

In terms of financial success, the story of George F. Washburn would have to be considered a failure since he did not die a rich man. During his lifetime he didn't amass a large amount of wealth if the only measure of his worth was by how much of an inheritance he left behind for his kin. His entire estate, consisting of real and personal property and cash on hand amounted to only \$1,205.45.^[1] He was a frugal New Englander who lived on only what was absolutely necessary to have in order to survive. His life style did not allow for, nor did it require, any frills. That's not to say he was a pauper, destitute and impoverished. He just wasn't the kind of person who put a great deal of value on accumulating a lot of materialistic artifacts. He was apparently immune to most of the conventional societal norms and expectations. For example, although he owned a house, he never married. He was a thoughtful man who was self-reliant and responsible. He kept to himself and expected others to do the same. He had a mind for details and was meticulous in his planning for the future. He was the first veteran I have come across who provided for the long term care of his own grave site before his death. Some people might have considered George eccentric, but he was no hermit. He kept his own affairs in order, but was no civic leader in his community. He was a loyal family man even though he never started one of his own. He did not leap at the first call to duty to defend his country from rebellion but neither did he run when tapped on the shoulder to serve. And he served honorably through some of the most vicious and prolonged fighting in the Civil War that the Old Vermont Brigade saw in that conflict.

From the very beginning of the research into George F. Washburn's life story difficult challenges surfaced. "Samuel", for example, proved to be a very common given name for male children and "Washburn" turned out to be an extremely popular surname like "Smith" and "Jones". It did not help matters any that our ancestors were enormously fond of recycling names among their children which made verifying the accuracy of information that much more difficult. For example, George's father was named "Samuel" as was his father before him. So the slippery slope of certainty had to be navigated every time the name "Samuel" popped up. Which one was it or was it a completely different "Samuel" altogether outside this family tree? The lack of reliable and accurate record keeping down through the years always posed additional problems. Misspellings, whether accidental or out of ignorance, was a deterrent to reliability. Just innocent oversights caused unintended frustrations. Take George's middle initial as an example. We knew it was "F" and fully expected to have the complete name revealed in some recorded document uncovered in the research process. But NO! Not one single form consulted offered to reveal what the letter "F" stood for.

Something out of the ordinary about the man's story is one element this writer always looks for. George's family history did not disappoint. His extended nuclear family actually consisted of two, distinct parts because, Samuel Washburn (1788-1843), was married twice. His first wife was Sally Flagg (1785-1814). Because Sally originally hailed from Massachusetts, her records were much more difficult to access. Therefore, the completeness of her background was more lacking in details. What was found out was that she and Samuel were married May 24, 1810 in the Boston, Massachusetts area (Framingham?).^[2] Sally was twenty-five when she married. She and Samuel had two male children together: James B. (1810-1905) and Edmund (1811-1873).^[3] James, born

three months after his parents' married, went on to become, it was believed, a Methodist minister. His brother, Edmund, became a manufacturer of shoes.^[4] Their mother, Sally, died at the early age of twenty-nine in 1814. She was buried in South Burying Ground in Boston, Massachusetts.^[5]

Samuel's second wife, Harriet Cook (1794-1879) was the biological mother of his next five children: Watson C., 1822-1878; William W., 1824-1885; Ruth Amelia, 1828-1878; George F., 1831-1915; and Henry E., 1837-1904.^[6] This segment of the Washburn clan was not very close to their half-siblings. The first two boys, besides having different biological mothers, were also eleven years older than their nearest sibling. By the time Samuel had begun his second family with his second wife, his first two sons were grown men in their early twenties. Little information on what Samuel did for a living all these years was found. The few details discovered about George's youth came from records of his siblings. For example, Samuel was born and raised in Natick, Massachusetts where his first two sons were born also. And because both of them grew up to be something other than farmers spoke highly to the fact that their father, Samuel, was probably never one either. This was based on the observation that it was almost automatic in rural America that if the father was a farmer, then most, if not all, of his sons also became one in their adult years. Of course, that was not 100% true 100% of the time. But it was a pretty common pattern. James became a clergyman it appeared from the records and Edmund manufactured shoes for a living.^[7] The next batch of sons, four of them (Watson, William, George and Henry) all became carpenters in their adulthood.^[8] So, if majority rules, Samuel most likely earned a living by working in the building trades not tilling the soil. This occupation would also have lended itself to a more mobile life style which the Washburn's seemed to enjoy at least for a while. Samuel was born and raised in Natick, Massachusetts. He and Sally were married in either Boston or Framingham, Massachusetts depending on which marriage certificate you were looking at. Sally was raised in Sherborne, Mass. and buried in Boston. Watson was born in Constable, New York. William, Ruth, George and Henry were all born in New Haven, Vermont.^[9] All this moving around would not be out of the ordinary in 2019, but it was highly unusual in mid-18th century main stream America. Then, people usually were born, raised, married and died in the same town or village and even in the same house (except for the buried part!).

