

Editorial

Vermont in the Civil War

Here is a spark of welcome and timely news. About a week ago, *The Bridge* received a joint press release from Vermont Congressman Peter Welch and Texas Congressman Ted Poe. The welcome news is that in response to an appeal from Congressmen Welch and Poe, the Walmart corporation has agreed to withdraw its proposal to build a new superstore near the site of the Wilderness Battlefield in Virginia.

Clearly, the Wilderness is hallowed ground. On May 5 and 6, 1864, both Vermonters fighting for the north and Texans fighting for the south suffered terrible losses of life, with many more wounded and missing, in savage fighting in the Wilderness Battlefield.

Beginning on April 12, 2011, and in the four years that follow, many Vermonters and many Americans will reflect on the 150th anniversary of the American Civil War, the bloody four-year conflict between North and South, and the terrible death and suffering that resulted.

As the war began, the critical issue between North and South was union or secession. But as the war ground on from one savage battle to another, a second issue—indeed an issue that had divided the American nation since its beginnings—emerged: the struggle in this country to end human slavery.

In his 1993 book titled *Full Duty: Vermonters in the Civil War*, Montpelier historian Howard Coffin notes that as early as July 1777, when a group of Vermonters gathered in Windsor to draft a constitution for the Vermont Republic, the first article of that document outlawed slavery.

Vermont entered the American Union in 1791, and, in the years following, the state's antislavery convictions held firm.

When the Civil War came in April 1861, President Lincoln wired the following message to Vermont Governor Erastus Fairbanks:

Gov. Erastus Fairbanks, Montpelier, Vt.: Washington is in grave danger. What may we expect of Vermont?

According to Coffin, "More than a century later, in the process of editing and indexing the papers of Governor Fairbanks, a Vermont state archivist in Montpelier, Mary Greene Nye, found the forgotten Lincoln telegram. She noted that in pencil on its back were written in Fairbanks' hand the words, "Vermont will do its full duty."

In truth, Vermont honored its promise of full duty during the Civil War, and the Wilderness Battlefield is a significant part of that story.

America was a very different country and Vermont was a very different state from the country and the state we know today. In 1860, the population of the U.S. (including somewhat less than 4 million slaves) was about 31.5 million. At about the same time, according to Coffin, Vermont population was 315,098.

The simple arithmetic of things demonstrates the numbers and the sacrifices involved in what Vermont contributed in lives and losses during the Civil War. According to Coffin, an estimated 34,238 men from Vermont served in the Union Army during the war. A simple calculation shows that about one person in every 10 of Vermont's citizens were soldiers in the fratricidal conflict.

Of the 34,238 Vermonters who served, 5,224 died. And, overall, more American soldiers died in the Civil War than in any other armed conflict before or after. In fact, there were more fatalities in the Civil War than in all the wars that this country fought from the Revolution through Vietnam.

Speaking about Vermont's contributions, Coffin wrote, "The number of men killed per capita makes Vermont's sacrifice among Union states second only to that of Michigan. It has been said, though not confirmed," Coffin added, "that Vermont ranked first in number of men per capita killed in combat."

Perhaps another way of measuring the impact of the Civil War on our state are the monuments we see scattered across Vermont on town or village greens or prominent places where two roads meet or diverge. Some of these monuments are inscribed granite blocks. Other monuments are statues of the often boyish-looking young men carrying a rifle or looking straight ahead or looking down with their lean, rough, farm-boy looks of determination and selfless courage.

Welch and Poe are to be thanked for their successful effort that resulted in Walmart's withdrawal of plans to build a superstore near the Wilderness Battlefield. And Walmart corporation deserves to be thanked for acceding to their request.

Coffin did more than write about the Vermont legacy in the Civil War. As a staff member to former U.S. senator James Jeffords, Coffin helped lead the way to the passage of the Civil War Sites Study Act of 1990. And Coffin went on to serve on the Civil War Sites Advisory Commission.

In *Full Duty*, Coffin records the terrible losses suffered by the Vermont Brigade, particularly in a Vermont Brigade action in the Wilderness at or near the intersection of the Brock-Orange Plank roads. According to Coffin, in the Battle of the Wilderness, the brigade suffered 1,234 casualties, with 191 killed, 947 wounded and 96 missing.

In 1993, when *Full Duty* was published, there were two monuments in the Wilderness Battlefield honoring Pennsylvania troops near the intersection of Brock and Orange Plank Roads. There was no mention of the Vermont Brigade. But that omission has now been repaired, with the installation in 2006 of a granite monument honoring the Vermont Brigade.

