THE CROMWELL BROTHERS: NEW YORK CONFRONTS THE CIVIL WAR

by

THOMAS M. McSHEA

(Under the Direction of Stephen Berry)

ABSTRACT

This thesis contrasts Henry B. Cromwell and Major James Cromwell who were two Quaker brothers from Cornwall, New York. They lived during the Civil War but chose decidedly different paths in how they confronted that war. Henry was a successful businessman in the coastwise steamship industry, and his business was tied strongly to the Southern economy. Major Cromwell volunteered twice to serve in the Union Army and was finally killed at Gettysburg. Their story represents the dichotomous nature of the Northern home front and helps demonstrate how the battlefield related to that home front in a way that is often unexplored.

INDEX WORDS: Civil War, Quakers, Society of Friends, New York City, Coastwise trade, Slavery, 124th New York State Volunteers, Gettysburg, Cornwall

THE CROMWELL BROTHERS: NEW YORK CONFRONTS THE CIVIL WAR

By

THOMAS M. McSHEA

B.S., The United States Military Academy, 2010

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the University of Georgia in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2020

THE CROMWELL BROTHERS: NEW YORK CONFRONTS THE CIVIL WAR

by

THOMAS M. McSHEA

Major Professor: Stephen Berry

Committee: Stephen Mihm
Peter C. Hoffer

Electronic Version Approved:

Ron Walcott
Interim Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
May 2020

Acknowledgements

There are many institutions and individuals to whom I owe my most sincere gratitude. First and foremost, I am grateful to the United States Army and the United States Military Academy for granting me the opportunity to broaden myself professionally at the University of Georgia. Additionally, I must highlight the Amanda and Greg Gregory Chair for supporting my research in Brooklyn and the Hudson Valley. This research was critical to the following work as well as others. Also, the Willson Center for Humanities & Arts supported my recent research at Duke University and allowed me to gain a more complete understanding of how the coastwise trade tied the North and South together commercially prior to the Civil War.

As for the individuals, it is impossible to name everyone here who assisted me along the way. But I must first communicate my sincere thanks to my thesis advisor, Dr. Stephen Berry. His example as a scholar, and his steady guidance allowed me to turn my lifelong interest into a defensible thesis. Though I arrived here with a vague topic and little formal experience in historical scholarship, his patience and calm encouragement helped light the way for me, resulting in an academic experience over the last two years that I will forever be thankful for. I am similarly grateful to my committee members, Dr. Stephen Mihm and Dr. Peter C. Hoffer, as well as all the faculty of the History Department who patiently guided me along the way. To my fellow graduate students, thank you for welcoming me here, for the great conversations, and for all you taught me over the last two years.

To Charles LaRocca, whose friendship I am honored to have acquired during the course of this research, thank you for always listening, imparting knowledge, and most of all for your

continued devotion to the legacy of the veterans of the 124th New York State Volunteer Infantry. To Lieutenant Colonel Brian Detoy (USA, Ret.), thank you for a truly inspiring staff ride at Gettysburg when I was a young plebe back in 2007. Your words and knowledge caused my childhood memory of the Cromwells to resurface and grow into this thesis. Also, I am indebted to Richard Field, who provided me with the most significant body of primary sources for this thesis. Thank you for trusting me to tell a small portion of the great story of your ancestors.

I am indebted significantly to the historical societies of Brooklyn, Cornwall, Cornwall-on-Hudson, and Troy, New York. Your genuine love of history, and your dedication to preserving the echoes of long ago bring unquantifiable value and richness to your communities. I am thankful for all the support, both verbal and material, you all unhesitatingly provided me.

My family is my rock. It was with my parents, and siblings in mind that I chose to try and shed some light on a period in the history of our hometown of Cornwall, New York. To my sister, Dr. Bronwen McShea, I appreciated the many late night discussions we had as you assisted me in navigating the ins-and-outs of the profession you call home.

Finally, and most preciously, thank you to my wife, Kelley McShea, for continuing to be the constant and brightest star keeping me on azimuth no matter what. You've quietly endured so much over the last decade during our journey with the Army. You and our beautiful children—Evelyn, Mark, Tara, and little James—are always my reasons why.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

Page

INTRODUCTION—A FORGOTTEN MEMORIAL

Memorials and gravestones stand as silent reminders of lives and events that even the most skilled historians can only partially reveal. One such memorial sits long forgotten in a small, overgrown, former family cemetery in the town of Cornwall in New York's Hudson Valley. Precious few locals, and even fewer tourists, are aware of its presence. The crumbling stone wall enclosing the plot has failed to prevent several large trees from taking root amongst the graves, where they have grown to full maturity over the decades. At least one burrowing animal has shared in the trees' disregard for this weathered stone. Nature, along with a busy country farm and store now possessing the ground, has unwittingly camouflaged the dilapidated cemetery from the public, and only the occasional child adventuring around a nearby patch of crops sometimes takes notice of the silent graves in the tree line—eroded sentinels of a Cornwall long since faded from memory.[1]

As one of those adventurous children, sometime in the early 1990s, I climbed over that wall and saw this memorial, the tallest in the small assembly. Weaving past some briars to view the inscription, I remember seeing several names, though the autumn shade and vegetation made most of them difficult to read. The third inscription, as seen pictured below, was the only one that gripped my young imagination in any permanent way:

[1] The "country farm and store" is called Jones Farm and sits adjacent to what is now called the Cromwell Manor Inn. Jones Farm was purchased from the Cromwell estate in 1914. The Manor and Jones Farm are both popular, prosperous businesses that have inadvertently hidden this cemetery from view.

Figure 1: The third inscription down reads, "Maj. James Cromwell, Born Jan. 4, 1840, Killed in the Battle of Gettysburg, July 2, 1863[2]

This moment of youthful curiosity was quickly filed away as one of many lost memories, and, like the majority of Cornwall residents, I grew up with no further thought or reminder of that name etched in stone. Years later, during a 2007 tour of Gettysburg, this memory resurfaced while I stood at the foot of a monument to the 124th New York State Volunteer Infantry Regiment, which also bears his name among others. Major James Cromwell was killed leading a desperate bayonet charge during the second day of that fight. The poignant connection between the hallowed ground of Gettysburg and the forgotten cemetery in faraway Cornwall, New York inspired me to research Major Cromwell, and to eventually tell his story. This desire intensified when I learned that the Cromwells were a prominent Quaker family, adding a curious note to the Major's military service due to the well-known pacifist tenets of that faith.[3]

[2] Kathleen Christensen, *Cromwell Family Grave Site,* 2019, Village Museum, Cornwall-on-Hudson, New York
[3] Major Cromwell, along with several other Quakers from Orange County, fit within another under explored and separate historiography within the field relating Quaker service in the Union Army, as seen in Jacquelyn S. Nelson, *Indiana Quakers Confront the Civil War*, (Indiana: Indiana Historical Society, 1991)

While portions of James Cromwell's martial record have been preserved only among a limited group of military historians and Civil War enthusiasts, the fourth name on that memorial stone, Henry B. Cromwell, has strangely fallen even further into local as well as scholarly obscurity.[4] Now, nearly thirty years after my youthful adventure among the forgotten gravestones, he has risen in importance in terms of how this story must be told. Henry Bowman Cromwell was one of James' brothers who was twelve years his senior. Henry was thirty-five when his little brother fell at Gettysburg, and by that time he had made a name for himself as an extremely successful businessman among New York City's merchant class.

Founder and owner of "H. B. Cromwell & Company Steamship Lines," he rose to the top of New York's coastwise merchant steamship industry during the 1850s, and he got there primarily by engaging in the "cotton triangle"— a circuitous merchant relationship which bound Yankee businessmen tightly to a Southern economic system resting squarely on the backs of countless enslaved African people.[5] His business network spanned every major port along the eastern seaboard from Portland, Maine to New Orleans, and he was a far more prominent figure in his day than his younger brother. Nevertheless, while Henry B. Cromwell's steamship lines can be found in many nineteenth century newspaper advertisements and "who's who"

[4] Major Cromwell's only presence in scholarly works falls within regimental histories of the 124th NYSV as well as discussions of the second day of fighting at Gettysburg. His death falls within the narratives of General Daniel E. Sickles' notorious performance in that battle. Charles W. Weygant, *A History of the 124th Regiment New York State Volunteers*, (Newburgh: Journal Printing House, 1877); Charles J. LaRocca, *The 124th New York State Volunteers in the Civil War*, (Jefferson, McFarland & Company Inc., Publishers, 2012), pp. 129-152; Harry Pfanz, *Gettysburg: The Second Day*. (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1986), pg. 187; Stephen W. Sears, *Gettysburg*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2003) pg. 273-274; Allan C. Guelzo, *Gettysburg: The Last Invasion*, (New York: Alfred Knopf, 2013) pg. 266.

[5] Robert Albion provided a thorough and classic definition of the "cotton triangle," which tied Southern ports to New York as well as Europe. Robert Greenhalgh Albion, *The Rise of New York Port (1815-1860)*, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1939) pp. 95-121. He also acknowledged that the coastwise trade is a routinely neglected topic as records keeping was far more robust for international trade, though coastwise vessels transported larger quantities of goods domestically, pp. 105-106.

publications of New York's social elite, no scholarly endeavor has made him a central focus.[6] For the most part he and his business enterprise are relegated to footnotes or a brief mention here and there only to provide contextual depth to other narratives.[7]

Told in tandem with each other, the story of these Quaker brothers from Cornwall, New York and their divergent yet intertwined experiences in facing the Civil War creates a particularly tragic and informative narrative regarding the dichotomous reality of the Northern home front. Though much scholarship has shed light on the fact that many in the North were opposed to the Civil War, and that such opposition was acutely characteristic of New York City, the Cromwell brothers' combined story is new to this field, or any other for that matter. One brother, whose prewar coastwise business ventures tied him closely to Southern commercial interests, became embroiled in the infamously corrupt and at times openly secessionist politics of New York City's Democratic political machinery. Peace Democrats, "Copperheads," racists, and war profiteers all rank among the powerful New York City elites Henry Cromwell consorted with before and during the war.[8] The other much younger brother became swept up in the patriotic fervor of the war's early stages. At the age of twenty-one, James Cromwell found himself wrestling with what came to be known as the "Quaker Dilemma"—the choice between breaking the pacifist 'Peace Testimony' of the Society of Friends or taking up arms in the name

---

[6] Ira K. Morris, *Morris's Memorial History of Staten Island, New York*, Vol. II, (Staten Island, Ira K. Morris Publisher, 1900) pg. 338; Joseph Howard Raymond, *History of the Long Island College Hospital and its Graduates*, (Brooklyn: Association of the Alumni, 1899) pg. 54.

[7] Greg Marquis, *In Armageddon's Shadow: The Civil War and Canada's Maritime Provinces*, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1998) pp. 138-140; Thomas Robson Hay, "Gazaway Bugg Lamar, Confederate Banker and Business Man." The Georgia Historical Quarterly 37, no. 2 (1953): 89-128. www.jstor.org/stable/40577432; Scroggins, Mark, "Georgia, New York, and Muskets on the Eve of Civil War," *The Georgia Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 89, No. 3 (Fall 2005), pp. 318-333; Morrison, John H., Frank O. Braynard, and Samuel Ward Stanton. *History of American Steam Navigation*. (New York: W.F. Sametz & Co., Inc., 1908) pg. 457.

