

# The Washington Volunteer

The Newsletter of the  
Puget Sound Civil War Round Table

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## Our Next Meeting

Seattle Pacific University professor and PSCWRT member Bill Woodward will be our presenter on Thursday, February 9. Bill will talk on "Why Civil War: Four 'Reminiscences'." He will "invite" four participants – whose speeches he will voice – to explain what happened to bring about the Civil War. The New York businessman will say it was different economies. The firebrand preacher will argue it was Southern sin. The Irish immigrant will claim it was a political failure and the Southern boy will say it was banning Southern property (i.e. enslaved people) from the West. After voicing these four positions, Bill will show the common themes in all four, highlight the legacy of the war that has kept the argument going for more than 150 years, and invite the Round Table participants to offer their viewpoints.



We will be meeting again by ZOOM at 6:45 pm. Dick Miller has sent the ZOOM link to all members, and it also appears on the Web site and at Facebook.

Topic: Puget Sound Civil War Round Table Zoom Meeting

Time: Feb 9, 2023 06:45 PM Pacific Time (US and Canada)

Join ZOOM Meeting <https://us06web.zoom.us/j/89730898297>

Meeting ID: 897 3089 8297; for additional access numbers, check the e-mail.

# Our Last Meeting

We resumed on ZOOM and had one of the best audiences in recent memory. Four dozen people attended, including some guests from allied organizations. Richard Heisler gave an engaging talk on the Washington State Civil War veterans who attended the Gettysburg reunion. Of special interest were the individual veterans who were members of Stevens Post #1 and Custer Post #6, Grand Army of the Republic, at Seattle and Tacoma respectively. Thank you, Richard, for a great presentation.

## President's Message

James L Dimond

The road to disunion started in Kansas. Thanks to that enigmatic fellow called John Brown, the war started there earlier than anywhere else. The American Civil War was a struggle between free soil and slave soil. Kansas was the focal point, a center of violence, partisanship, and the very issue of union. One such person involved in Kansas was a New Englander named Charles Dimon. He moved to Kansas in the 1850s. His roots are very much the same as mine, a son of the Fairfield Dimon family. He engaged in the violence there. His partisan stance was that of a free soiler. On numerous occasions his life was threatened by the slaveocracy.

When the war broke out, he joined the Second Kansas Infantry and fought to save the Union, but mostly because he was a free soiler. He survived the war. As a veteran of the war, he became a Major in the Kansas state militia and died at Fort Scott in 1876.

Years ago, there was a popular monograph entitled *Tracing Your Civil War Ancestor*. Its main advice was, order the pension file and see what it says. That was much less expensive at the time it was published. Today, a pension file can cost close to a hundred dollars. The National Archives is, however, helping clients to reduce the price. If the file is scanned, it can be made available on Fold3. Self-service scanning stations have been established in the downtown headquarters building. It will take some time for all of the files to be scanned, but this is progress. Anyone want to go to Washington DC for us?

In the case of Charles Dimon, I was able to do partial research on Ancestry. It's a very useful site, but as ever one must be careful about personal identification of people in the past. Name's the same doesn't cut it.

# Additional Reading

## What Should I Read Next?

Jeff Rombauer

In 1939 the great historian Douglas Southall Freeman published a work called *The South to Posterity: An Introduction to the Writing of Confederate History*. This summary of books published up to the late 1930's was in response to the numerous requests by readers of popular Civil War fiction to the historian of what they should read next. The question of what to read on the American Civil War has only gotten worse since then, with thousands of additional books, monographs and articles published since 1939. Fortunately, the ability to sort the "chaff" from the wheat has gotten easier with the publication of numerous guides and studies on Civil War books. For those interested in the literature of the Civil War the following books are recommended.

Harwell, Richard Barksdale. *In Tall Cotton: The 200 Most Important Confederate Books for the Reader, Researcher and Collector*. Austin: Jenkins Publishing Company, 1978. Pp. xi, 82.

Richard Harwell, a noted historian of Confederate imprints and literature, published this guide as an update to Freeman's 1939 work. As Harwell notes, "it has been rewritten by each successive generation. What each generation has written has been truth for it. Each reader is now challenged by a massive Confederate literature to find his own version of the truth." The original edition was limited to only 200 copies, but now has been reprinted.