The front panel of that monument reads:

In these woods, during the Battle of the Wilderness on May 5 and 6, 1864, Vermont's Old Brigade suffered 1,234 casualties while defending the Brock Road and Orange Plank Road intersection.

At the close of his chapter titled "Terrible losses in the Wilderness," Coffin first talks about the absence of any monument or marker to honor Vermont soldiers who fought in the Wilderness. Then he writes, "Yet it is to the Wilderness that one must go to find the place where the soldiers from Vermont made their greatest sacrifice to the cause of the American Union. Around that historic and unlovely place where two country roads still meet, Vermonters by the hundreds fell bleeding to keep Meade's Army of the Potomac from being sundered."

These words complete Coffin's Wilderness chapter: "The Brock-Orange Plank roads intersection is Vermont's great Civil War battle scene."

Letters

Light Corrections

To the Editor:

I thought [Tara Gita's] article about Breathing Light (January 20 issue) was lovely, but there were a couple of glitches. I do acupuncture Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, but Breathing Light is open and we offer classes and treatments seven days a week. However, the overall message was terrific and the exposure appreciated. There are also a couple of key players (Lucia Ferrera and Britt Richardson) at the center who have been there from day one (working hard) and only got a minor mention. We also have a very strong and popular pre- and post-natal program of classes instructed by Richarda Ericson whose name was left out of the instructor/practitioner list. And there was mention of a doula/midwife I've never heard of before. A quick look at the article before going to print would have given me the chance to give these clarifications. But I realize time was of the essence and again appreciate that we were part of an article in our wonderful local paper, *The Bridge*!

*Sbaron McIlwaine,
Breathing Light Studio*

Time to Care for Women

To the Editor:

We just finished up a week of participating in right-to-life activities. This is such a divisive issue, but is important for all sides to see the information that is out there. This is what we heard and saw.

On Saturday, January 15, 2011, we attended the local march to the Vermont State House and the following rally there. We were able to hear excellent testimony of a young Boston-area lawyer telling of her journey from pro-choice to pro-life. Her conversion occurred while she was a student at Middlebury, and her message is a very important one: there are growing numbers of pro-life feminists, women who strongly believe that we can rectify serious economic and social issues without denying their unique role as women. Women are harmed by abortion.

On Monday, January 24, 2011 we were down in Washington, D.C., for the national rally and march. It was an experience to be with thousands upon thousands of people, testifying that life is precious and that we must protect the most vulnerable of our population. The most outstanding feature of this

rally is the number of young people, especially the high-school- and college-aged women who were there.

It is time for our society to really care for women. We have to do better.

*Loretta and Gesualdo Schneider,
Middlesex*

Unemotional Strategy

To the Editor:

As Vermont's Republican state auditor, I want to see the Shumlin administration succeed in preserving our state's financial stability. It is no accident that Vermont was voted one of the best-managed states in the country positioned to address this crisis. We must remain strategic and unemotional, as a team, to navigate through this continuing difficulty. Thanks to all of you citizens in advance for your support of the current leadership in Montpelier.

Tom Salmon, CPA, St. Johnsbury

Game of Bridge, Anyone?

To the Editor:

The Montpelier Senior Activity Center will be offering an eight-week class in beginning bridge sometime in March.

The game of bridge is challenging and interesting, and can be played very seriously—and not seriously. It is important to attend every class if at all possible. The calls will be taught by Nancy Cleveland as a fun and not serious game. The class will be held on Wednesday mornings from 9:30 to 11:30 a.m. The only charge is membership in the senior activity center, which is \$10 for Montpelier residents and \$25 for those not living in Montpelier. The only delay in getting started is getting enough people we can play games with, at least four or multiples of four. Bridge players who wish to remember how to play are welcome. A sense of humor and being able to count to 13 would be big helps in learning.

From about 1 to 4 p.m. on Mondays, bridge is played at the senior activity center with people you can get advice from. The group is very relaxed, with men and women, and offers a comfortable way to learn more about playing bridge.

If you are interested, please register your interest with the senior activity center by calling 223-2518, or call Nancy at 229-9841.

Nancy Cleveland, Montpelier



Republican Rep. Ted Poe of Texas, left, and Democratic Rep. Peter Welch of Vermont at the new Vermont Brigade monument in Virginia (see editorial at left). Photo courtesy of Peter Welch's office.