[8] Henry B. Cromwell was a Mozart Hall delegate, and therefore affiliated with Fernando Wood. Wood famously advocated for secession, as will be highlighted later, as will the proceedings of the 1861 New York State Democratic Convention in Albany. See Jerome Mushkat, *Fernando Wood: A Political Biography*, (Kent: The Kent State University Press, 1990) pp.112-115.

of the historically Quaker cause of abolishing slavery.[9] A staunch abolitionist, he chose the latter and volunteered not once but twice to serve in the Union Army. He thereby earned disownment from the Society of Friends and became part of New York's unrivaled war effort consisting of more soldiers, materiel, and money than any other state in the Union.[10]

In the end, the younger brother died a tragic hero, and though he only occupies a small chapter in current scholarship, his unblemished yet under sung legacy lived on among his family and friends long after the war. His mother mourned his death until she met her own, and subsequent generations took some pains to ensure his proud sacrifice in the Civil War was preserved.[11] Henry, on the other hand, has no similar archival legacy despite his lofty social and commercial prominence at that time. Newspapers, government records, port documents, and various references to his steamships provide the available source base for his side of this story—a story that soundly contradicts a lingering insistence in the wake of his death that he remained always a loyal supporter of the Federal cause.[12]

The following research has revealed that the Civil War was a catalyst to a tragedy within this Quaker family which must have rent a gaping wound in the conscience of Henry B. Cromwell. The catastrophic violence of the war came home to Henry in the form of his younger brother's lifeless body, forcing him to account for the blind eye he turned toward Southern interests for almost a decade up until the moment the war erupted. Ironically, Henry's complicity

---

[9] Allen C. Thomas, *A History of Friends in America*, (Philadelphia, PA: The Christian Literature Company, 1894) pg. 177; Rufus M. Jones, *The Later Periods of Quakerism: 1863-1948*, (London, McMillan and Co., ltd., 1921) pp 728-729; Hugh Barbour, *Quaker Crosscurrents: Three Hundred Years of Friends in the New York Yearly Meetings*, (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1995) pg. 193; William C. Kashatus, *Abraham Lincoln, the Quakers, and the Civil War*, (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2014) pp. 4-5, 27.

[10] Edward K. Spann, *Gotham at War: New York City, 1860-1865*, (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources Inc., 2002) pg. 57.

[11] Smith, Farrington, and Cromwell Family Papers, ARC.193, (Brooklyn Historical Society, 1935); "A Forgotten Hero of the War," Unpublished Manuscript, approximately 1885, Gift to Author from Richard Field, Photocopy of typewriter transcription

[12] *The Brooklyn Daily* Eagle, Sunday, May 16, 1909, pg. 3

with the South right up until the bombardment of Fort Sumter played out in a more tragically tangible way than he ever could have foreseen or fully understood. As the following pages will demonstrate, these two brothers represent a microcosm of how New York confronted the Civil War.

CHAPTER 1

QUAKERS, THE HUDSON RIVER VALLEY, AND STEAM POWER

Henry Bowman Cromwell was born in Brooklyn, New York on April 26, 1828. His parents were both members of the New York Monthly Meeting of the Society of Friends, commonly known as Quakers. Henry's mother, Rebecca (Bowman) Cromwell, was an English immigrant, and his father, David Cromwell, was a dry goods merchant and owner of a store in partnership with Edward Haight, a New York politician. The Cromwells were a well-established family in New York and the Hudson Valley, and proudly boasted their direct paternal lineage to the famous Oliver Cromwell, Lord Protector of England. Additionally, David's grandfather was renowned regionally for his support to the Continental Army during the Revolutionary War, and the physical torture he had endured at the hands of loyalist forces in Rye, New York.[13]

The store, named "Cromwell, Haight & Co.," was lucrative enough that David was able to purchase a substantial tract of land upstate sometime in the 1820s. While maintaining his business and his New York City properties, David moved his family, of four children at that time, to the much more rural and affluent town of Cornwall fifty-five miles north along the western shore of the Hudson River Valley.[14] By 1840, when James Cromwell was born, the

---

[13]Charles Washington Baird, *Chronicle of a Border Town: History of Rye, Westchester County, New York, 1660-1870, Including Harrison and the White Plains Till 1788*, (New York, New York: Anson D.F. Randolph, 1871), pp. 295-296 discusses John Cromwell providing shelter to Continental Troops, moving forage out of the area to prevent the English from using it, and contributing to a $2500.00 contribution from local Quakers which John likely provided most of. A local loyalist group known as "Cow Boys" then tortured John with a red-hot shovel when he refused to turn over his money to them. He lived until 1805 and told the story proudly. Also see the Cromwell family tree in Anna Cromwell, *Diary of Anna Cromwell: 1841-1845*, (Brooklyn, New York: Brooklyn Historical Society, 1935) pg. 1.

[14] Henry's birthday is taken from the previously cited photograph in Figure 1; Cornwall Orthodox Meeting held at Blooming Grove, November 11, 1828, Cornwall Monthly Meeting Records, QM-NY-C675, Quaker Meeting Records at Haverford College Quaker & Special Collections and Friends Historical Library of Swarthmore College.

Cromwells had established themselves as prominent members of the Hicksite branch of Quakers there, and were reputed as one "the best families in Cornwall." Their stately brick manor home with six white columns still remains as an active bed-and-breakfast to this day.[15] Several hundred acres in size with several families working the land, this estate was assessed at $41,194.52 in 1857, or about $1.1 million in modern dollar value.[16] In all David and Rebecca would raise ten children there within the teachings of the Cornwall Society of Friends.

The family's association with the Hicksite branch of Quakers provides important context to this narrative. Since long before Quakers first arrived in the American colonies in the seventeenth century, pacifism, or what they called the Peace Testimony, was one of the most foundational components of their faith. Quakers also gained an early reputation in America for being among the first and most ardent opponents of slavery. By the early nineteenth century, Elias Hicks had become an influential Quaker and abolitionist leader who was well known in Brooklyn, Long Island, and elsewhere. Hicks' teachings eventually placed him at odds with the established Quaker hierarchy, leading to the 1827 schism across America's Society of Friends into an Orthodox sect and a Hicksite sect.[17] This rift can be very plainly followed in the meeting notes of Cornwall's Orthodox Quakers, who diligently recorded the names of any Friend who "joined himself with those that we have no unity with."[18] David and Rebecca Cromwell, who

(Microfilm); "Last Will and Testament of David Cromwell," Original document, Brooklyn, New York: Brooklyn Historical Society, 1857, ARC.193

[15] Dempsey, Janet, Collette C. Fulton, and James I. O'Neill. *Cornwall, New York: Images From the Past*. Cornwall: Friends of the Cornwall Public Library, 1994

[16] "Last Will and Testament of David Cromwell," Original document, Brooklyn, New York: Brooklyn Historical Society, 1857, ARC.193; Specifically assesses the total assets of the Cromwell family at $41,194.52 cents after all his assets were surveyed following his death in the fall of that year.

[17] For more on the Hicksite separations, see Rufus M. Jones, *The Later Periods of Quakerism,* pp 728-729, and also see Allen C. Thomas, *A History of Friends in America*, pp. 100-119.

[18] Cornwall Orthodox Meeting held at Blooming Grove, November 11, 1828, Cornwall Monthly Meeting Records, QM-NY-C675. Quaker Meeting Records at Haverford College Quaker & Special Collections and Friends Historical Library of Swarthmore College. (Microfilm)

lived in Brooklyn during this period, came into contact with Hicks and were influenced by his teachings. In 1828, their movement to Cornwall was recorded in the Orthodox meeting notes, but from then on, their names appear only within Cornwall's dominant Hicksite meeting records.

One of the most important facets of Elias Hicks' teachings, and one that remained widely common across both sects, was explicitly outlined in his fairly well-circulated 1811 book entitled *Observations on the Slavery of the Africans and their Descendants and on the use of the Produce of their Labour.* In this book he offered a method to eventually eliminate slavery while remaining true to the Peace Testimony. He identified the "class of the people" who sought to perpetuate slavery as the ones who profit from it in any way, citing profit as "the only stimulus for making slaves." He went on to advocate a complete refusal "to purchase or make use of any goods that are the produce of slavery." This proposed boycott of all commodities procured from slave labor, Hicks argued, "would doubtless have a particular effect on the slave holders, by circumscribing their avarice, and preventing their heaping up riches, and living in a state of luxury and excess on the gain of oppression."[19] Elias Hicks lived until 1830, and as no evidence suggests otherwise, it may not be a stretch to suppose that David Cromwell, a Hicksite convert, would have managed his dry goods store within these guidelines. The Cromwells eventually became connected to the Hicks family when both Henry and his sister, Rebecca, married descendants of Elias Hicks in the 1850s.[20] This evidence suggests that abolitionism to the point of boycotting the products of slavery was a strong feature of the religious ideology Henry and James grew up with.

[19]Elias Hicks, *Observations on the Slavery of the Africans and their Descendants and on the use of the Produce of their Labour*, (New York: Samuel Wood, 1811), pp. 15-16.
[20] Henry Married Sarah Hicks Seaman and Rebecca married Valentine Hicks Seaman, "Rebecca C. Seaman: Obituary," *The Daily Standard Union*, July 31, 1915, pg. 2; "President Cromwell's Mother Passed Away," *Perth Amboy Evening News,* Wednesday, December 31, 1913, pg. 1

Quaker teachings, however, were far from the only influential forces at play in their development. The Cromwell children, and Henry most of all, were affected by another salient feature to the backdrop of their youths: the Hudson River. Growing up in Cornwall during those decades, Henry and his siblings were youthful witnesses to the rapid rise of steam-powered travel up and down the Hudson River which was then occurring. Unlike the Cromwells' upscale manor home several miles inland, Cornwall Landing—in sharp contrast to the quiet esplanade it is today—was then dominated by a long dock, coaling stations for steamboats, a fishery, a brick yard, and other industrial facilities that relied on the river for their commercial needs.[21] With frequent trips between Cornwall and Brooklyn, Henry and his siblings would have marveled at the ships as children.[22]

The Hudson River had been a well-trodden commercial artery since colonial days. However, Robert Fulton revolutionized navigation up and down the river when his boat, the *Clermont*, plied under steam power from New York City to Albany and back in 1807. By 1824, following the Supreme Court's decision on *Gibbons vs Ogden,* "barriers to the free navigation of the rivers of the United States by boats propelled 'by fire or steam'" were permanently removed by the federal government, and the Hudson saw a rapid growth of both technological improvements and competition in the steamboat industry.[23] Boats became larger and faster, and as it took time for engineering to improve there were frequently terrible accidents involving catastrophic engine fires and boiler explosions.[24]

---

[21] For a map of Cornwall circa 1864, see Hughes, James. *Farm Map of the Town of New Windsor and part of Cornwall, Orange County, New York*. Goshen: Orange County Genealogical Society, 1864.
[22] Anna Cromwell, another of James' siblings, wrote of these frequent trips on the river in her diary from 1841-1845. She mentions Henry several times throughout, Anna Cromwell, *Diary of Anna Cromwell: 1841-1845*, (Brooklyn, New York: Brooklyn Historical Society, 1935)
[23] Morrison, John H., Frank O. Braynard, and Samuel Ward Stanton. *History of American Steam Navigation*. (New York: W.F. Sametz & Co., Inc., 1908) pg. 46.
[24] James Cromwell, "Beam Engine for the Steamboat Reindeer: Review by James Cromwell," Unpublished thesis, Rensselaer Polytechnique Institute, Troy, New York, June 3, 1861; This is the thesis paper of James Cromwell. He

By the time Henry was old enough to remember, New York, Albany, and Troy had emerged as the major steamboat hubs along the Hudson, with other smaller towns like Newburgh, Cornwall, and Cold Spring developing busy little ports of their own as the years progressed. On top of the burgeoning Hudson Valley, Henry's frequent trips to Brooklyn would have put him in regular proximity to New York's East River and the Brooklyn Navy Yard, one of the largest shipyards in the United States at that time. Steam propulsion was the way of the future, and the youthful Henry Cromwell had his eyes fixed on it.[25]

While these developments were probably most visible and prolific in the Hudson Valley due to its connection to New York City, steam navigation was also taking the rest of the east coast by storm. Steamers, their associated shipyards, and the coal required to keep them running rapidly spread to Boston, Philadelphia, Savannah, and countless other coastal and riverine regions in the decades following the voyage of the *Clermont*. By 1852, Southern businessmen were fully engaged in the direct sale of cotton to international markets, and steam power enabled them to do so. As a prominent example, Edward Collins created a transatlantic line of steamers that accomplished just that, and for a brief time he managed to surpass England when it came to the speed, reliability, and frequency of his transatlantic steam powered trade.