Gallagher, Gary W, Gary W Hughes and others. *In Taller Cotton: 200 More Important Confederate Books for the Reader, Researcher, and Collector*. Wilmington: Broadfoot Publishing Company, 2006. Pp. xx, 90.

Three historians expand the list of books readers should consult on the Confederacy in short paragraph annotations.

Gallagher, Gary W, and Stephen Cushman. *Civil War Writing: New Perspectives on Iconic Texts*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2019. Pp. x. 296.

Nine essays on iconic Civil War books by writers such as Jubal Early, John Gordon, William T. Sherman, and Louisa May Alcott.

Gallagher, Gary W, and Stephen Cushman. *Civil War Witnesses and Their Books: New Perspectives on Iconic Works*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 2021. Pp. viii, 303.

Eight essays on Civil War participants “who felt compelled to convey their stories for a variety of reasons.” Works by James Longstreet, George McClellan, John D Billings, and others are reviewed.

Cushman, Stephen. *The Generals' Civil War: What Their Memoirs Can Teach Us Today*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2021. Pp. 230.

“In this insightful book, Stephen Cushman considers Civil War generals’ memoirs as both historical and literary works, revealing how they remain vital to understanding the interaction of memory, imagination and the writing of American history.” Books reviewed include those by Joseph E Johnston, William T Sherman, Richard Taylor, Ulysses S Grant, George B McClellan, Phil Sheridan, and Mark Twain.

Wooster, Robert. *The Civil War Bookshelf; 50 Must-Read Books about the War Between the States*. New York: Citadel Press, 2001. Pp. xxiii, 280.

Short essays on what Wooster considers the best books to read on the Civil War.

## Features

### Veterans In Our Back Yard: Where Have All The Ashes Gone Part Two

by Loretta-Marie Dimond

The first crematory in Seattle was opened by the Washington Cremation Association (now the Cremation Society of Washington) on Queen Anne Hill in 1905. Their “Northwest Mausoleum” was a hopeful fiction. While the association was founded about 1898 and had offices in downtown Seattle, it took seven years to get a building.

And it wasn't Arthur A Wright that founded it. He was still selling cigars at Occidental and Jackson in 1899, and came to the firm in 1904 to sell burial insurance. He joined Carleton J Smith (the president) and Lewis Angevine Treen (the secretary, and a Civil War deserter) in managing and running the firm. Not until 1926 did he take over the company that has borne his name ever since. Most of the 1906 building has been torn down, but the original retorts can still be seen in the basement of the Queen Anne Mausoleum, right next door to Mount Pleasant Cemetery. As cremation became popular, the facility was subcontracted by every provider in town.

It didn't take long for crematoria to proliferate. Butterworth (1912), King County (1912), Bonney-Watson (1913), Johnson and Hamilton (1915), Bleitz (1915), and Home Undertaking

(1916) got into the act. Washelli installed the "finest" retort in 1922 as a cooperative effort. Acacia's cremation house is still visible, outside Mausoleum #1; don't take a wrong turn off the Lily Corridor, sometimes it's left unlocked. In Tacoma, Oakwood Hill opened a retort (again, take a wrong turn in the old building and you stumble into the processing room, or look around back where it's welded shut), and Buckley-King and Mellinger weren't far behind.



***Exterior, Acacia crematory, 2020. Photo by LMD.***

The average cost of cremation was \$20-50. For an additional fee, half a dollar to a dollar or so a year, the funeral home would store the ashes for a family until it could be decided what to do with the deceased. Butterworth, Home Undertaking, and Bonney-Watson advertised private columbaria in their lobbies. All have since been closed. Oakwood Hill's columbarium is an adjunct to their original funeral parlors, and is still open. The Queen Anne Mausoleum is another funeral home columbarium which gained beauty over the years, but started out as simple open ivory shelving in the basement.