Despite, or perhaps because of, their meanderings, this second group of Washburns became very close and tended to stick together especially during times of crisis. In 1843, the family lost its leader - Samuel. He died suddenly on June 29, 1843 in New Haven, Vermont at the age of fifty-five.^[10] Sudden deaths in the Washburn clan particularly of male members was not unfamiliar. Similar tragedies had happened twice before to them. George's grandfather, also named "Samuel" had unexpectedly drowned in March of 1818. In 1824, his son, Elijah, also drowned on January 13, 1824. Both were living in Natick, Massachusetts at the time.^[11]

In 1850, Watson (27), Amelia, aka Ruth (23), George (18) and Henry (12) were all living together on a farm in New Haven. Since Watson was the eldest male in the home, he was declared the head of household. The real head of the house was Harriet, his mother and

Samuel's widow aged fifty-two. The oldest member of the family at the time of the 1850 Federal Census who lived in the same household was Abigail Cook (90). She was Harriet's mother and Samuel's mother-in-law.^[12] Living right next door as neighbors was William Washburn, his wife, Martha, and their son Wallace. They also lived on a farm. The 1850 Census taker did not put a dollar value on either of the two farms. However, they did assign a \$800 personal property evaluation to Harriet's belongings.^[13]

On the eve of America's great civil war, the small Washburn group remained intact and lived under the same roof. Besides some discrepancies' in ages of individuals, there were a number of other major changes in the lives of the family. Mother Cook was absent from the family list. She would have been near one hundred years old in 1860. Secondly, George had been promoted to head of household over his older brother, Watson. Third, all three brothers had given up being farmers and were now all carpenters. Ruth (aka Amelia) was still a spinster at thirty-two and remained the only sister in the clan. Harriet, who seemed confused about her age, had also lost her financial status in the family as she was now listed with a zero value assigned to her. However, now George appeared on the census form with a value of \$800 along with his new title as head. Lastly, it appeared that the immediate neighborhood had also undergone a transformation as William, the other brother in the family, no longer lived along side his siblings and mother in New Haven.^[14]

During May and June of 1863, Captain C.R. Crane, Provost Marshall for the First Congressional District of the State of Vermont registered George F. Washburn, thirty-one years of age and described as an unmarried "lounger" eligible for the draft.^[15] According to the Oxford American Dictionary, a "lounger" could mean someone, especially a man, who frequents bars; another words, a lazy, indolent person.^[16] Apparently Captain Crane did not think very highly of George or his life style. Perhaps he had reason. Since the draft was not instituted until two years into the Civil War, it was obvious that George had not leapt at the many chances to enlist that had come along since April of 1861. He was fairly young, unmarried, not a farmer or a father and wasn't employed in an indispensable occupation vital to the war effort, so it was obvious that he was not highly motivated to take on his patriotic duty of defending his country in time of crisis. But then again, there were many young men of the nation that felt this war was immoral, unjustified and unnecessary. Others faced with the possibility of being drafted did go into hiding to avoid being forced into military service. But not George. He may not have been super anxious to enlist, but he did not run away either. He stood his ground and allowed the legal process to play itself out. He did not dodge being drawn into active service; he just did not volunteer to do it. When called up, he went dutifully. July 15, 1863 George reported to Rutland and was enlisted into the First Company of Drafted Men. September 6, he rendezvoused at Brattleboro to be assigned to Company A of the Sixth Vermont Regiment of Infantry.^[17] While in the First Company of Drafted Men, George had been "acting corporal". When the thirty-one year old carpenter, standing five feet ten inches tall and having black hair along with a dark complexion set off by hazel eyes and hailing from New Haven, Vermont was placed in the Sixth Regiment, his rank was reduced to that of a private.^[18] Private Washburn was a recruit in an existing Vermont regiment that had been in the field for two years before he joined it.