Operating out of Charleston, Collins had learned the merchant business in New York as a youth, and he applied his experience aggressively to maximize his revenue from transporting cotton directly to Europe.[26] A string of bad luck brought the company to its knees by that year. This prompted Senator George E. Badger of North Carolina to implore federal intervention to

---

provided a brief account of the explosion of this steam boat near Saugerties, New York. Also, the S.S. Pulaski was a famous example of a steamboat tragedy where many people were killed off the east coast due to a boiler explosion. This is shows that James took an interest in steamships as a youth, demonstrating the subject's popularity within the family.

[25] Anna Cromwell, *Diary of Anna Cromwell: 1841-1845*, (Brooklyn, New York: Brooklyn Historical Society, 1935)

[26] Ralph Whitney, "The Unlucky Collins Line," *American Heritage*, Vol. 2, Issue 2, February 1957, https://www.americanheritage.com/unlucky-collins-line

avoid ceding transatlantic trade dominance to the ever-enterprising Great Britain.[27] A plainly volatile and developing steamship industry, expanding railroads, and the harnessing of technological innovation to improve commercial profit were all atmospheric influences to Henry Cromwell's childhood and adolescence.

During this time, not much is documented about Henry's younger brother. The available information regarding James' early years comes from an unpublished biographical manuscript that has been passed down in the Cromwell family for well over one hundred years.[28] James attended the same local private school as Henry and his older sisters, known informally as the Silliman and Roe School. This school was operated at various times by two abolitionist Presbyterian ministers, Rev. Jonathan Silliman and Alfred C. Roe.[29] Though no evidence exists to suggest these teachers emphasized abolitionist doctrine to the youth of Cornwall, several childhood associations make it clear that James, perhaps much more than his older brother, became close at an early age to members of anti-slavery minded families.

The Roe's were one of these families, as James attended school alongside Edward P. Roe who went on to be a Civil War Army chaplain and later a successful novelist.[30] The Roe family caused a local stir in the following decade when, in 1855, they split Rev. Silliman's congregation over the presence of several out-spoken, pro-slavery parishioners, including the local physician Dr. William Beattie.[31] Even more striking is the clear evidence of James' strong friendship with William Silliman, the Reverend's son who would go on to command of the 26th Regiment of

---

[27] George E Badger, *American Steam Navigation: Speech of George E. Badger for the Collins Steamers*, (Buell & Blanchard, 1852) pg. 5
[28] "A Forgotten Hero of the War," Unpublished Manuscript, approximately 1885, Gift to Author from Richard Field, Photocopy of typewriter transcription
[29] Janet Dempsey, "The Cornwall Presbyterian Church," *The Cornwall Local*, no. 165, (August 10, 1994)
[30] E. P. Roe cited his old friend, Major James Cromwell, in his 1877 novel *A Knight of the Nineteenth Century*, along with some wartime observations of him on the march.
[31] Janet, Dempsey, "The Cornwall Presbyterian Church," *The Cornwall Local*, no. 165, (August 10, 1994)

United States Colored Troops (U.S.C.T) following his service alongside James in the 124th New York.[32] According to local and family accounts, James once saved Silliman's life after the boy fell through the ice on the Hudson River while skating near Cornwall Landing.[33] These associations are significant as they undoubtedly played a role, along with his family's Quaker influence, in the trajectory James would later assume leading up to the Civil War.

But by this time Henry Cromwell was already well on his way to gaining the know-how and business sense required to become a player in the lucrative yet cutthroat coastwise steamship industry—an industry whose dynamism and profit potential would eclipse much of the Quaker teachings of his youth. After attending the aforementioned school, which was then considered among the best in New York State, Henry attended college much earlier than what is considered ordinary in the present day.[34] Before he was twenty years old, Henry went to work under the tutelage of his father and oldest brother, William, at the family store and warehouse in New York. It can be assumed that these years, approximately 1847 through 1851, were formative for Henry's understanding of how to run a business and manage revenue. By January 1, 1849, the business passed solely to the hands of partner Edward Haight, William, and Henry. Their father retired from business to spend what would be his final eight years of life managing affairs at the manor in Cornwall.[35]

---

[32] William Silliman was killed while commanding the 26th U.S.C.T. at Honeycut Hill, SC in 1864, *Documents of the Assembly of the State of New York: One Hundred and Thirty-Fourth Session*, Vol. XXXL, Part L, (Albany: J.B. Lyon Company, State Printers, 1911) pg. 511.

[33] "A Forgotten Hero of the War," Unpublished Manuscript, pg. 2

[34]The Cromwells and others received their early education at the school of Alfred C. Roe, a Yale man from an abolitionist Presbyterian family in Cornwall. Anna Cromwell's 1845 diary specifies their father considered sending Henry to Philadelphia for college, but in the end decided to send him to "Montgomery," and does not specify anything further about his education. Janet Dempsey, Collette C. Fulton, and James I. O'Neill, *Cornwall, New York: Images From the Past*, (Cornwall: Friends of the Cornwall Public Library, 1994) pp 11, 22.

[35] Joseph Howard Raymond, *History of the Long Island College Hospital and its Graduates*, (Brooklyn: Association of the Alumni, 1899) pg. 54; "The Copartnership of Cromwell, Haight & CO," *New York Morning Enquirer*, January 1, 1849.

In 1851, Henry boarded the *S.S. Pacific*, a steamer of the aforementioned Collins Line, and went abroad to England.[36] Henry's name appeared on a list of thankful passengers who, after safely arriving in Liverpool, wanted to publicly recognize Captain Ezra Nye and his crew for a comfortable, safe, and speedy voyage.[37] His purpose in going abroad was presumably to obtain advantageous business relationships with British textile manufacturers in Huddersfield, England in order to commission and sell their merchandise back in the United States. Henry spent three years there, and entered for a time into partnership with John Haigh, Martin Goldstein, and Luke Gledhill, of "Huddersfield, Bradford, and Leeds, Commission Merchants." While there is not much further information on his activities in England, Huddersfield was and remains a manufacturing town which produced woolen textiles. It appears that Henry was exposed during this time to the considerable profit potential of freight commissioning, along with the critical relationship of railroads, canals, and reliable steam ships to execute those commissions.[38]

In December of 1853, Henry again boarded the *Pacific* and made a less-than-pleasant return voyage to New York. The seas were rough, prompting Henry and a small group of other grateful passengers to present Captain Nye with an engraved silver trumpet upon their arrival in New York Port in January of 1854.[39] This study has not produced evidence of how much wealth or financial backing Henry may or may not have acquired during his time abroad, but there is no doubt the young entrepreneur was poised to seize the next available opportunity to make his move into New York's steamship industry. This opportunity presented itself with the dramatic failure of the Parker Vein Coal Company, and its associated steamship lines.

---

[36] *Semi-Weekly Courier and New York Enquirer*, April 18, 1851
[37] *Semi-Weekly Courier and New York Enquirer*, December, 1853
[38] For this insight, I must directly cite and thank Mr. Dave Pattern of the Huddersfield Historical Society. He found this business partnership announced in several London newspapers from the time when they dissolved formally in the fall of 1854. Dave was gracious enough to answer my research inquiry, and share his insight based on his expertise as a Huddersfield historian. Emails exchanged between November 12-15, 2019.
[39] *Semi-Weekly Courier and New York Enquirer*, January 8, 1854.

Morrison's *History of American Steam Navigation* from 1903 makes a passing reference to the "old Parker Vein" steamers used by Henry Cromwell during the late 1850s and into the Civil War.[40] The New York newspapers from the time tell a more interesting story, and help explain the opportunity Henry seized upon soon after his return to New York. The Parker Vein Coal Company was a Maryland corporation that arose in the early 1850s. The company owned two "veins" of coal: one which was very large, and another that was small but highly sought after for the purity of its coal. The company quickly developed a mutually beneficial relationship with the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, while also investing in the construction of a fleet of coastal steamers. With this infrastructure, the so called "Parker Vein Steamers" were a well-known transporter of coal on the American east coast by 1853.[41]

However, the company had a disastrous year in 1854, just in time for a young, aggressive entrepreneur like Henry Cromwell to take advantage of them. The State of Maryland had chartered Parker Vein as a three million-dollar corporation, to maintain 30,000 shares for a hundred dollars each. By June of 1854 it became apparent that the company had fraudulently over-issued shares, issuing by that time 127,411. Furthermore, they had done so using identical certificates to those of the "bonafide shareholders," making it impossible for them to identify who the true shareholders were.[42] On November 28th at a meeting at "the New York University," angry shareholders confronted the company leadership for the embarrassingly insolvent position they now found themselves in. By December Parker Vein was forced to begin rapidly selling its assets, as they "went under" in dramatic fashion.[43]

---

[40] Morrison, 457.
[41] For a full, detailed description of Parker Vein's assets, see "Legal Intelligence," *New York Morning Courier*," November 4, 1854, accessed on www.fultonhistory.com
[42] *Morning Courier and New York Enquirer*, Wednesday, November 29, 1854. NYU was still officially known at that time as the University of the City of New York, though the newspapers referred to it as quoted.
[43] *New York Tribune*, December 27, 1854.

While the intricacies of the transfer of property are unclear, what is certain is that by December of 1854, Henry B. Cromwell was advertised in the *New York Tribune* and elsewhere as the freight agent for ten steamships, listed as follows: *Parker Vein, Mount Savage, Thomas Swan, Caledonia, Jackson, George's Creek, Locust Point, Piedmont, Totten,* and *Westernport*. According to the advertisements, these ships maintained the previous habitual relationship to the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, making the newly minted "Cromwell's Baltimore Steamship Line" the primary marine conduit between the Hudson and Eerie Railroads—where Henry was a shareholder—New York, Baltimore, and all major railroad stops along the Ohio River Valley.[44] Furthermore, Cromwell was offering a bi-weekly trip between New York, Baltimore and Boston, and a daily dispatch at 4 PM both ways between New York and Baltimore.[45] Henry Cromwell now had a firm foothold within the coastwise steamer industry, and he worked hard to rapidly expand his interests up and down the east coast.

Newspaper advertisements from this time period allow for an interesting way to analyze the growth of Henry Cromwell's enterprise. By 1856, he had dedicated two steamships to provide routine freight and passenger service to Portland, Maine. By 1860 this grew into the "New England Screw Steamship Company," which fell under the Cromwell lines as he owned the vessels. Henry further established a similar corporation with the "New York and Virginia Screw Steamship Company" also by 1860. These corporations relied on the old yet refurbished Parker Vein steamers which Henry originally came to own in 1854. By 1857, however, Henry began producing brand new, larger, and faster vessels. He was able to do this by tapping into the

[44] John A. Livingston, *The Eerie Railway: Its History and Management, from April 24, 1832 to July 13, 1875*, (New York: J. Polhemus, printer, 1875) pg. xxx.
[45] *New York Herald*, December 1854; *Washington DC Evening Star*, January 20th, 1855, page 3.

lucrative "cotton triangle" and the Southern economy, and the names of these new ships are representative of the Southern money they were tied to.