A Seven-Step Budget Recommendation for Vermont

by Morgan W. Brown

The Vermont legislature should consider adopting, as well as enacting, something along the lines of the following seven recommendations when it considers addressing the current shortfall in terms of crafting the fiscal year 2012 budget:

1. Tap up to half of the rainy day reserve funds, not counting the Agency of Human Services (AHS) case-load reserve fund, as is already proposed to be used.

2. Create a tax scheme along the lines of what former governor Dick Snelling and the state legislature wisely enacted back in the early 1990s. This could be used both to help raise a portion of the current shortfall and to ensure that a certain amount of those tax re-

ceipts are dedicated to help build back up the tapped rainy day reserve funds.

3. While still needing to find and make cuts to the FY 2012 budget to cover the shortfall, this time around make sure to cut the fat where the fat truly exists: At the top and mid-

level regions of the higher-paid and -positioned bureaucracy across state government. Start within the administration itself. But don't make salary cuts to the rank and file state workforce that delivers direct services to Vermonters. Dur-

ing these tight budget times, the state cannot afford, nor does it need, all the deputy commissioners at the department level across state government, including at the department of mental health.

4. In addition, put or keep in place a per-

manent cap on all salary increases, bonuses, merit increases or whatever they might be termed these days for those working in top or middle management positions across state government, including and starting with the administration. This policy should be kept in place until the economy fully recovers and not be ceased until all human services program cuts are then fully restored to what they were prior to the series of cuts that have been made within previous years as well as any forthcoming cuts.

5. As was done previously, cut salaries of higher level state employees receiving \$60,000 or more. However, this time do so by 10 percent, beginning with members of the administration, including the governor. It is certain that there are others who are as well qualified and also willing to serve within those positions who could step in to take over for anyone not be willing or able to take such cuts and who choose leave their positions as a result.

6. Put an end to providing meal allowances and other such stipends for any

and all state employees, including the governor or members of the state legislature.

7. Severely restrict out-of-state travel allowances for state employees across state government, including members of the administration and the state legislature, and recommend use of teleconferencing or use of other electronic means rather than attending meetings in person. In addition, also severely restrict allowances covering conference fees and the like for all state employees, including within the administration and state legislature, whether it be for in-state or out-of-state conferences or other such meetings.

These are some of the places state government should be looking to cut first. Rather than beginning at the bottom and working their way up the food chain, they should be starting at the top and working their way down.

Morgan W. Brown is writer, blogger and activist, as well as a person with disabilities, who lives in Montpelier.

Opinion

Defending Social Security

by Senator Bernie Sanders

Social Security is the most successful social program in American history. More than half of our elderly population lived in poverty before 1940, when Ida May Fuller of Ludlow, Vermont, received the first Social Security check. Because of Social Security, the poverty figure today is less than 10 percent. Social Security also provides dignified support for millions of widows, orphans and people with disabilities. One in four veterans receives Social Security benefits in addition to help they receive from the Veteran's Administration.

Since Social Security was established 75 years ago, every nickel owed to every eligible American has been paid in good times and bad. While corporations destroyed the retirement dreams of older workers by eliminating defined-benefit pension plans, Social Security was there paying full benefits. When Wall Street greed and recklessness caused millions of working people to lose billions in retirement savings, Social Security was there paying out full benefits.

Despite its success, Social Security now faces unprecedented attacks from Wall Street, the Republican party and a few Democrats. If the American people are not prepared to fight back, the dismantling of Social Security could begin in the very near future.

Rep. Paul Ryan, the new chairman of the House Budget Committee, has been open

about his desire to partially privatize Social Security, lower cost-of-living adjustments (COLAs), and drastically cut benefits. A majority of his fellow Republicans agree. There are threats on other fronts. A deficit reduction commission established by President Obama called for increasing the retirement age to 69, reducing COLAs for today's retirees, and cutting benefits for future retirees making as little as \$42,000 a year.

Just about every day, in one form or another, we hear from our conservative friends that Social Security is in "crisis," that Social Security is going "bankrupt" and that the Social Security trust fund contains nothing more than a pile of worthless IOUs. As a result of this barrage of misinformation, many young Americans have been convinced that when they reach retirement age, Social Security will not be there for them.

So what are the facts? Why have there been such concerted attacks against Social Security?