Incineration of remains became so popular and fashionable that funeral homes from out of town would ship their deceased to Seattle or Tacoma for processing. From Bellingham and Bremerton and Port Angeles, from Retsil and Orting, and even from as far away as Okanogan County, the bodies were brought in. Southwest Washington gravitated toward the infamous Portland Crematorium (founded 1901) in Multnomah County, Oregon. The surviving community storage from this outfit is now in custody of Wilhelm's; Peter Jones Knapp, a veteran of the Civil War, and his widow were found on their storage shelves. The Knapps were interred at Willamette National in Portland in 2012 in a well-attended and nationally publicized ceremony. No doubt others are at Wilhelm's, but their records are closed in the interest of "privacy."





***Willamette National Cemetery, 2019. Photo by LMD.***

The ashes were preserved from decay in the unsanitary ground, purified by the flames from infection and disease (or so said the propaganda of the times). The attractiveness of a bronze urn, kept on a shelf or in a glassed-in case, in a dry and pleasant environment, appealed to many. Tall loving cups and companion urns were many and varied. Faux Grecian vases looked like trophies. Stylish books conveyed an atmosphere of intellectual achievement. Fine pottery and porcelain catered to vanity. Many opted for the simplicity of an urn shaped like a cigar humidor (actually, they were—the manufacturers used the same moulds). Miniature urns for children and babies looked like so many little brass egg cups.

Failing that, the industry temporary urns, made of copper and kept in their original cardboard packing boxes, could be installed in a mausoleum behind a niche cover of marble or metal, and no one would ever know. And failing even that, there was a second step “total cremation” that reduced the remains entirely to ash, which could then be scattered on Puget Sound or wherever else imagination would permit. Read on for amazing examples.

The winter of 1918-1919 taxed the capacity of the entire funeral industry, much as we have seen recently. The "Spanish" influenza epidemic doubled or tripled the work load. The records of the Home Undertaking Company for that winter reflect a haste and sloppiness not evident in the preceding years. At about the same time, funeral homes started to realize that the unclaimed cremains were beginning to stack up. Oakwood Hill offered a discount rate and a waiver of storage fees if the ashes of a loved one would be buried in the coffin of the next person in the family to receive ground burial.

Okay, so what does all of this have to do with the Civil War? Quite a few veterans, known to have been cremated, began dropping off the radar starting in 1912 or so.

William Riley Bise was one. He served as second lieutenant in Company G, 19<sup>th</sup> Illinois Infantry during the war, and received pension from 1891. At his death in Tacoma in April 1923, his remains were cremated. They remained in either family possession or funeral home community storage until May 1952, when he was finally interred inside the coffin of his son, Ottis Bise, at the Wenatchee City Cemetery.

Others include:

A Vashon Island veteran, Thomas Jefferson Willhight, was two places. At his death he was cremated and left on the crematory shelf. Years later his wife died, and at that time the family made the decision to establish a family lot in the Vashon Cemetery. The move was made in 1929. His entire family is with him now. He has a commemorative marker.

John Cecil Eberly was abandoned on the shelves of a Spokane crematory. He was discovered by a researcher and interred alongside his wife and son, with full military honors, at the new state veterans cemetery at Medical Lake.

Reginald Heber Angel is a most interesting case. He died while aboard a Washington State ferry in the middle of Puget Sound, and on reaching Seattle his family drove him straight to Home Undertaking. He was cremated without benefit of legal disposal authority. No physician ever signed the death certificate, the original of which remains with his record in the Home Undertaking archive. It can be viewed by special arrangement through the Manuscript Library of the University of Washington. Most official records used Bremerton, his legal residence and pension address, as his place of death. His ashes were returned to the middle of Puget Sound without further ceremony.

Byron Phelps, a long-surviving member of the Seattle Grand Army of the Republic, was cremated and the ashes given to his family. There is no further public record.

Hundreds of others are, similarly, not buried anywhere. Ashes are portable. They can be moved around. They can be given to family and lost in attics. They can be mailed. They can be scattered. They can be buried quietly, by dark of night, without legal burial permit. And they can be lost in storerooms and moving boxes. When the private columbaria of Bonney-Watson (1962), Butterworth (2005), and Home (1945??) closed, the ashes had to go somewhere. We're looking.

# Ye Olde Editor's Close

Please visit our reconstructed Web site at [www.pugetsoundcwrt.org](http://www.pugetsoundcwrt.org) for the latest in news, events, and announcements. Please consider contributing an article or two! Until next time, please stay safe and healthy.

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