The "American Atlantic Screw Steamship Company" was incorporated in Milledgeville, Georgia in 1857. Henry B Cromwell owned half the company's shares, Richard R. Cuyler owned a quarter of the shares, and Savannah businessmen Henry Brigham and Daniel H. Baldwin owned the remainder.[46] Cuyler was a very powerful man in Georgia, and he presided over the Savannah-based "Georgia Central Railroad and Bank" throughout the Civil War. Between March of 1858 and February of 1860, the steamships. *Huntsville*, *Montgomery*, and the *R.R. Cuyler* were all added to Henry's fleet. These fast, new vessels, designed by John Baird, were dedicated to Cromwell's Southern lines, and they, along with the corporation they were linked to, gave Henry access to freight commissioning in every major Southern port. Furthermore, his association with R.R. Cuyler linked him much further inland along the reaches of the developing Georgia railroad system. Cities across the deep South as far as Memphis now carried advertisements bearing Henry's name.[47]

Aside from his rapid expansion up and down the eastern seaboard, in 1858, an unexpected solicitor came knocking on the door of the "H.B. Cromwell Steamship Company." A few years earlier, the *USS Water Witch*, after failing to identify itself in international waters, had been fired upon from the Paraguayan river fort of Itapiru along the Parana River, killing one American.[48] The ship and its crew were sailing there as part of an exploratory mission to survey the rivers and establish rapport with the governments of the region. In the fall of 1858, U.S.

---

[46] *Acts and Resolutions of the General Assembly of the State of Georgia: November and December 1857*, (Columbus: Tennent Lomax, State Printer, 1858) pg. 80; "The Savannah and New York Steamship," R.R. Cuyler, *The Savannah Republican*, May 16, 1861.
[47] *The Memphis Daily Appeal*, August 4, 1860
[48] Thomas Jefferson Page, *La Plata, the Argentine Confederation, and Paraguay*, (New York: Harper, 1859), pg. 307.

Congress decided to send a Naval detachment to secure an official apology from the government of Paraguay, and to field the required ships the Navy looked to Henry Cromwell.

While Cromwell was not personally involved in the diplomatic particulars of this event, it is worth noting that a fledgling U.S. Navy looked to his company to commission four ships—*Atlanta, Westernport, Memphis,* and *Caledonia*—and began working to contract and mobilize them in August of 1858. The commander of the expedition, Thomas Jefferson Page, conducted a survey of steamships in Philadelphia, New York, and Boston, and reported to Congress on August 2, 1858 that he was "of the opinion the [the ships] of the 'Cromwell line' are better suited to the wants of the service for which they would be required than those of either of the other lines."[49] Though the newspapers initially spoke very disparagingly of the Navy's decision to commission Cromwell's screw propellers, which were popularly perceived as weaker than the common side-wheel ships of that time, the Paraguay Expedition proved that the screw propellers were not only effective but in many ways superior to the older models.[50] As a result the Navy ultimately purchased two of his vessels, renaming them *Mystic* and *Sumter.*[51] This incident foreshadowed and served as a dress rehearsal for what would occur at the outbreak of the Civil War, when the Navy would again leverage Henry's fleet.

[49] *Papers on Expenses of Late Expedition to Paraguay.* Letter from Secretary of Navy, U.S. Congressional Serial, Set., pg. 3, 1860, https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=UbFNAQAAMAAJ&hl=en&pg=GBS.PP1
[50] For the criticism of commissioning H.B. Cromwell's screw propellers as warships, see "The Paraguay Chartered Steamers 'Converted' Into Men-of-War," *Morning Courier and New York Enquirer*, New York City, Friday, August 26, 1859; For the post-expedition praise published to refute such criticism see "The Steamers of the Paraguay Expedition," *Evening Star*, Washington D.C., Thursday, June 2, 1859. Whatever the sides of the debate, the Navy answered when they began purchasing screw propellers, signaling their superiority to the old side-wheel ships.
[51] "Trial Trip of the Steamer George Washington," *New York Herald*, New York City, December 4, 1862, pg 6.

CHAPTER 2

1858-1861: ON THE BRINK OF WAR

By examining how Henry's ships were employed just prior to the outbreak of the Civil War, a clear picture comes to light of the opposing sides taken by Henry and James within the Northern home front. Henry's advantageous relationship with Southern businesses heavily outweighed the abolitionist principles of his Hicksite Quaker upbringing. While his large steamships arrived at Savannah and elsewhere with massive amounts of manufactured goods and other products of the North, they would return to New York loaded down with cotton, destined for textile mills in the northeast and also Europe. This cotton, as is well known, was the principle export of the American South, and every aspect of its growth, harvesting, and preparation depended on slavery.[52]

But cotton was not the only commodity from which Henry and his ships' captains profited. During the Civil War, Henry and his associates would commonly and publicly point to their former ships, *Mystic* and *Sumter*, with pride in their effective employment by the Navy in suppressing the illegal slave trade off the African coast. During one trial voyage, Henry boasted that these ships had "done more to break up the African slave trade than any other vessels of the Navy."[53] Prior to the war, however, records indicate that his company was not above accepting profit from the shipment of slaves within the domestic trade. A search of the coastwise inward

[52] Robert G. Albion, *The Rise of New York Port,* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1939) pp. 95-121, 389; Calvin Schermerhorn, "The Coastwise Slave Trade and a Mercantile Community of Interest," in *Slavery's Capitalism*, by Sven Beckert and Seth Rockman, pp. 209-224, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016) pp 210-216.
[53] "Trial Trip of the Steamer George Washington," *New York Herald*, New York City, Thursday, December 4, 1862.

and outward slave manifests reveals that *Huntsville, Montgomery,* and *North Carolina*—all steamers of Cromwell's lines—were active in the transportation of slaves between cities along America's coast.[54] In other words, just as coastwise freight commissions enabled Henry to receive a profit for every bale of cotton his ships carried from Southern ports, so too did he earn profits from the sale and shipment of human slaves domestically.

As war loomed ever nearer, still another problematic commodity found its way into the cargo holds of Henry Cromwell's southbound steamers. The beginning of 1861 saw several states already in open secession from the United States, and Southern financiers like Gazaway Bugg Lamar of Georgia, worked to purchase as much arms and ammunition as they could to fill Southern arsenals. On January 22, 1861, New York State policemen stopped one of Cromwell's ships, the *Monticello*, and confiscated a large shipment of muskets from the cargo hold, which they had observed being loaded up for freight earlier in the day. New York City Democrats, like Mayor Fernando Wood, cried foul, and the Georgia state assembly and Governor Brown blasted their New York State counterparts in dramatic fashion over this breech of their Constitutional rights. Cromwell was angry too, mainly because whatever the cargo consisted of, he was being paid by Lamar to ship it to the designated destination—Mobile, Alabama by way of Savannah—on the agreed upon timeline. He stood to lose money and suffer a blow to his reputation.[55]

The *Monticello* muskets, as the *New York Herald* recorded on January 25th, 1861, were made in Windsor, Vermont by "Robbins and Lawrence." These Type II Enfield muskets were

---

[54] U.S., Southeast Coastwise Inward and Outward Slave Manifests, 1790-1860, ancestry.com; Searching these records by ship names reveals that Cromwell's lines transported slaves on several occasions between New York, Wilmington, Savannah, and Mobile. It is a safe assumption that there was more activity than this which was not recorded.

[55] Mark Scroggins, "Georgia, New York, and Muskets on the Eve of the Civil War," *The Georgia Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 89, No. 3. (Fall, 2005) pp. 318-333; This is a thorough summary and a great article describing this comparatively small but meaningful event. Also see Thomas Robson Hay, "Gazaway Bugg Lamar, Confederate Banker and Business Man," *The Georgia Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 37, No. 2 (June, 1953) pp. 89-128.

originally contracted by the British government in 1854 for service in the Crimean War. Production delays, the development of the Type III Enfield, and also the end of the Crimean conflict left several thousand of these rifled muskets unclaimed. The thirty-eight cases of muskets confiscated from the *Monticello* represented a portion of those procured by the South, and Civil War weapons collectors consider them a particularly rare and collectible firearm.[56]

An almost identical incident occurred two days later, involving yet another one of Cromwell's steamers, *Montgomery*. *The New York Herald* painted the police on the scene as confused, breathless, and bumbling—able to only shout "muskets, treason," and "contraband goods," when their authority to conduct the ordered search and seizure was questioned by Cromwell. When told by Sergeant Wemyss, the policeman on the scene, that the General Superintendent of Police, John Alexander Kennedy, had been justified in ordering such a seizure of "contraband goods," Cromwell made the following spirited reply:

> "Contraband fiddlesticks, sir! He has no authority to delay the departure of any vessel in this way, unless there has been an actual declaration of war. He has no authority at all, not even the shadow of authority, sir."[57]

The courts ultimately upheld the validity of Henry Cromwell's words, and the muskets were shipped, as ordered, to the Confederate arsenals in Georgia and Alabama. They were almost all used to equip Confederate volunteer regiments from those states, where such high-quality weapons were a scarce commodity.

An examination of the Savannah Port Papers reveals that, while these muskets happened to be caught by the New York Police, there was likely a much greater quantity of military

---

[56] There were only a small number of these muskets ever acquired for the Confederacy, and almost all of them saw hard service throughout the war, making them highly rare collector's items. Some were sent to South Carolina, but Cromwell's ended up in Alabama and Georgia. https://collegehillarsenal.com/fine-scarce-windsor-enfield-by-robbins-lawrence

[57] "The Police Among the Secessionists, Unsuccessful Attempt to Seize Another Batch of Muskets," *New York Herald*, New York, Friday, January 25, 1861

materiel being shipped by Henry Cromwell's ships which went undetected and unrecorded. On one such ship's manifest of Henry's *Chesapeake*, which in this case arrived at Savannah from Baltimore on March 28th, 1861, one line was marked as a case of "Military goods" destined for "H. Lathrop & Co."[58] However, it is impossible to begin to quantify the extent of military materiel shipped by the coastwise steamers due to their record keeping practices. Some of the extant cargo manifests from Cromwell's steamers are over ten feet long, containing many hundreds of lines of inventory. But in many cases the item descriptions are listed simply as "Mdse," which stood for 'merchandise.'[59] Ultimately, Cromwell's company, as demonstrated by their complicit behavior with everything from slaves to muskets, were concerned only with seeing the shipment completed, making good on their contracts, and maintaining their profitable relationship with their Southern associates.

But Henry went further than simply playing the part of an impartial businessman blindly executing contracts. He was also a Democratic Party delegate to Mozart Hall, which was a rival political organization to the famed Tammany Hall in New York City. This political machine was created by the city's staunchly Democratic mayor, Fernando Wood, after Tammany Hall sidelined him.[60] On January 6, 1861 Mayor Wood made a famous speech in which he advocated that New York City secede along with "our aggrieved brethren of the Slave States" with whom, he asserted, New York maintained "friendly relations and a common sympathy."[61] Cromwell was a named delegate of Mozart Hall at New York State's Democratic Convention which

[58] Inward Manifests, Steamer Chesapeake, From Baltimore, March 23, 1861, Box 21, Savannah Port Papers, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University.
[59] Boxes 18, 19, 21, Savannah Port Papers, David M. Rubenstein Rare Books & Manuscript Library, Duke University.
[60] Edward K. Spann, *Gotham at War: New York City, 1860-1865*, (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources Inc., 2002), pg. 84.
[61] Fernando Wood, "Mayor Wood's Recommendation of the Secession of New York City, January 6, 1861, https://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/mayor-woods-recommendation-of-the-secession-of-new-york-city/

occurred in Albany on January 31st of that same year.[62] The main event of this convention, which was greeted by sweeping applause from the hundreds of assembled delegates, was a lengthy speech given by Horatio Seymour, vehemently advocating against war with the South and against Republican "agitation" over the question of Southern slavery.[63] This speech captured the logical reasoning of many businessmen like Henry. The South was a major source of revenue, and war would only disrupt the hard-won business ties many of the wealthy men present had developed over the decades.