In less than two weeks from the time an urgent request from the Secretary of War in Washington reached Governor Fairbanks in Vermont in September of 1861, the Sixth Vermont Regiment of Infantry was raised and rendezvoused in Montpelier to be mustered into the service of the United States for three years. It was formally accepted on October 15, 1861. Three days later, it was enroute to the front, arriving in Washington on the 22nd. Two days later, the Sixth marched into Camp Griffin to join the Second, Third, Fourth and Fifth Vermont and completed the Old Vermont Brigade. During the winter cantonment, the regiment suffered terribly from sickness. There were over 278 cases of typhoid fever, 330 of measles, 90 of diphtheria and 180 of mumps. The mortality was great, amounting to more than 50 deaths.

On March 10, 1862, the Regiment broke camp and entered into the Union's offensive plans to capture the Confederate capital of Richmond. The offensive was called the Peninsula Campaign. It began at Fortress Monroe March 24th and commenced its march on the objective April 4. Along the way, at Lee's Mills, the Sixth received its baptism of fire. Wading across a mill pond chest high in water, parts of the Sixth took heavy fire from well entrenched Rebels in amply manned rifle pits. After a relentless attack, the Sixth drove the Confederates from their first line of defenses and advanced on a well supported main battle line of the enemy. The Sixth stopped at the abandoned Rebel rifle pits while waiting for reinforcements. Instead, the order to retreat came from the Union commanding officers. In order to return to their own lines, the Sixth had to wade across the mill pond a second time, all the while exposed helplessly to the fire of the enemy. Confederate bullets boiled the waters around the retreating federals and more casualties were suffered. Twenty-three of the Sixth were killed in this futile action. Another fifty-seven were wounded. The Vermonters then settled into a quiet period of observation of the Confederate position until they were abandoned the night of May 3, 1862. As the Union troops moved forward to occupy the deserted enemy works, they found that the Rebels had left behind some deadly gifts for their enemy. Scores of loaded artillery shells, buried in the ground near the surface, and armed with percussion caps ready to explode the moment they were stepped on, were found. Several explosions of these new weapons resulting in deaths and dismemberments alerted the Union soldiers to the presence of a never-before used device of warfare - the first "land mines".

From Lee's Mills, the Vermonters continued their march towards Richmond on the 4th of March. They engaged the Confederates again at the Battle of Williamsburg. By May 19, the Regiment had made its way from White House Landing to the Golding farm near the Chickahominy River. Another direct attack was launched against Richmond during the Seven Days Battles (June 25-July 1, 1862) - Garnett's Farm; Savage Station; White Oak Swamp; Malvern Hill. After spending a month at Harrison's Landing, the Sixth moved back to Fortress Monroe. September and October were spent on the Maryland Campaign. Mid-September severely tested the already depleted strength of the Regiment with the bloody action at Crampton's Gap and Antietam. Fredericksburg came on the heels of Antietam in mid-December, 1862. The Sixth was relieved to go into winter camp at White Oak Church.

January of 1863 did not begin auspiciously for the Vermonters. They followed Burnside through the infamous "Mud March" January 20-24. Two months later found the Sixth facing the challenges of Marye's Heights where it performed admirably. At Salem Heights and particularly at Bank's Ford, the Regiment was alone responsible for the capture of 250 prisoners. When the Battle of Gettysburg opened July 1, 1863, the Sixth Vermont, along with the rest of the Sixth Corps to which it belonged, was at Manchester, Maryland, thirty-five miles from the battlefield. Orders to march came around dusk, but the columns did not actually start for Gettysburg until about 10 o'clock at night. It was on this occasion that General Sedgwick issued his famous order "Put the Vermonters ahead and keep the column well closed up." Before the sun set on July 2, the Vermont Brigade was deployed into line of battle at Gettysburg where it saw only light action during the famous cavalry charge near the Round Tops. A week after Gettysburg, at Funkstown, Maryland, the Sixth played a more crucial role in the engagement. Covering a front of more than two miles as skirmishers, the Fifth and Sixth were attacked three times by heavy lines of battle. Each time, they held their position without assistance even though there were 50,000 Union troops within thirty minutes' march. Soon after, the Old Vermont Brigade, including the Sixth, were sent to New York City to quell the draft riots breaking out there. In late September, 1863, the Regiment rejoined the Army of the Potomac at Culpeper Court House and participated in the Bristoe Campaign and the action at Rappahannock Station on November 7, 1863. It ended 1863 being part of the Mine Run Campaign.^[19]

