

Willard Birchard was not your typical Vermont Civil War Volunteer soldier. He was not your standard native Vermonter. He was not the traditional husband and father either. In fact, there was very little about Mr. Birchard that you could label as conventional. He was, you might say, a horse of a different colour.

Willard was born in April of 1837 in Brandon, Vermont the son of Lorenzo and Lucia Birchard. ^[1] He was the only child of the family. However, two additional resources list Willard's place of birth as Rochester, Vermont. ^[2] One 1850 Federal Census record had thirteen year old Willard Birchard living in Rochester with a farm family named Washburn. Another 1850 Federal Census for the town of Leicester listed a fourteen year old Willard Birchard living with a family named Morris. And in that family lived a second Birchard - a women named Sally Enos who was fifty-nine years old. ^[3] All attempts to authenticate any genealogical association of any of these Birchards with Willard Birchard, member of the Fifth Vermont Infantry, was unsuccessful. None of the research done so far explained why a thirteen-fourteen year old boy would be living with strangers rather than with his parents.

It was determined without doubt that Willard married for the first time on March 4, 1860 to Julina Olive Holden from Leicester, Vermont. She was sixteen and Willard was twenty-two. ^[4] Julina and Willard had nine children together. The first was born in 1862 and the last in 1881. There were four boys and five girls. ^[5] Their marriage lasted forty-six years, only coming to an end in 1906 when Julina died. ^[6]

Willard was not at home when his first born arrived in 1862. He had enlisted in the Union Army on August 20, 1861 and had been mustered-in at St. Albans on September 16, 1861. ^[7] He was twenty-four when he joined Company F, Fifth Regiment Vermont Infantry. He stood an impressive five feet nine inches tall and had a light complexion which went well with his brown hair and blue eyes. He claimed Rochester as his birthplace and was a laborer by trade. He apparently went for Cornwall, Vermont. ^[8]

For the next eight months, life in the service was uneventful for Willard. He did what he had to do and went where he was told to go. Then, on September 7, 1862, Private Birchard was reported as "...deserted while on the march from Alexandria, Virginia." [9] The Fifth, along with the rest of the Second Vermont Brigade of the Sixth Corps, was on its way to Crampton's Gap to meet a Confederate advance into Maryland. It was not surprising that Private Birchard, among many others, fell out of the ranks due to the arduous pace of the march. In truth, Willard had been forced by illness and fatigue to fall out. According to a letter of support for Private Birchard written by Lieutenant E.A. Hamilton commanding Company F, to Colonel Lewis A. Grant, commander of the Fifth Regiment dated November 10, 1862 "...after marching two days to overtake the Co. & Reg. (he) finally returned to Washington and reported to the Medical Director and was by him sent to the Vermont Hospital and was reported as a deserter on the 10th of October, 1862. and returned to the Co. and Reg. Nov. 9th 1862...." [10] It was the lieutenant's recommendation that Private Birchard be restored to duty without trial. After due deliberation, Colonel Grant reached the same conclusion and Private Birchard was reinstated to his Company without further action being taken against him. In fact, the Company Muster Roll for November/December, 1862 so stated: "...Deserted Sept 7, 1862; restored by order of Gen. Howe Nov 9, 1862...." [11]

Private Birchard's life as a Union soldier resumed its usual normalcy throughout the beginning months of 1863. The only incident which occurred during all those months through June, 1863 of any note was that Willard managed to lose his bayonet. Then sometime during July/August of 1863, Private Birchard again got himself into trouble of some sort for he was fined a month's pay "...by sentence Regl C. M. Aug 28 1863 \$13.00...." [12] The official military records gave no explanation regarding the cause or causes of this disciplinary action against Private Birchard. But it must have been of some substantial misconduct to be fined a month's pay.

On December 16, 1863 at Brandy Station, Virginia, Private Birchard of Co. F, Fifth Vermont Infantry re-enlisted at twenty-five years old. He went for the full three years this time. [13] Sometime between October 31, 1863 and February 29, 1864, Willard managed

to lose his musket. The Government stopped his pay for the amount of \$20. ^[14] Good news for a change came Private Birchard's way on June 9, 1864 when he was promoted to Corporal. ^[15] Between June 9 and June 29, 1864, much to everyone's surprise I imagine, Corporal Birchard was promoted again to Sergeant. That is the rank Willard held when he was discharged at Washington, D.C. on the 29th of June, 1865. He owed the Government \$4.54, but the Government owed him \$400 in bounty money. ^[16]

When Willard came home to Vermont in June/July of 1865, he returned to his wife and his young three year old son, Eugene. Between his return home in 1865 and 1868-69, he and Julina had three more children: George Perry, 1864; Emma, 1866; and Lucia, 1868. All these children were born in Vermont. By 1870, the Birchard family lived in Hersey, Michigan. Willard must have taken Horace Greeley's advice to "Go West" to heart because the emigration westward to Michigan was only a temporary stop. Thirty-three year old Willard was supporting his growing family by farming a very small spread worth only \$500. ^[17] Life in Michigan must have been stressful for the family. Their financial security must have been extremely shaky.