Henry's business ventures and political affiliations during this time contrasted sharply with the Hicksite Quaker ideologies of his childhood, which evidently his younger brother still maintained. James enrolled at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute (RPI) in Troy, New York in the fall of 1858. James not only established himself as a leader by being elected as permanent class president for the RPI class of 1861, but also was listed as an examiner in the local "African School" of Troy. Also, James was closely associated with the debate club at the "Atheneum," which was located in a facility which also housed abolitionist meetings of both black and white anti-slavery activists.[64] Such civic involvement demonstrates consistency with the values associated with his background in the Cornwall Society of Friends. As war clouds gathered, Henry probably took it for granted that his young, devout brother would not allow himself to be caught up in any military conflict. However, reading James' letters to his mother in the wake of the bombardment of Fort Sumter in April of 1861 reveals that the youth was already drawn up in the strong currents of patriotism characteristic of the early days of the Civil War.

---

[62] *Proceedings of the Democratic State Convention, Held in Albany, January 31 and February 1, 1861*, (Albany: Comstock & Cassidy Printers, 1861) pg. 7.
[63] Ibid., pp. 15-25
[64] *Troy Daily Whig*, Thursday, January 24, 1861, accessed at www.fultonhistory.com

CHAPTER 3

THE CROMWELLS AND THE CIVIL WAR

When the *R.R. Cuyler* made its "trial voyage" around Staten Island in February of 1860, Henry Cromwell and the other passengers drank a toast to "An additional link between North and South," as they proudly tested the thrumming engine of a ship named after a slave-owning railroad tycoon from Savannah.[65] Just over a year later, as the North began a frenzied mobilization in the days following the bombardment of Fort Sumter, the elegant vessel was among the first to carry volunteers to the defense of Washington.[66] On April 22, James wrote home, after returning to school at Troy, that he had visited New York "for the purpose of witnessing the departure of the regiments," which he described as "a sight one will not often see in a life time—a historical event."[67] He almost certainly had observed *R.R. Cuyler* which was then Henry's largest and fastest ship, teeming with volunteer soldiers under a full head of steam enroute to Annapolis, Maryland.

Only four days previous to James' letter home, Thurlow Weed, a former Whig party member and editor of the *Albany Evening Journal*, received an urgent telegram from his close friend Secretary of State William Seward in Washington.[68] Telegram wires were being cut, bridges burned around Washington and Baltimore, and the young rebellion seemed to swirl around the nation's capital. Secretary Seward wired to Weed, "The danger is imminent, hasten

---

[65] *New York Herald*, Friday, February 17, 1860; Robert C. Black, *The Railroads of the Confederacy,* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1952) pp. 29-30

[66] "Trial Trip of the Steamer George Washington," *New York Herald*, New York City, Thursday, December 4, 1862, pg. 5.

[67] James Cromwell to Rebecca Cromwell, April 22, 1861, Brooklyn Historical Society, ARC.193

[68] John Strausbaugh, *City of Sedition*, (New York: Twelve Hachette Book Group, 2016) pg. 44

the movement of steamers with troops via Annapolis." This was followed an hour later by Secretary of War Simon Cameron's echo, "Charter steamers and dispatch troops to Annapolis." Weed did just that on the morning of April 19th from "Spofford & Tileston, M.O. Roberts, Mitchell & Co., and H.B. Cromwell & Co."[69] In one of the Civil War's many ironies, *R.R. Cuyler*—a symbol of the strength and dynamism of the South's commercial relationships with the North—went on to earn a reputation as one of the Union Navy's fastest blockade ships, and it spent most of the war prowling off the coasts of Florida and Alabama. But the ship's early use as a troop carrier caused quite a stir in Georgia, where Cuyler was soon rumored to have "treasonable affiliations with our enemies of the North."[70] This caused Cuyler to publish a letter in newspapers across the state to set the record straight and explain his prewar business relationship with H. B. Cromwell of New York. In fact, four of Henry's ships, including all three of his newest steamers for the Savannah line, were commissioned by the Navy as gunboats for the blockade, and two others as troop carriers.[71] By April 12th James Cromwell had already heard of the Navy's designs on Henry's fleet, and he expressed regret to his mother over what the family viewed as an impending loss to Henry, though he added "as thee remarks it is all for the best given the prospect of war."[72] While Henry worked to consolidate what remained of his fleet, and to ensure the government made good on promised payments for his vessels, the narrative shifts more heavily to his younger brother.

As the North and South each mobilized and the situation continued to escalate, James Cromwell began to wrestle with his desire to volunteer and do his part in the Army. Though he

---

[69] Thurlow Weed, Harriet A. Weed, and Thurlow Weed Barnes, *Life of Thurlow Weed Including His Autobiography and a Memoir,* (Houghton Mifflin and Co., etc., etc., 1883) pp. 338-339
[70] *Daily News*, Savannah, May 16, 1861, R.R. Cuyler letter
[71] "Trial Trip of the Steamer George Washington," *New York Herald*, New York, December 4, 1862
[72] James Cromwell to Rebecca Cromwell, original letter, Troy, New York, April 12, 1861, Brooklyn Historical Society, ARC.193

continuously assured his mother he had no intention to join, his letters are filled with evidence of his true conscience. His ominous predictions that "the time might come where the young men of the north will be called upon to protect their country from traitors" reveal his mindset.[73] On May 14, 1861, the college senior described to his mother that he foresaw a very hard fight ahead, and that he did not believe "the Southerns" would give up easily. He wrote, "we must remember they are to be humbled and if subjugated to receive the sneers and contempt of the whole world." He tied this to his sense that the Southern states would fight with everything at their disposal, as "it is either victory or death to their leaders." The coming storm would be no simple matter, in his view, as honor and reputation were at stake. These components—essential within the nineteenth century concept of masculinity—would require, in time, the North "to reclaim the union sentiment even to the very centre of the South if need be."[74]

Additionally, James was suddenly confronted with living examples of what he saw as men who embodied his notion of duty and sacrifice during time of crisis. He described with complete admiration the passage of the "Green Mountain boys" through Troy, stating that,

> "They are the true stuff. Each man a man. Every one spoke in their countenances that they left their homes for work not for pay. They wanted to be placed for action and when the national honor was retrieved they wanted to return home and pursue their accustomed duties."[75]

In this same letter he went on to highlight how many who had joined this regiment were school teachers, and many others were "independently rich." He revealed with these words a glimpse at his vision of what dutiful patriotic men were expected to do at such times. National honor was in jeopardy, and therefore no matter how this war interrupted the otherwise ordinary, respectable, or comfortable lives of Northern men, masculine duty compelled them to bear whatever sacrifice

[73] Ibid.
[74] James Cromwell to Rebecca Cromwell, Original letter, May 14, 1861, Brooklyn Historical Society, ARC.193
[75] Ibid.

was necessary to resolve the situation. His sense of patriotism, duty, and his distaste for Southern slavery combined with this volatile atmosphere to make it difficult to resist signing up.

However, though James' young fiancée, Annie Barton, consented to his wish to join up, he could not disappoint his Quaker mother, who refused to let him go. After his mother denied him permission to join, James confided in his sister, Emily, "I gave in because Mother wished it, but I shall never be able to hold up my head again," and, "I will always feel ashamed and disgraced before my fellow men."[76] Contemporary standards of masculinity and the circumstances at hand meant he would face life-long shame if he adhered to the Peace Testimony and to his mother's wishes. According to the family's private history, his sister pleaded on his behalf, and by mid-summer, James graduated a month ahead of the RPI class of 1861 to take a commission as Captain of Company D, 2nd Regiment of Cavalry, New York State Volunteers.[77] His old Cornwall companion, William Silliman, took a Lieutenant's commission and served as James' second in command.[78]

This news must have surprised Henry, from whom James requested assistance in his effort to recruit his new company. Here another example of Henry's lukewarm attitude toward the war is found in the family letters. After promising to send a dozen volunteers up from New York City, Henry disappointed James and only sent one man, awakening the ire of their young sister Emily who observed James' exhaustion and stress from the labor of recruiting.[79] More than likely Henry was too busy at this time to worry about much else, but also did not feel too

[76] "A Forgotten Hero of the War," Unpublished manuscript, pg. 6.
[77] "To Graduate," *Troy Daily Whig*, Troy, New York, Monday, June 3, 1861
[78] "2nd Regiment Cavalry, New York State Volunteers muster roll," pg. 30, New York Military History Museum, https://dmna.ny.gov/historic/reghist/civil/MusterRolls/Cavalry/2ndCav_NYSV_MusterRoll.pdf
[79] "A Forgotten Hero of the War," Unpublished Manuscript, pg. 7-8.

inclined to put forth any effort to support a war which had suddenly shut off his revenue streams from Southern ports.

On October 29, 1861, Captain Cromwell married Annie Barton under the supervision of a Unitarian minister in Troy.[80] He did so in haste, with the consent of their parents, but in direct violation of the Quaker rules regarding marriage procedures. One of the oldest tenets of the Quaker faith was that they recognized no formal clergy among Friends. For that reason, marriages were viewed to be strictly between the couple and God, with only approval, guidance, and help offered by the Meeting House.[81] Nevertheless, he was about to leave for Washington D.C. in command of a company of cavalry, and he assumed he would soon face the trial of combat. However, this first trip "to the front" ended in utter disappointment for the young Captain. Whatever dreams he and his men may have had of charging decisively into the face of enemy lines were replaced with the reality of a disorganized Union war effort and the drudgery of garrison duty in Washington D.C. Despite James' best efforts to get into the fighting, his first season of service amounted to guard duty in the nation's capital. At one point he even leveraged his father's old business partner, Edward Haight, to write a letter of recommendation to Secretary of War Stanton, but to no avail.[82] During the winter of 1862, "a short-sighted policy led to the mustering out of several regiments of cavalry not yet mounted, among these…the second New York," and Captain Cromwell returned home to Cornwall in "bitter disappointment" that spring.[83]

---

[80] Anna B. Cromwell's Widow's Application for Pension, October 30, 1863, accessed on www.ancestry.com/Fold3
[81] Allen C. Thomas, *A History of Friends in America*, (Philadelphia, PA: The Christian Literature Company, 1894) pg. 58-59.
[82] Edward Haight to the Honorable Edwin M. Stanton, copy of original letter, "James Cromwell," Unpublished manuscript, Washington, March 24th, 1862, pg. 4.
[83] Newspaper Clippings, DMNA website, "Biographical Sketch of James Cromwell" likely written by E.P. Roe, but the author is not named, http://dmna.ny.gov/historic/reghist/civil/infantry/124thInf/124thInfMain.htm

However, a series of Union military disasters in the summer of 1862 revived James' brief and thus far insignificant military career. An embarrassingly clumsy execution of General McClellan's 'Peninsular Campaign' spurred Abraham Lincoln to issue a call for 300,000 more volunteers, and among the many New York regiments to assemble in response was Orange County's 124th New York. Command of this regiment was given to Colonel Augustus Van Horne Ellis. Captain Cromwell applied for and received command of company C, and he quickly initiated his next recruitment effort.[84] Unlike the beginning of the war, Northern boys were much less inclined to volunteer. This was due in part to the efforts of "Copperheads and traitors who had hitherto found it unsafe to give utterance to their treasonable thoughts, save in secret conclaves, [and] were permitted to shout aloud their joy over news of Confederate victories, and to laugh and scoff at their country's agony, in public places."[85] The clock was ticking for Colonel Ellis, to get his ten companies of volunteers assembled in the town of Goshen. As frustration mounted, "the theory of prosecuting the war in strict accordance with the Constitution was acknowledged to be a failure," and so local volunteers and recruiters began arresting and imprisoning anyone they perceived as an obstruction to their efforts.[86]