George had been registered for the draft back in Vermont during May/June, 1863 just after the Battle of Gettysburg.^[20] His transfer from the First Company of Drafted Men to the Sixth Regiment, Company A happened only days before the Battle of the Wilderness took place on May 5-6, 1864. The recruit was paid \$25.00 of his \$100.00 bounty and credited to the 1st District of Vermont.^[21] Private Washburn was with the Sixth in the ranks during the brutal two day battle of the Wilderness. Four hundred forty men, including Private Washburn, went into that inferno. Almost one half were lost - 196 out of the total engaged. He was also part of the charge of Upton's forlorn hope at Spottsylvania Court House when twelve regiments of the Sixth Corps were chosen to charge the enemy's lines. Of those twelve, three were from the Vermont Brigade - the Second, Fifth and Sixth. On the 12th of May, 1864, the Regiment fought at the Salient known as the Bloody Angle. The musket fire there was so severe that oak trees more than a foot in diameter were cut down by Minnie balls. By June 15, the Sixth had been reduced to about 250 men from its previous 441. At Cold Harbor, the men of the Sixth were constantly engaged with the enemy for twelve consecutive days.^[22]

It was at the end of Sheridan's Valley Campaign mid-September that Private Washburn was extracted from combat duty and transferred to the Second Division, Sixth Corps Headquarters to serve as provost guard. This was the duty he continuously performed from September 14, 1864 until his discharge on June 26, 1865.^[23] In the meantime, the Regiment moved on to participate in the Third Battle of Winchester (Opequan), Fisher's Hill and the Battle of Cedar Creek. While his Regiment was accepting the surrender of Lee and his army at Appomatox Court House, Private Washburn was still doing provost duties at the Sixth Corps Headquarters. On October 16, 1865, the veterans of the Sixth

Vermont were ordered home to be dismissed from the service. Three hundred twenty recruits were retained until July 8, 1865 when the last of the Regiment were discharged at Burlington, Vermont.^[24] George's luck had held out to the last because he, although a drafted recruit, was discharged nearly a month earlier, on June 26, 1865 at Washington, D.C.^[25]

The Sixth Vermont Regiment was one out of 2,000 regiments in the war of rebellion which lost 200 men or more in battle and it was one of the famous 300 fighting regiments of the Civil War. The total number of members was 1,681, of whom 189 were killed or died of wounds, 189 from disease, 20 from imprisonment and 2 from accident.^[26]

Upon George's discharge from the service in June of 1865, his final accounting showed that he owed the Government money for various things. The first charges went back to August, 1864 when he was still in the field. After The Wilderness, Spottsylvania or Cold Harbor engagements, Private Washburn was billed for the loss of one cartridge box, belt and plate (\$6) and one canteen (\$1.07). In addition, he was charged \$21 for transportation when the March/April Company Muster Roll was completed. These items totaled \$28.07 that George owed the Government. On the plus side, the Government owed him \$75 of his bounty money, so he did end up going home with a little jingle in his pockets.^[27] Once he had settled his accounts with the Government, George headed straight for New Haven, Vermont and the family he had left behind.

While George was in the service from 1863-1865, his brother, Watson, had continued to fill the role of head of household. He had supported his mother, Harriet, Henry, his brother, and Ruth, his sister by doing carpentry work around the New Haven area.^[28] In 1865, Henry married a local gal named Arvilla and moved into his own residence a short distance away from his relatives and his mother. He, too, supported himself and his new bride by doing carpentry work.^[29] By 1870, Watson was doing well for himself. He hadn't amassed a fortune, but he was worth \$2,150 according to the Federal Census taker.^[30] George had rejoined the household containing his brother, Watson, his mother, Harriet and his sister, Ruth after his return to civilian life in New Haven. He resumed being a carpenter for a living as well. Up to July 20, 1870, he also remained unmarried unlike many single veterans of the war who became husbands soon after returning home.^[31]

Five years later found George and Watson still sharing the role of head of household. Harriet, seventy-six in 1870, was still the glue holding the entire clan of Washburns together. The boys, both carpenters, were also still unmarried as was their thirty-three year old sister, Ruth. Henry and William both were out of the nest finally. They had each married and established homes of their own. William had moved to Rutland where he plied the trade of carpentry. Henry lived in New Haven just three houses away from the rest of the Washburns. He also had gone into the carpentry trade for a living.^[32] None of the boys were flush with cash or rich in real estate holdings. They all were blue collar working stiffs and lived pay period to pay period on wages earned building and repairing things. Life was good and they all were close enough to each other to provide mutual aide when necessary. At the very end of the 1870's however, the fabric of the closely woven Washburn clan began to unravel. William decided to relocate himself and his family to

Saratoga Springs in New York state, putting even greater distance between himself and the rest of his family.^[33] In 1878, Watson somehow injured himself, developed an "abscess of the hip" and died.^[34] Harriet, the grand dame of the clan, passed away in 1879.^[35] Those losses severely decimated the nuclear family of Washburns in New Haven.

