', National Museum of American History,
<https://americanhistory.si.edu/collections/search/object/nmah_556322>.

The Smithsonian's entry of Pullen's Quilt to their archive which includes a short description of the item, an image gallery and additional information on the quilt's specifications.

'Smithsonian National Quilt Collection: Civil War Sunday School Quilt', National Museum of American History, YouTube, uploaded June 28, 2011,
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gFS34M_5PIM>.

A short video made by the Smithsonian, taking Pullen's quilt out of its drawer, and uncovering its history.

Woman's Relief Corps, <<https://womansreliefcorps.org/>>.

Link to the WRC's website, where more about the organization's history and current activities can be found.

Further Reading

'Caribou Veterans Memorial Park Statue', Google Maps,

<<https://www.google.com/maps/place/Caribou+Veterans+Memorial+Park+Statue/@46.8576441,-68.010496,17z/data=!4m5!3m4!1s0x4cbcb8574b23e12f:0x4b5cfcafd3bde02!8m2!3d46.8579743!4d-68.0101491>>.

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_____'Rebecca Usher: "To succor the suffering soldiers"', Maine Memory Network, <https://www.mainememory.net/sitebuilder/site/2443/page/3926/display?use_mmn=1>.

A brief biography of Rebecca Usher on the Maine Memory Network website, which includes a link to a slideshow on Usher's life, accompanied by images and additional information on her family.

'National GAR Records Program', Historical Summary of Grand Army of the Republic (GAR) Posts by State: MAINE, prepared by Sons of Union Veteran of the Civil War, <<http://www.suvcw.org/garrecords/garposts/me.pdf>>.

A list of the GAR programs throughout the US, including GAR Post no. 95. The list includes some brief information on the Post as well as its namesake, Ansel G. Taylor.