James had hopes of gaining the position of Major in the new Regiment, and though many in Cornwall remembered him as a young boy, he seized upon this opportunity to assert himself as a force to be reckoned with.[87] He organized a patriotic gathering in Cornwall with "a band of music, rockets, etc." on August 1st, and worked with local leaders to raise bonus money for the

[84] Weygant, Charles, *History of the 124th Regiment, New York State Volunteers*, (Newburgh, NY: Journal Printing House, 1877) pg. 11.
[85] Ibid., 11.
[86] Ibid., 16.
[87] James Cromwell to Edward Barton, Original letter, Cornwall, New York, July 27, 1862; This letter was written from the Cromwell Manor in Cornwall to Ensign Edward Barton aboard the *USS Huntsville*.

new recruits—probably contributing from his own substantial inheritance money.[88] James even personally arrested at least one known Southern sympathizer in Cornwall. Alongside a timid town constable, James seized the aforementioned physician, Dr. William Beattie, from his home half a mile down the road from the Cromwell Manor on the morning of August 11th. Though Beattie likely tended to James and his siblings in years past, the young Captain very publicly paraded him through town in irons to be locked away in Fort Lafayette for three weeks on a $1,000.00 bond of release.[89] After that, recruitment ran more smoothly, and the 124th's ranks were filled as required. This, the prominence of his family, and the added credential of his civil engineering degree led Colonel Ellis to assign James to the vacant Major position. James' old friend, William Silliman, subsequently took command of Company C, known as the 'Cornwall Company."

This frenzy of recruiting activity, public arrests, and promotions attracted the attention of the Cornwall Society of Friends, from whom Mrs. Rebecca Cromwell had apparently concealed her son's marriage and military commission of the year prior. James was approached by a small committee of three Quaker elders who were appointed to seek clarification regarding his reported actions. In this confrontation, James "acknowledged the complaint against him to be true, and [said] that circumstances, and not choice, were the cause of his being married by a Priest, that the acceptance of a military commission [was] a considered and settled step, and [he] wished to be retained a member amongst Friends."[90] At Cornwall's Monthly Quaker meeting on August 28th, 1862, against James' expressed wishes, the local elders decided to disown him from their Society

[88] Estate Papers of David Cromwell, "Last Will and Testament of David Cromwell," Original document,, Cornwall, New York, 1857, accessed in Brooklyn, New York: Brooklyn Historical Society, ARC.193.
[89] Mary Abigail Beattie Sherwood, *Living Recollections*, (Ohio: Oberlin College Graphic Services, 1946), pg. 16-18
[90] "Cornwall Monthly Meeting Records," QM-NY-C673, Microfilm, Quaker Meeting Records at Haverford College Quaker & Special Collections and Friends Historical Library of Swarthmore College, August 28, 1862.

due to his violation of the Quaker *Discipline*. Whatever anguish this might have caused the new Major is not recorded, but it was coupled with even greater sadness for James and his young wife.

In a July letter to Annie's brother, Ensign Edward Barton, who was then coincidentally assigned as the Navy paymaster aboard Henry's old ship *USS Huntsville*, James expressed his decided sadness for having to leave Annie for a second time. This was made more difficult than their previous parting, as Annie was by that time about four months pregnant. As if not difficult enough for her to see her husband leave for a war that had grown exponentially more violent in the last year, by August 22nd the Cromwells received news that Annie's brother had succumbed to a yellow fever outbreak which struck the *Huntsville* during blockade duty near Key West.[91]

Henry, ever managing his business in New York City, would have certainly heard of this ugly news, as the war inched closer to directly impacting his family members as well as one of his old prized vessels. Nevertheless, even as his younger brother had earned a Major's commission for imprisoning Copperhead activists in Cornwall, Henry continued to support the election of another Copperhead to the Governor's seat of New York that fall. Horatio Seymour, an outspoken white supremacist who had previously served as Governor from 1853 to 1854, was elected again in 1862. As previously alluded to, Seymour was an ardent defender of slavery and of compromise with the South. To Seymour, "The agitation of the question of slavery has thus far brought greater social, moral and legislative evils upon the people of the free States than it has upon the institutions of those against whom it has been excited."[92] Compromise above all,

[91] James Cromwell to Edward Barton, Original letter, July 27, 1861, from Cornwall, Brooklyn Historical Society, ARC.193; Also see Unknown Author, *Memorial of Edward Davis Barton*, (Troy: A.W. Scribner & Co., Printers, 1862)

[92] *Proceedings of the Democratic State Convention, Held in Albany, January 31 and February 1, 1861*, (Albany: Comstock & Cassidy Printers, 1861), pg. 15-24

and the right of individual states to decide internally whether to remain free or slave were the main thrusts of his political platform regarding the Civil War. In his opinion, the nation's capital had been drained of all virtue by Lincoln's Republican fanatics.

For a businessman like Henry Cromwell, who remained safely distant from the violence of the war, Seymour's platform made perfect sense. The blockade not only utilized some of his best ships, but also closed off the main source of his wealth. The recovery of Henry's business interests, like many other wealthy New Yorkers, depended on either a rapid defeat of the Confederacy or on a deliberate compromise. Henry took full advantage of Union military gains whenever possible, as demonstrated by his quick response to the opening of New Orleans by Admiral Farragut when he famously "ran the guns" over-watching that port in April of 1862. H. B. Cromwell & Co. was among the first coastwise businesses to re-engage the old trade routes with New Orleans using his new steamer *George Washington*, and by August the newspapers once again featured regular advertisements for Henry's freight commissioning services to and from New Orleans and New York City.[93]

This military and commercial gain was significant for Henry's business and demonstrates the shrewd eye with which he viewed the developments of the Civil War. But such progress had taken well over a year since the war commenced. For that reason, and due to all the setbacks, the Union Army suffered in the field up to that point, Henry would have had little confidence in any suggestion of quick victory to reopen his Southern business interests. Compromise was the way to both end the violence and to hopefully pick up where he had left off with business as usual. James, however, had just left home once again with his newly formed regiment, and by that

[93] "Shipping News," *New York Herald*, New York City, August 8, 1862

November Henry was given a whole new perspective and proximity to the war's brutally violent realities.

On November 13, 1862, Major Cromwell wrote a lengthy letter to Henry detailing his introduction to the hardships of field service in the Army of the Potomac. Though he described minor skirmishes in the vicinity of Manassas Gap and elsewhere, his experience thus far dealt more with cold, exposure to the elements, and long unforgiving marches for days on end. Interestingly, the letter concludes with the following lines, which must have stung Henry at least slightly:

> "What were you about to allow Seymour to be elected? That looks very much like enemies in our rear and homes, when we consider the platform on which he runs. These are peculiar and trying times, it seems as if this was really a degenerate age."[94]

Clearly the results of New York's internal elections meant something to James and his comrades on the front lines, and he was not afraid to make that point clear to his prominent older brother.

From there onward, James' steady stream of letters to his family, and most of all to his wife, Annie, are representative of both his journey into the hell of Civil War combat as well as the revelation to Henry that this conflict represented far more than an interruption of his coastwise trade business. The horrors of Fredericksburg, where James' college roommate was killed in action, brought an otherwise faraway battlefield into the midst of the Cromwell family at home. Though James was only lightly engaged, with the still green 124th being held in reserve throughout the battle, he wrote again to Henry how scared he became of the terrible face of battle, and how "the reality of the battlefield and the fearful roar of cannon and musketry" were enough to make him "have no wish to repeat it whatever." Still, he insisted that he was resigned to face it again if duty required him to do so.[95]

---

[94] A Forgotten Hero of the War," Unpublished manuscript, pg. 22-23.
[95] Ibid., pg. 26.

Subsequent letters detailing the unremitting misery James and his men experienced during the famous Mud March, which punctuated the ruin of General Burnside's Fredericksburg Campaign, must have shocked his loved ones at home. Several letters detailed to his wife the utterly back-breaking work he supervised to "corduroy" roads through the mud so that subsequent units could more easily pass through the terrain on the retreat back to Washington. Cannons mired up to the wheel hubs, horses mired down to their bellies, and nights unsheltered from unceasing rainfall created conditions that would count among the most atrocious in American military history. All this convinced Major Cromwell that,

> "…if the people of the North could see them, or pass such a night themselves, the rain six inches deep before morning, they would use every energy to bring this war to a successful close, and not let all these sufferings and the lives that have been spent, be worse than wasted for a compromise, or any treaty with the traitors. The worse we have to face the more I feel we ought to punish the ruthless causers of it."[96]

Such sentiment, born of the hardship of field service, draws yet another sharp contrast to Henry who had only recently assisted in the election of Horatio Seymour.

While Major Cromwell, the 124th, and the Army of the Potomac rested and refit under their new commander, General Thomas Hooker, in February of 1863, Henry apparently began to shift his political and ideological leanings. On the morning of February 19, Mr. Thurlow Weed again influenced Henry Cromwell to action after being summoned to the White House by President Abraham Lincoln. Around ten o'clock that morning, Mr. Weed arrived at the White House after eating breakfast with Secretary of State Seward. There, Lincoln made the following request:

> "Mr. Weed, we are in a tight place. Money for legitimate purposes is needed immediately; but there is no appropriation from which it can be lawfully taken. I didn't know how to raise it, and so I sent for you."[97]

---

[96] Ibid., pg. 28-29

[97] Thurlow Weed, Harriet A. Weed, and Thurlow Weed Barnes, *Life of Thurlow Weed Including His Autobiography and a Memoir,* (Houghton Mifflin and Co., etc., etc., 1883) pg. 435.

After Lincoln further specified the need for $15,000.00 (the modern equivalent of approximately $300,000.00), Weed hastily returned to New York City to raise the funds. By that evening, Weed had secured the pledges of $1000.00 each from fifteen of the wealthiest men in New York City and forwarded the money to the White House. Presumably, this money was used to sway certain state-level elections in favor of the Republicans later that year.[98] Cornelius Vanderbilt was on that list, and so was Henry Bowman Cromwell. This represents the first evidence that Henry was swayed towards support of the Republican cause regarding the war effort, and it is significant due to the recent experiences his younger brother had only recently written home about.

Additionally, though Henry had remained a member of the Quakers all this time, and indeed had long been known for this religious affiliation in the New York newspapers, that same February he voluntarily withdrew from the Society of Friends.[99] The meeting notes do not record a reason why, leaving his motives to the speculation of historians. Perhaps he had lost interest in active membership long ago due to his business affiliations, and simply chose this moment to put an end to his membership. But perhaps this is indicative of a change of heart in Henry brought about by his brother's hardships communicated from the front lines. Henry was likely very familiar with his young brother's patriotic and abolitionist motives to fight, and the fact that James had been disowned by the Quakers despite sacrificing so much and claiming such virtuous intentions might have soured him somewhat to his otherwise lifelong religious affiliation. If this interpretation holds merit, his disavowal of Quakerism combined with his new embrace of the

[98] Lincoln, Abraham, Roy P. Basler, and Christian O. Basler. *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*. Rutgers University Press, 1990. vol 6, pg 112.

[99] The New York newspapers were well aware of Henry's Quaker affiliation, and mentioned it when describing the simple yet elegant luxury of his Savannah steamers. See "Trial Trip of the Steamer Huntsville," *New York Evening Express,* Saturday, April 3, 1858; For Henry's voluntary withdrawal from the Quakers, see Hazard's Index, http://www.swarthmore.edu/library/friends/hazard/instructions.html

Republican cause represent evidence that Major Cromwell's sacrifice had swayed his heart in favor of the Federal war effort.