According to the latest report of the Social Security Administration, Social Security will be able to pay 100 percent of promised benefits for the next 26 years. After 2037, Social Security will still be able to pay about 78 percent of promised benefits. The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office (CBO) says Social Security will be able to pay full benefits to every eligible recipient until 2039, and beyond then cover 80 percent of promised benefits.

While Social Security is strong for a quarter century, Congress should stabilize it for the longer term. That is why I agree with President Obama, who has called for raising the cap on taxable income. Today, that cap is at \$106,800. By removing the cap on incomes of \$250,000 and more we can make Social Security fully solvent for generations to come.

Even with no change, the fact is that Social Security has a \$2.6 trillion surplus that is projected to grow to more than \$4 trillion in 2023. Is this surplus, as some have suggested, just worthless IOUs? Absolutely not! Social Security invests, as it should, the surplus money it accumulates into U.S. Treasury bonds, the safest interest-bearing securities in the world. These are the same bonds that wealthy investors, China and other foreign countries have purchased. The bonds are backed by the full faith and credit of the U.S. government which, in our long history, has never once defaulted on its debt obligations. In other words, Social Security bonds are as safe as any other U.S. debt obligation.

Further, despite the manufactured hysteria about a "Social Security crisis," Social Security has not contributed one penny to the very serious deficit situation we face. Social Security is fully funded by the payroll tax

that workers and their employers contribute into the system, not by the U.S. Treasury. Our deficit has, in recent years, been largely caused by the cost of two wars, tax breaks for the rich, a Medicare prescription drug program written by the insurance and pharmaceutical industries, and the Wall Street bailout—all unpaid for. Social Security has played no role in our deficits.

Why has there been such a concerted effort to privatize Social Security, raise the retirement age or cut benefits? There are two reasons. First, Wall Street stands to make hundreds of billions in profits if workers are forced to go to private Wall Street firms for their retirement accounts. Second, as the Republican party has moved far to the right and become much more antigovernment, there are more and more Republicans who simply do not believe government has a responsibility to provide retirement benefits to the elderly, or help for those with disabilities.

Needless to say, I strongly disagree with both of those propositions. That is why I have recently formed the Defending Social Security Caucus in the Senate. In my view, maintaining and strengthening Social Security is absolutely essential to the well-being of tens of millions of Americans. We cannot allow it to be destroyed or dismembered.

Opinion

Thanks

In this issue of *The Bridge* we are publishing a story written by Montpelier singer, songwriter and performer Dylan Waller.

As part of a performance tour last summer, Waller visited Athens, Greece, where he was attacked on the street and badly injured. Travel always involves some risks, some dangers. We felt it was important to publish Dylan's personal account of what happened.

As he presented it to us, his story was longer than a typical story in *The Bridge*. But we wanted to publish it in its entirety. Because of that, we took the unusual step of asking a number of people in Montpelier's downtown business community to help us financially. On page 1 of this issue, we thank the individuals and businesses who made a contribution so that we could publish Dylan's story.

On another and related subject, we are continuing to receive financial contributions to the paper's current fundraising campaign to raise \$7,500 as we start a new year of publishing. We thank all those who are continuing to respond to our request for financial help.

Please support our campaign by sending a check made payable to *The Bridge* to this address: *The Bridge*, P.O. Box 1143, Montpelier, VT 05601. Or stop by at our office at 32 College Street in the basement of Schulmaier Hall on the campus of the Vermont College of Fine Arts in Montpelier. Please accept our continued thanks.

—Nat Frothingham

Corrections

Corrections are in order for two articles in our January 20 Health and Wellness issue.

In "Let Your Light Shine," about Breathing Light Studio in Montpelier, the days of operation were listed incorrectly. Breathing Light is open Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Also, Breathing Light can be reached at both 229-2290 and 229-1800.

In "SafeArt: Healing From Domestic Violence Through the Arts," several errors were made. SafeArt's correctly stated mission is "to engage the transformative power of the arts to prevent and heal abuse and other traumas." SafeArt does not have three full-time employees: One employee is full-time and the other two are part-time. Finally, "Act as One" referred to in the article should have been "Act 1," which goes into effect this summer and mandates a comprehensive health education for grades K-12, including "how to recognize and prevent sexual abuse and sexual violence, including developmentally appropriate instruction about promoting healthy and respectful relationships, developing and maintaining effective communication with trusted adults, recognizing sexually offending behaviors and gaining awareness of available school and community resources."

The Bridge regrets these errors.

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