Willard continued to move his family westward at the same time that it continued to expand in size. In the next ten years, he and Julina added four more children to the family. Julina was born in 1871; Clara (Carrie) followed in 1874; Willard came along in 1877; and Minnie emerged into the family in 1879. Willard was still making a living by farming with the help of his son, George. Eugene had disappeared from the family roll. Emma and Lucia helped their mother around the house. Clara (Carrie) and Julina attended school. Young Willard, only three, and the infant Minnie were busy being babies, getting under everyone's feet. ^[18]

In 1890, Willard applied for a pension. When he filed, he was living in Oregon. ^[19] The 1895 Oregon State Census place Willard, and what remained of his shrinking family, in Rural, Oregon. At fifty-eight, Willard was still farming. He was a Protestant, stood five feet nine inches in height, had a dark complexion and weighed one hundred twenty pounds. His residence was in Stayton, Oregon. His wife, Julina, was five feet tall, dark

colored and weighed one hundred fifty-five pounds. She also lived in Stayton with her husband and the few children still at home. Carrie was female, nineteen and had been born in Iowa. She was five feet one inch tall and was a servant. She had a dark complexion and weighed one hundred thirty-five pounds. William (Willard) was also born in Iowa, stood five feet five inches tall and weighed one hundred forty pounds. He was a student, had a dark complexion and was eighteen years old. Minnie was born in Iowa as well. She stood five feet three inches tall, had a dark complexion and weighed one hundred thirty pounds. She was a fifteen year old student. Earl was the youngest of the family left at home. He was twelve. Born in Iowa, too, he reached only four feet five inches high (he was still growing) and also had a dark complexion. He weighed only one hundred ten pounds and was a student. ^[20]

For some major faux pas, Willard was forced to change his address before the time the 1900 Federal Census was taken. In that year, he was listed as an inmate in the Oregon State Penitentiary. At sixty-three, he was separated from his wife and children and locked away in prison. What crime he committed was not specified in the public records. Nor was it known when he was incarcerated or for how long. What was documented in the records was that Julina, his wife, was, in 1900 at the age of fifty-six, living with her daughter, Carrie, and her son-in-law, William Shanks in Stayton, Oregon. By all appearances, Willard was still locked up in the State Penitentiary when she died on July 31, 1906. The cause of death was "dropsy...dilation of heart..." from which she had suffered for several years. She was buried on August 2, 1906 in Lone Oak Cemetery, Stayton, Oregon. The family members who helped write her obituary must have been very upset with Willard. When they mentioned that she was married, they only gave the date of her marriage and left out all mention of the name of the groom entirely (which would have been Willard). ^[21]

After his release from prison, with his wife gone and his children scattered over three states (Idaho, Iowa and Oregon), Willard headed back East to Vermont, his old stomping grounds. By 1910, he was an inmate again, this time in the Old Soldiers' Home in Bennington, Vermont. ^[22] He was now seventy-three and widowed. Although he owned

property in Hancock, Vermont, it seemed that he had no home nor anyone related for him to live with so he ended up living at the Soldiers' Home. The peculiar events of Willard's life persisted even into his old age. Somehow the old goat managed to meet a woman while living at the Soldiers' Home who hailed from Leicester, Vermont. Her name was Lucy E. Hooker. Her father was Reverend O. W. Scott of Montpelier, Vermont. On July 18, 1910, she and Willard were joined in marriage. They both were in their seventies. Both had been widowed. They were united in matrimony in Bennington by E. R. Stone, a Methodist minister from Bristol, Vermont. [23]

After the wedding ceremony, Willard continued to live at the Soldiers' Home. The marriage did not last long - a little over a year. On October 23, 1911, Willard died of heart disease in Goshen, Vermont. [24] Despite all that Willard had accomplished in his lifetime - surviving a rough childhood going from one stranger's home to another; rising in rank from private to sergeant while in the army; traveling from coast to coast and back again; staying married to the same woman for forty-six years; weathering an existence that straddled both sides of the law - he died a pauper.