1863 was a relentless year of the war, however, and it had only just started. Major Cromwell continued to write home of his experiences. With a daughter, Louisa, born in February, James' and Annie's shared wartime sacrifices became that much more poignant, especially in light the highly lethal engagements he fought through. In early May, General Hooker's disastrous defeat at Chancellorsville represented the124th New York's true baptism of fire, placing James in the midst of violence previously unknown to him. At one point, during a vicious delaying action, the Major was seen "springing to the front, [taking] a position ten paces ahead of the colors to lead" the regiment in a bayonet charge.[100] As this was James' first real combat experience, he wrote extensively of the battle to his brothers and to Annie. James saw men blown apart by rebel cannon fire, and numerous friends from Orange County were cut down by enemy muskets as they "fought like the best of veterans as immovable as a wall."[101] The sharp fighting at Beverly's Ford came next, and James again survived without harm. The military details within James' letters home, which have not been incorporated into any previous scholarly work, could adequately substantiate an entirely separate study within the realm of Civil War military history.

While his letters from the front brought the battlefield to life for his family at home, James' stalwart optimism and conviction are as remarkable as the combat descriptions themselves. With good indicators being reported out of General Grant's siege of Vicksburg, Major Cromwell hoped that the next significant battle against Lee would bring the war rapidly to

[100] Charles H. Weygant, *History of the 124th Regiment New York State Volunteer,* (Newburgh: Journal Print House, 1877) pg. 120
[101] James Cromwell to Rebecca Cromwell, from Cornwall, May 8, 1863, Brooklyn Historical Society ARC.193

a close. In James' view, emancipation was perhaps the single most vital component of the Federal cause's irresistibility. He wrote that because Southern blacks "have a definite and certain knowledge of what the policy of the Government is and that we are human beings and extend the hand of fellowship to all those who would grasp it of both colors" and that the Confederacy would "have as much trouble with keeping their negroes subjected now as the foe before them almost, and the infection will spread throughout their counties and states." He went on to emphasize to his wife that "all able bodied men quietly remaining at home, at such times as this, are holding themselves responsible for all the blood that has been shed and the death of many more brave men."[102] This last sentiment, if ever made known to Henry, would have been a very painful one to hear in the aftermath of the great battle still to come.

On the morning of July 2, the 124th roused itself with coffee and a meager breakfast in the vicinity of George Weikert's farmhouse a few miles south of Gettysburg.[103] The previous day's forced march through summer heat and dusty roads from Emmitsburg, Maryland had been particularly trying for the New Yorkers, and stragglers continued to catch up throughout the morning. As the soldiers engaged in the age-old custom of waiting for higher command—in this case General Daniel E. Sickles—to figure out the plan, the men could only guess at what awaited them later that afternoon. Nevertheless, something in the air—perhaps the urgency of artillery and staff officers as they hurried into position all day, or maybe the gradual increase of musket fire as pickets exchanged blows in the woods west of the Emmitsburg Road—prompted James Cromwell to take a moment and solicit a friend for a favor. Thinking of his Quaker mother back home in Cornwall, he said:

[102] "A Forgotten Hero of the War," Unpublished Manuscript, pg. 64
[103] Weygant, pg. 172

> "We don't know what is before us today. If I go down, I want you to tell my mother that I have never taken a life in all the engagements I have been in. I think this will comfort her more than anything else. I have avoided killing all through."[104]

By mid-afternoon, General Sickles made up his mind, sparking a historical debate that rages to the current day. When he advanced the Third Corps forward to the Emmitsburg road and south to a mass of large boulders now known as Devil's Den, the 124th found itself laying down behind the crest of a subtle terrain feature called Houck's Ridge. Confederate General Longstreet's artillery initiated the fight at about three o'clock, followed by the appearance of three daunting gray lines of General John Bell Hood's Division emerging from the trees west of Emmitsburg Road. Fighting reached a fevered pitch as the rebels closed the distance on Houck's Ridge. As Colonel Ellis watched intently to ensure his regiment held the line with adjacent units, Major Cromwell implored him several times to order a charge. Ammunition, able bodies, and nerve were running low, and under those circumstances a bayonet charge offered the best chance at breaking the enemy advance. At length Colonel Ellis and the brigade commander, General Hobart Ward, assessed the time was right, and Ellis and Cromwell both mounted their horses. When Captain William Silliman pleaded that Major Cromwell get down to avoid unnecessary danger, the Major fatefully replied "The men must see us today."[105] Though fully aware of the danger, the Major, an engineer and now a combat veteran, knew that they had to hold out as long as possible to allow reinforcements time and space to come forward to their support. Every minute would count and given the dire numerical superiority of the onrushing Confederates,

---

[104] "A Forgotten Hero of the War," Unpublished Manuscript, pp 78-79.

[105] Harry W. Pfanz, *Gettysburg: The Second Day*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987) 186-187; While Harry Pfanz incorrectly credited Colonel Ellis with uttering those words, Weygant and Silliman's eye-witness accounts clearly indicate that Major Cromwell was the speaker. See Charles J. LaRocca, *The 124th New York State Volunteers in the Civil War*, (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2012), 142-143; See also Charles H. Weygant, *History of the 124th Regiment New York State* Volunteers, (Newburgh: Journal Print House, 1877) 175.

which was obvious from that vantage point, he recognized fully what was being asked of the Orange Blossoms that day. His example would have to match the occasion, no matter the cost.[106]

The subsequent charge, though initially successful in breaking the Confederate advance, ended in severe losses for the 124th. They left 57 dead on the field, and many more were wounded. Conspicuously, Major Cromwell was killed by a gunshot wound to the chest while physically leading the 124th in that charge. Colonel Ellis was mortally shot in the forehead moments later. The New Yorkers doggedly staged a total of three charges, and recovered their officers' remains before being compelled to retire. The Third Corps withdrew under pressure, and after about two hours of desperate fighting, the battle boiled around and onto Little Round Top, ending in ultimate failure for the Confederates. Although the 124th primarily faced the 1st Texas Infantry in their desperate stand on Houck's Ridge, the final irony of Major Cromwell's story, and one that neither he nor Henry were likely aware of, was the large concentration of Georgia and Alabama regiments who assaulted within a few hundred yards from where Major Cromwell was killed.

General John Bell Hood's division consisted of nine Georgia regiments, most of whom fought in the vicinity of the Wheatfield and Devil's Den. His five Alabama regiments all took part in the famous assault of Little Round Top, and one of them (the 44th Alabama) actually engaged the 4th Maine and the 124th New York during their attack on Devil's Den itself. Some of these Confederate soldiers—without a doubt in the 8th Georgia Infantry who fought in 'the Wheatfield,' and very likely in the 15th Alabama which fought against Colonel Chamberlain's 20th Maine—were carrying at least a scattered quantity of those same Robbins and Lawrence

[106] While this is a brief summary, by far the best and most complete account of the 124th New York at Gettysburg, and throughout the war for that matter, is Charles J. LaRocca, *The 124th New York State Volunteers in the Civil War*, (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2012) Chapter 8.

Type II Enfield muskets from Windsor, Vermont.[107] Though it is impossible to determine and highly improbable that James was personally killed by one of those muskets, there is no doubt that Henry B. Cromwell's contested freight from January, 1861 was present on the battlefield in enemy hands at the place and time that James fell.

[107] The "Rome Light Guards" who were part of the 8th Georgia, and who fought in 'the Wheatfield' at Gettysburg, were cited to have been armed with "the Windsor rifle in the May 28, 1861 edition of the *Tri-Weekly Courier,* George Magruder Battey, *A History of Rome and Floyd County, State of Georgia, United States of America,* (Atlanta: Webb and Vary Co., 1922) pg. 140. College Hill Arsenal posted an authentic Type II Enfield stamped "Windsor," with the number "13th" carved on the stock, and arms collectors assess it was likely used by a Confederate soldier from Georgia, Alabama, or South Carolina—the only states that imported the left-overs from the British contract. This was likely from the 13th Alabama which fought on Culp's Hill. As the Regimental numbers are fairly close, it is not a stretch to think they drew their weapons at similar times from the arsenal in Mobile Alabama, which contained at least 560 rifled muskets from Henry B. Cromwell's shipment (28 cases of 20 rifles each).

CHAPTER 4

FROM THE BATTLEFIELD TO THE HOMEFRONT

On July 7, 1863, the North remained electrified by the joyous news of General Meade's decisive victory at Gettysburg and the southward retrograde of General Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia. Vicksburg too had fallen to General Grant in the western theater, and for the first time in two years of bloody setbacks the Federals seemed to be turning the tide against the Confederacy. Nevertheless, the city whose mayor once threatened to secede from the Union bristled with unrest, and the white working classes were growing more intolerant of Lincoln's conscription policies. The city braced itself in those tense days before the impending draft riots brought unprecedented violence to the streets of lower Manhattan. All the while, casualty reports and death notifications continued steadily streaming into the city via telegram, letters, and newspapers.

Henry Cromwell, who had grown long accustomed to the inward and outward flow of cargo of all types at his busy lower Manhattan wharf, Pier 12, was called upon by a battle-weary Lieutenant Henry Ramsdell of the 124th New York to receive the most precious yet heart-rending box he ever could have imagined. The exhausted Lieutenant was tasked to deliver the bodies of Colonel Augustus Van Horne Ellis and Major James Cromwell from Gettysburg to "their friends" back in New York, and it had taken him five arduous days to do so. With his detail of eight soldiers from the 124th, Ramsdell had used the point of his saber to acquire a wagon from a local Gettysburg farmer on the morning of July 3rd to relieve his tired men from the burden of bearing the dead officers on stretchers. Fighting for space aboard the trains to Baltimore from

Westminster, Maryland, he and his somber detail were "switched and reswitched" by railway managers during the confusion of the battle's aftermath. At one point a wounded Irish Major was forced to intervene on the young Lieutenant's behalf, "seating himself on the box containing Colonel Ellis," and swearing "he would brain the very next man who meddled in the matter." During this time, the bodies were packed with hay and ice in an effort to stay the effects of decay despite the summer heat. In Baltimore, Ramsdell finally managed to coerce an over-worked undertaker to "drop everything and furnish metallic cases in the place of the rough pine boxes" which had contained the bodies since Westminster.[108] Two days later, it was Henry Cromwell who received this metallic case containing his dead brother, and the responsibility of making funeral arrangements fell to him. The distant violence of the war had come to Henry B. Cromwell's doorstep.

The funeral service for Major James Cromwell was held at Henry's Brooklyn residence on Wednesday, July 8, 1863.[109] In attendance were several friends and relatives from Brooklyn, Cornwall, and Troy, including the Unitarian minister, Reverend E. Buckingham, who had hastily performed James' and Annie's wedding in the fall of 1861. Annie, now a widow and a single mother to an infant Louisa B. Cromwell, would also have been there. One can only imagine that if Henry Cromwell ever felt guilt or regret for his antebellum business practices, it would have been in the moment he observed James' grieving widow as they brought him to his final resting place. At the funeral's conclusion, Major Cromwell was buried in a little-known Quaker cemetery in Brooklyn's Prospect Park, joining many of his relatives who also rest there.[110] Mrs. Rebecca Cromwell, too frail to make the trip to Brooklyn, was visited by Lieutenant Ramsdell in

[108] Weygant, pp. 198-200
[109] *Troy Daily Times*, July 10, 1863
[110] Grave of Major James Cromwell, Friends Quaker Cemetery, Prospect Park, Brooklyn, NY, www.findagrave.com

Cornwall, where he explained what he remembered of James' last moments.[111] His sorrowful errand complete, Ramsdell returned to his regiment in the field.

