GRIFFIN A. STEDMAN MONUMENT (HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT)

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Lydia Huntley Sigourney was among the most famous poets in the antebellum United States. Popularly known as the "Sweet Singer of Hartford," she was fabulously prolific, publishing dozens of books of poetry, autobiography, essays, and advice for young ladies, as well as thousands of pieces in periodicals. Among her last works, written less than a year before her death at age 73, was a memorial poem for Griffin A. Stedman, Jr., who had been killed in action during the federal siege of Petersburg, Virginia, in August, 1864. Privately printed in italic font on black-edged stationery, the poem was likely distributed at Stedman's funeral, which took place in coastal New London, Connecticut, on August 13, just one week after his death.

General Griffin A. Stedman, Jr.
Died, August 6th, 1864.

Solemnly, tenderly lay him down
In the cottage by the sea,
While the dews are bright on the summer flowers,
And old ocean's moan in the silent hours,
His requiem sad shall be.

"Come back in August," his mother had said,
"A furlough you surely may claim,"
And he who ne'er had her word gainsayed,
Since boyhood's curls o'er his shoulders stray'd
With the ides of August *came*.

Five more stanzas attend to Mrs. Stedman's grief, the many other mourners, and the nobility of the "patriot-martyr."

Sigourney was a virtuoso of the sentimental elegy—so much so that she often received requests for poems made to order from grieving fans (including one for a dead canary). In this case, though, Sigourney likely needed no special inducement. The Stedmans and the Sigourneys were among the leading families of antebellum Hartford, and the names Griffin Stedman, Sr. (father of the deceased) and Charles Sigourney (Lydia's husband) can be found near each other throughout the annals of this prosperous American city. During the prime of Lydia Sigourney's writing career, the two patriarchs were building the social

infrastructure of elite Hartford. They served on the Board of Directors of the same bank. They were both vestryman of Christ Church and in 1828 laid the cornerstone of what is today the cathedral of the Episcopal Diocese of Connecticut. They were among the 10 original trustees of the Hartford Academy, an Episcopal school chartered in 1819, and both contributed financially to the 1823 founding of Washington College (later Trinity College), from which Griffin, Jr., graduated in 1858. Both were subscribers of (donors to) the Connecticut Retreat for the Insane, which opened in 1824 and remains a leading center for psychiatric care.

It is entirely plausible, then, that when the son of the Stedman family went off to war, Lydia Sigourney, who had watched the boy grow up, took a ring "from her own finger, and placed [it] upon his, with her prayer and blessing." This, at least, is the story someone documented in a handwritten note on the printed copy of the memorial poem that survives in the archives of the Connecticut Museum of Culture and History. The text of Sigourney's poem elides her personal connection with the ring:

> A talisman ring on that hero's hand
> With the parting prayer was placed.
> There are crimson spots on its orb of gold:—
> Hath it been to its mission so false and cold
> As his pure heart's blood to taste?

As the unknown annotator of the poem explains, the ring was "returned to [Stedman's] mother after his death, with his heart's blood upon it, having raised that hand to his heart, when wounded."

It is likewise plausible to suppose that this is part of what was being memorialized when Connecticut veterans of the Civil War chose the figure of Griffin A. Stedman, Jr., to stand atop a monument—this fading connection to a bygone era. The inscription on the pedestal identifies the bronze figure as "Griffin A. Stedman, Typical Volunteer Soldier of the Civil War," yet this is an almost laughable characterization. The scion of an affluent family, possessed of the advantages of higher education, a captain upon his enlistment and a general (by brevet) at his death, Stedman was "typical" of at most one tiny sliver of the federal military force. His wide-brimmed officer's hat immediately marks him as an outlier among the ubiquitous statues on New England town greens of generic men in privates' kepis.

But Stedman was typical of something aging Civil War veterans in late-1890s Connecticut knew had passed away: the old mercantile families who had seen the colony through the Revolution and then given way to the industrial and financial titans—the Samuel Colts and

J.P. Morgans—who defined Connecticut in the Civil War era and its aftermath; the idealized womanhood of Lydia Sigourney's nightingale verse and the propriety of her advice on young women's conduct; the romance of an antebellum world in which well-born boys never "gainsayed" their mothers' counsel.

Whether or not it was a Civil War veteran who preserved a copy of Sigourney's Griffin Stedman poem, the transit of that ring—from the finger of a woman born during the George Washington administration to a siege line of modern warfare, speeding back along steel rails to be registered in sentimental verse—reflected the vertiginous cultural changes that clearly were on the minds of those who erected the monument. It grew precisely out of a sense of anxiety about the urbanizing, modernizing postbellum North. Thomas McManus, president of the Camp-Field Monument Association, who had been a major in the Connecticut 25th, explained his and his compatriots' motives in a speech at the monument's dedication on October 4, 1900. He gave a lengthy history of the field on the south side of Hartford where his regiment and Griffin Stedman's and those of 6,824 other men had been mustered in and drilled before their departure for the front. "This spot was their elementary school for learning the art of war," McManus said, yet for all its importance to veterans' experiences, it was fading into obscurity:

> Cities have expanded their boundaries, pursuing the horizon, the identity of this field was growing uncertain, the old boundary highways changed their names and now new ones intersecting here, had been opened. The adjoining fields acknowledge new owners and dwellings stand and white haired children play where the grim sentinel once paced his silent beat. Probably not one survivor in fifty of the nearly 7,000 soldiers who mustered here thirty-eight years ago would, unaided, have recognized this field. If its identity should be lost during the first generation, who could re-establish it in the second?

In a departure from much of the rhetoric of dedication ceremonies for Civil War memorials, McManus warns not of the risk of forgetting the Union cause or the sacrifices of soldiers and their families, but rather of forgetting the way the world had been—how this part of Hartford had looked, exactly where this crucible of seven thousand men's lives had commenced.

Thus connected are the two most distinctive aspects of this monument: that it depicts a specific individual, yet not an icon on the order of Grant or Sherman (even Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain didn't have a statue in Maine until 2003); and that it marks a notable location, yet not a battlefield (unusual in the North, where little of the war's "action" occurred). Hartford already had a grand memorial to its Civil War dead: the Soldiers and Sailors

Memorial Arch in downtown's Bushnell Park, the first permanent triumphal arch in the United States, erected in the 1880s at a cost of $60,000 (a multi-million dollar figure in today's terms). It was there that hundreds of Connecticut veterans assembled on an October morning in 1900 before parading south through the city streets until they reached the Camp-field—the spot, once on the edge of countryside, where they elevated Griffin Stedman, thorough product of antebellum Hartford, graduate of the college visible on the hill above the assembled thousands at the dedication. Through that day they pulled the threads of a culture of memorialization Lydia Sigourney had been instrumental in spinning.

Today the Camp-field, already diminished between 1861 and 1900, is smaller still. The monument stands in a thoroughly urban neighborhood, surrounded by a patch of green space a little larger than an average house lot, secured within a fence I once sprained my wrist hopping over while leading my class on a field trip. In a small triangular plaza across the busy three-way intersection, a plaque on a slab of granite honors Thomas McManus, the prime mover of the effort to place the Stedman monument. As if he had carried all the way to his grave in 1914 some angst about the "second generation" losing sight of where the Camp-field had been, the plaque reads: "Upon this field which was once their camping ground his surviving comrades in affectionate memory have placed this tablet."

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