The Overseer of the Poor in Goshen, H. W. Chamberlain, had to bury him at town expense. Nothing was done for him by any member of his family. His second wife had disappeared. His children out in the Northwest apparently had disowned him. To settle Willard's affairs, the overseer had to get himself appointed Executor of the Estate by the Addison County Probate judge. This he did on December 23, 1911. [25]

Willard had left very little of any value behind. He owned a small parcel of land in what then was called Churchville, a tiny hamlet located in or near Hancock, Vermont. It was less than one acre and valued at only \$50. An inventory of his personal property was revealing : "...one watch and chain; one suit of clothes; one trunk and hand bag; one old over coat; one old under coat; a pair of pants too badly worn one old vest...." In total, all the articles he owned amounted to only \$19. The grand total of Willard's entire estate came to \$69. The Executor, Chamberlain, submitted disbursements, including a \$34 dollar bill for burial expenses incurred by the town, that totaled \$55.58. The Probate

judge allowed Chamberlain the extra \$13.42 for compensation to the Executor for seven and one half days of labor. [26]

When everything had been taken care of, Willard's entire life boiled down to one significant item - a watch and chain. The Executor had valued the watch and chain at \$15 in Willard's inventory of personal property. Chamberlain seemed to have an interest in buying it from the estate. In a letter from the court judge to Chamberlain dated April 9, 1912, the judge cautioned Chamberlain : "...As to the matter of selling the watch for \$3.00, I can not advise you, but I would consult with the town officials who seem to have to have (sic) a financial interest in this matter on behalf of the town. I have heard that Tom Hooker would give \$15.00 for the watch...In these matters, however, you have full authority as Admr. to use your oen (sic) best judgment. On the other hand I would not buy any of the property myself unless you are certain that your neighbors are satisfied that you are giving all it is worth and then I would not buy it if any one will give as much...." [27]

I would give more than \$15 to know what became of that watch and chain! It is a sad thing when the value of a man's life comes down to the price of one watch and chain.

NOTES

1. Ancestry.com, Murray Family Tree and Townsend/Kristoff Family Tree.
2. Vermont in the Civil War/Cemeteries/Vermont/Goshen/Goshen Cemetery/Birchard, Willard/Vitals and Ancestry.com, Vermont, Marriage Records, 1909-2008 for Willard Birchard.
3. Ancestry.com, 1850 U.S. Federal Census under Willard Birchard.
4. Ibid., Murray Family Tree and New England Burchard-Bi... Family Tree.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid., Oregon Death Index, 1898-2006 for Julina Birchard.
7. Fold3.com, Compiled Service Records of Volunteer Union Soldiers Who Served in Organizations from the State of Vermont, p. 4, image 311387222. Hereinafter referred to as Compiled Service Records....
8. Ibid., Compiled Service Records..., p. 3, image 311387218.
9. Ibid., Compiled Service Records..., p. 11, image 311387247.
10. Ibid., Compiled Service Records..., pp. 39-40, images 311387343 and ...347.
11. Ibid., Compiled Service Records..., p. 12, image 311387251.
12. Ibid., Compiled Service Records..., p. 18, image 311387272.

13. Ibid., Compiled Service Records..., pp. 20, 21 and 35, images 311387281, 311387329 and 31138285.
14. Ibid., Compiled Service Records..., p. 23, image 311387291.
15. Ibid., Compiled Service Records..., p. 25, image 311387297.
16. Ibid., Compiled Service Records..., p. 33, image 311387321.
17. Ancestry.com, 1870 U.S. Federal Census under Eugene Burchard.
18. Ibid., 1880 U.S. Federal Census under Willard Birchard.
19. Ibid., U.S., Civil War Pension Index: General Index to Pension Files, 1861-1934 for Willard Birchard.
20. Ibid., Marion County, Oregon, Census, 1895 under W. Birchard.
21. Ibid., 1900 U.S. Federal Census under Willard Birchard; Ancestry.com, 1900 U.S. Federal Census under Julina O Birchard; Find A Grave Memorial #30645631 for Julina Holden Birchard; Ancestry.com, Willamette Valley, Oregon Death Records, 1838-2006 for Julina Birchard.
22. Ibid., 1910 U.S. Federal Census under Willard Birchard and U.S. City Directories, 1822-1995 for W. Birchard.
23. Ibid., Vermont Marriage Records, 1909-2008 for Willard Birchard.
24. Ibid., Vermont, Death Records, 1909-2008 for Willard Birchard.
25. Ibid., Vermont, Wills and Probate Records, 1749-1999 for Willard Birchard, document #2 and #24.
26. Ibid., Vermont, Wills and Probate Records, 1749-1999 for Willard Birchard, "An Inventory....", document #20 dated 30th November, 1912.
27. Ibid., Vermont, Wills and Probate Records, 1749-1999 for Willard Birchard.