Beyond standard newspaper advertisements for "H.B. Cromwell & Co. Steamship Lines," not much else is recorded for Henry until December 9, 1863, when one of his ships, *S.S. Chesapeake,* was commandeered enroute to Portland by "Confederate pirates" off of Cape Cod. Though the "pirates" turned out to be British subjects from New Brunswick and Nova Scotia who were sympathetic to the South, this event pulled a significant business asset of his into the center of a diplomatic dispute between England and the United States.[112] Federal Navy ships pursued *Chesapeake* into the British port at Halifax, drawing the ire of the Crown for an apparent violation of England's declared neutrality. As the dust settled from this affair, a drawn-out legal battle ensued. Henry, however, would not live to see it resolved. He passed away suddenly on April 2, 1864.

Though his sons, George and Henry Bowman, would live on to carry on his shipping business through the beginning of the twentieth century and would occupy the Cromwell Estate on Staten Island until 1945, Henry and his extended family left little else on record to remember him by. Several brief biographical overviews were published after his death, each ending with the words "Although Mr. Cromwell's commercial interests were so largely connected with the South, he firmly upheld the cause of the government during the war." With no archival footprint and only recent digital access to scores of old newspapers, it is understandable why that sentence has never been questioned for such a prominent New York City businessman.

---

[111] Rebecca Cromwell to Annie Cromwell, Original letter, from Cornwall, New York, Brooklyn Historical Society ARC.193; Also see Weygant, pg. 200

[112] "The Pirate Chesapeake at Sea," *The New York Times*, New York City, Monday, December 14, 1863; Also see Greg Marquis, *In Armageddon's Shadow: The Civil War and Canada's Maritime Provinces*, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1998)

New York had a dual persona before and during the Civil War, and the Cromwell brothers are representative of each side of it. Henry was the successful, wealthy businessman who built his affluence by tethering technological innovations to Southern business. For that reason, he turned a blind eye to Southern slavery and viewed the Civil War initially as an inconvenient disruption to good business. James was a young man who was swept up by both patriotism and a desire to see the blemish of slavery removed from American territory once and for all. James gave everything he could for the Federal cause and died a relatively unsung hero at Gettysburg. Henry faded more or less into obscurity, and for that reason the more questionable aspects of his coastwise business have never been brought to light.

This study is not meant to condemn the life of Henry in order to exalt that of James. They were brothers after all, and though they had their differences, no evidence suggests that they hated one another. Rather the purpose of this study is to highlight how much confusion and turmoil the Civil War created. The opposing home fronts were just as intricately disunified as the Cromwell brothers. The war demolished any concept of what had been considered acceptable or tolerable, and it turned one brother's wealth into the weapons wielded by another brother's enemies. The battle lines may have been drawn between North and South, but the problems the war confronted rested deep within the American conscience, and its impact was far more asymmetric than we in the present can easily discern.

REFERENCES

Primary Sources

"A Forgotten Hero of the War," Unpublished Manuscript, approximately 1885, Gift to Author from Richard Field, Photocopy of typewriter transcription

Acts and Resolutions of the General Assembly of the State of Georgia: November and December 1857. Columbus: Tennent Lomax, State Printer, 1858.

Ancestry.com. *U.S., Southeast Coastwise Inward and Outward Slave Manifests, 1790-1860* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2011.

Badger, George E. *American Steam Navigation: Speech of George E. Badger for the Collins Steamers*. Buell & Blanchard, 1852.

The Brooklyn Daily Eagle. Accessed at www.fultonhistory.com.

Cornwall Monthly Meeting Records, QM-NY-C673. Quaker Meeting Records at Haverford College Quaker & Special Collections and Friends Historical Library of Swarthmore College. (Microfilm)

Cornwall Monthly Meeting Records, QM-NY-C675. Quaker Meeting Records at Haverford College Quaker & Special Collections and Friends Historical Library of Swarthmore College. (Microfilm)

Cromwell, James "Beam Engine for the Steamboat Reindeer: Review by James Cromwell," Unpublished thesis, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, Troy, New York, June 3, 1861

The Daily Standard Union. Accessed at www.fultonhistory.com.

Field, Anna Cromwell. *Diary of Anna Cromwell: 1841-1845*. Brooklyn, New York: Brooklyn Historical Society, 1935.

Hicks, Elias. *Observations on the Slavery of the Africans and their Descendants and on the use of the Produce of their Labour*. New York: Samuel Wood, 1811.

Hughes, James. *Farm Map of the Town of New Windsor and part of Cornwall, Orange County, New York*. Goshen: Orange County Genealogical Society, 1864.

Lincoln, Abraham, Roy P. Basler, and Christian O. Basler. *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*. Rutgers University Press, 1990.

Livingston, John A., *The Eerie Railway: Its History and Management, from April 24, 1832 to July 13, 1875*. New York: J. Polhemus, Printer, 1875.

Memorial of Edward Davis Barton. Troy: A.W. Scribner & Co., Printers, 1862.

Memphis Daily Appeal. Accessed through www.fultonhistory.com.

New York Evening Express. Accessed through www.fultonhistory.com.

The New York Herald. Accessed through www.fultonhistory.com.

The New York Morning Courier. Accessed through www.fultonhistory.com.

The New York Morning Enquire. Accessed through www.fultonhistory.com.

The New York Times. Accessed through www.fultonhistory.com.

The New York Tribune. Accessed through www.fultonhistory.com.

Page, Thomas J. *La Plata, the Argentine Confederation, and Paraguay.* New York: Harper & Brothers, 1859.

"Papers on Expenses of Late Expedition to Paraguay. Letter from Secretary of Navy." U.S. Congressional Serial Set. https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=UbFNAQAAMAAJ&hl=en&pg=GBS.PP1

Perth Amboy Evening News. Accessed at www.fultonhistory.com.

Proceedings of the Democratic State Convention, Held in Albany, January 31 and February 1, 1861. Albany: Comstock & Cassidy Printers, 1861.

Roe, Edward Payson. *A Knight of the Nineteenth Century*. New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1877.

Savannah Daily News. Accessed through Georgia Historic Newspapers. https://gahistoricnewspapers.galileo.usg.edu

Savannah Port Papers, 1754-1920. Boxes 18, 19, 21, RL.10081. David M. Rubenstein Rare Books & Manuscripts Library. Duke University, Durham, North Carolina, USA.

The Savannah Republican. Accessed through Georgia Historic Newspapers. https://gahistoricnewspapers.galileo.usg.edu

Scrapbook collection of various Orange County Civil War newspapers. New York Military Museum and Veterans Research Center. Saratoga, New York, USA. http://dmna.ny.gov/historic/reghist/civil/infantry/124thInf/124thInfMain.htm

Sherwood, Mary Abigail Beattie. *Living Recollections*. Ohio: Oberlin College Graphic Services, 1946.

Smith, Farrington, and Cromwell Families Papers. ARC.193. Brooklyn Historical Society, Brooklyn, New York, USA.

The Semi-Weekly Courier and New York Enquirer. Accessed at www.fultonhistory.com.

Troy Daily Times. Accessed through www.fultonhistory.com.

Troy Daily Whig. Accessed through www.fultonhistory.com.

The Washington D.C. Evening Star. Accessed through www.fultonhistory.com.

Weed, Thurlow, Harriet A. Weed, and Thurlow Weed Barnes. *Life of Thurlow Weed Including His Autobiography and a Memoir.* (Houghton Mifflin and Co., etc., etc.), 1883.

Weygant, Charles H. *History of the 124th Regiment New York State* Volunteers. Newburgh: Journal Print House, 1877.

Whitney, Ralph. "The Unlucky Collins Line." *American Heritage*, Vol. 2, Issue 2, February 1957. https://www.americanheritage.com/unlucky-collins-line

Wood, Fernando. "Mayor Wood's Recommendation of the Secession of New York City, January 6, 1861, https://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/mayor-woods-recommendation-of-the-secession-of-new-york-city/

Secondary Sources

Albion, Robert Greenhalgh. *The Rise of New York Port.* New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1939.

Baird, Charles Washington. *Chronicle of a Border Town: History of Rye, Westchester County, New York, 1660-1870, Including Harrison and the White Plains Till 1788*. New York, New York: Anson D.F. Randolph, 1871.

Barbour, Hugh. *Quaker Crosscurrents: Three Hundred Years of Friends in the New York Yearly Meetings*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1995.

Battey, George Magruder. *A History of Rome and Floyd County, State of Georgia, United States of America.* Atlanta: Webb and Vary Co., 1922.

Black, Robert C. *The Railroads of the Confederacy.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1952.

College Hill Arsenal. Antique weapons dealer. https://collegehillarsenal.com/fine-scarce-windsor-enfield-by-robbins-lawrence

Dempsey, Janet. "The Cornwall Presbyterian Church." *The Cornwall Local*, no. 165, August 10, 1994.

Dempsey, Janet, Collette C. Fulton, and James I. O'Neill. *Cornwall, New York: Images From the Past*. Cornwall: Friends of the Cornwall Public Library, 1994.

Documents of the Assembly of the State of New York: One Hundred and Thirty-Fourth Session. Vol. XXXL, Part L. Albany: J.B. Lyon Company, State Printers, 1911.

Find-a-Grave. www.findagrave.com.

Spann, Edward K. *Gotham at War: New York City, 1860-1865*. Wilmington: Scholarly Resources Inc., 2002.

Guelzo, Allen C. *Gettysburg: The Last Invasion*. New York: Alfred A Knopf, 2013.

Hay, Thomas Robson, "Gazaway Bugg Lamar, Confederate Banker and Business Man," *The Georgia Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 37., No. 2 (June, 1953), pp. 89-128.

Jones, Rufus M. *The Later Periods of Quakerism: 1863-1948*. London, McMillan and Co., ltd., 1921.

Kashatus, William C. *Abraham Lincoln, the Quakers, and the Civil War*. Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2014.

LaRocca, Charles J. *The 124th New York State Volunteers in the Civil War*. Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2012.

Mushkat, Jerome. *Fernando Wood: A Political Biography*. Kent: The Kent State University Press, 1990.

Nelson, Jacuelyn S. *Indiana Quakers Confront the Civil War*. Indiana: Indiana Historical Society, 1991.

Pattern, Dave, Huddersfield Historical Society, Emails exchanged between November 12-15, 2019, Huddersfield, UK;https://huddersfield.exposed/archive/collections/browse

Pfanz, Harry W. *Gettysburg: The Second Day*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987.

Marquis, Greg. *In Armageddon's Shadow: The Civil War and Canada's Maritime Provinces*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1998.

Morris, Ira K. *Morris's Memorial History of Staten Island, New York*. Vol. II. Staten Island: Ira K. Morris Publisher, 1900.

Morrison, John H., Frank O. Braynard, and Samuel Ward Stanton. *History of American Steam Navigation*. (New York: W.F. Sametz & Co., Inc., 1908)

Raymond, Joseph Howard. *History of the Long Island College Hospital and its Graduates*. Brooklyn: Association of the Alumni, 1899.

Schermerhorn, Calvin. "The Coastwise Slave Trade and a Mercantile Community of Interest," in *Slavery's Capitalism*. Sven Beckert and Seth Rockman, pp. 209-224. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016.

Scroggins, Mark. "Georgia, New York, and Muskets on the Eve of the Civil War." *The Georgia Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 89, No. 3. (Fall, 2005). Pp. 318-333, https://www.jstor.org/stable/40584842.

Sears, Stephen W. Sears, Stephen W. *Gettysburg*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2003.

Strausbaugh, John. *City of Sedition*. New York: Twelve Hachette Book Group, 2016.

Thomas, Allen C. *A History of Friends in America*. Philadelphia, PA: The Christian Literature Company, 1894.