By 1880, only George and his sister, Ruth Amelia, remained living together as unmarried siblings. At forty-eight, George was still pounding nails for a living. Henry, his brother, lived just two doors from him. Henry was doing quite well for himself and his family in 1880. He had specialized in building and repairing wagon wheels rather than just being a general carpenter. He also boarded people in his home for extra money. He had two lodgers when the 1880 Federal Census was taken. One was a female dress maker named Esther Elmer from New York state. The other was Fordyce Nash, a twenty-five year old retired merchant. Henry was prosperous enough to afford a servant - a sixteen year old female named Ida Page.^[36]

When the Special Schedule of 1890 was done for surviving soldiers, sailors, marines and widows, George was listed on it as a veteran living in New Haven. It verified that he was a private in Co. A of the Sixth Vermont Regiment who had enlisted in July of 1863 and was discharged two years later almost to the day. It also noted that he had a disability due to his service which was listed as "malarial poison and piles". George had applied for a pension, presumably because of this condition, in August of 1890. He had been granted payments since that time.^[37] The 1890's were not kind to George. Not only was he suffering from physical ailments caused by his exposure to arduous military duty during the Civil War, but he was also being assaulted by the effects of longevity and aging. In rapid succession, he had lost his brother, Watson in 1878, his mother in 1879 and then another brother, William, in 1885.^[38] He then lost his longtime roommate, his sister, Ruth, in 1898.^[39] Since George had never married, this last loss left him totally without companionship.

George's solitary situation did not last long. By 1900, he had taken on a Canadian farm hand named Oviel Filion who then lived with him in the house. George had given up carpentry by 1900 for the life of a farmer in New Haven. Oviel was his hire man.^[40] George's career change was most likely brought about by his "organic" heart condition. In 1907, George got a raise in his monthly pension amount due to the generosity of Congress at the time. He was granted \$20 per month due to the change in the pension laws. He got another raise (to \$27 per month) in 1912 after Congress enacted new legislation governing pension benefits.^[41]

By the next census year in 1910, George was pretty much in full retirement mode and living alone again in his house in New Haven. His pension payments were adequate to meet his living expenses. He owned his house free and clear, so his expenses were minimal.^[42] George was still a bachelor at eighty-three and a man of leisure who could amble around town in his spare time, shooting the breeze with his fellow towns folk. Eventually his bad ticker caught up with him. George passed away on March 14, 1915 in his home of "arterio sclorosis" and heart disease.^[43] His funeral was held in the Congregational Church with "Masonic services and fitting words for the occasion".^[44]

Before he died, George had his Last Will And Testament drawn up. In it, he stipulated that his just debts and final expenses be paid out of his estate first. Then, one hundred fifty dollars was to be set aside in a trust fund at the Burlington Savings Bank for the perpetual care of his grave site in Evergreen Cemetery. The remainder of his assets were then to be divided equally among the three children of his nephew, Wallace Washburn. After the real and personal property was auctioned off (his house went for \$800), and were added to the cash on hand he held at the time of his death, his entire estate amounted to the grand sum of \$1,205.45. The executrix presented a \$406.12 bill to the estate which covered everything to settle the estate and put George into the ground (including a headstone). That left \$799.33 to be divided between the three heirs named in the will. So, "Edwin Washburne, Lottie A Boomhower and Ida M. Boomhower" each received an inheritance of \$266.44!^[45] In 2017 dollars, that would have been the equivalent of \$4,692.00. Just a little something to remember him by.

NOTES

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12. *Ibid.*, 1850 U.S. Federal Census for George F. Washburn.
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14. *Ibid.*, 1860 U.S. Federal Census for George F. Washburn.
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21. www.fold3.com, Compiled Service Record, p. 8, image 311596715.
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23. www.fold3.com, Compiled Service Record, p. 15, image 311596730.
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32. Ibid., 1870 U.S. Federal Census for George, Wm and Henry Washburn.
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