

The story of Abram S. Abbott in and by itself was rather a mundane and ordinary story. The boy was born, raised to adulthood and died all within the compressed time of two decades. The most interesting aspect of his story did not occur until after his death. And, while he was alive, the circumstances of his life had more twists and turns in it than a pretzel. His immediate family was nearly impossible to trace. They were almost non-existent as far as leaving an imprint in the public records was concerned. The same could be said of those who became part of the family circle through marriage and association. It seemed that these people connected to Abbott, Jr. were so insignificant that no one paid them any mind while they were alive nor took any interest in them after they had died. Hence, the usual channels of information used to garner facts about subjects were devoid of any enlightenment. Although this sketch was meant to tell Abram S. Abbott's story, one of the most fascinating portions of it really happened to his wife, Mary Ann Williamson.

Abram was born to, and named after, Abram S. Abbott, Sr. (1807-1884) and Tryphena Foster (1804-1873).^[1] What the "S" stood for was never discovered. Abbott, Sr. was born and raised in New Hampshire. He and his family lived in Hartland, Vermont in 1850 when Abram, Jr. was nine years old. Abram, Sr. was a laborer then as was his eighteen year old son, Moses, Abbott, Jr's older brother. When Moses wasn't working to help support the family, he attended school along with Abram, Jr. and Sarah J., the boys' sixteen year old sister. All five of the 1850 family members were natives of New Hampshire.^[2] There was a very strange, and perhaps strained, relationship between Moses and his father. In April of 1849, on or about the time Moses turned eighteen, his father placed a public notice in the local newspaper that said: "This may certify that I have given my son, Moses W. Abbott, his time, and shall not claim his wages nor pay any debts of his contracting after this date."^[3] The notice was witnessed by two gentlemen, probably friends of Abram, Sr.'s, William and Isaac Griffin both from North Hartland, Vermont. Throughout the history of mankind, it has not been unheard of for a father and son's relationship to go sour and become contentious as the younger male treaded the path of maturity. Some human psychologists would even claim that it was a natural part of the maturation process. However, cutting the parental umbilical chord by placing an advertisement in the local newspaper seemed a bit of an odd way of going about it. Also a little weird was the fact that Moses continued to live in his father's house after the announcement was posted just as though there was nothing amiss between himself and his father. There was no evidence that Moses had ever done anything to provoke his father's public declaration about his son's independent status. It just seemed to be Abram, Sr.'s way of dealing with his son's reaching the age of majority, for he did exactly the same thing to Abram, Jr. when he turned eighteen later on.^[4]

Just prior to the outbreak of the Civil War, the 1860 Federal Census was taken. It put Abram S. Abbott, Sr. and his shrinking family in New Haven, Vermont. Senior was still a "laborer" as was his namesake, Junior. Sara J. was fifteen and lived at home while attending school. Junior was now seventeen and no longer sought any further education in the public school system. Moses had married and started his own family, but did not stray too far from his parent's home and his younger siblings. He lived just next door to

his mother and father in New Haven. He, too, made a living as a laborer.^[5] Then the War of the Rebellion erupted in South Carolina and everyone's world was turned upside down.

After the badly mauled Federal forces from the first battle at Bull Run in July, 1861 had streamed back into Washington, D.C. in an absolute state of panic, President Lincoln put out a call for hundreds of thousands of additional volunteers to serve in the military. Young Abram S. Abbott, Jr. could not enlist fast enough for God, country and glory. The twenty year old laborer, standing five feet nine inches tall, having a dark complexion, blue eyes and dark hair, stood before Capt. G. Parker in Vergennes and pledged to serve in Company A of the Sixth Vermont for three years on September 28, 1861.^[6] A few weeks later, October 15, in Montpelier, Vermont, the Sixth Vermont and Private Abbott, Jr. were accepted into the service of the United States military.^[7]

The Sixth Vermont Regiment was raised from volunteers in all parts of the State within two weeks from the time Secretary of War Stanton contacted Vermont's Governor, Erastus Fairbanks, following the debacle of First Bull Run. Within thirty-three days of its formation and acceptance into the service of the United States Army, the Sixth was enroute to its first duty station in Washington, D.C. It was immediately sent to Camp Griffin near Lewinsville, Virginia where it joined the Second, Third, Fourth and Fifth regiments to form the First Vermont Brigade - the "Old Vermont Brigade". During the winter cantonment at Camp Griffin, the Sixth suffered terribly from diseases. There were 278 cases of typhoid fever, 330 of measles, 90 of diphtheria and 180 of mumps. Being used to clean air, isolation, eating wholesome and plentiful food and getting robust exercise doing their chores, the Vermonters were decimated by the cramped contact with urban carriers of diseases they had no immunity to, subjected to monotonous meals ill prepared and infrequently supplied, exposed to the elements and exhaustive duties and surrounded by sickness caused by the lack of reasonable sanitation in the camps perpetuated by the careless and torpid behavior of indifferent camp mates. The mortality among the vulnerable Vermonters was great, amounting to more than 50 deaths. Without any natural immunities to their infectious companions and considering the exposure and poor diet they were subjected to, the results in the ranks of the Vermonters was very similar to that which occurred among the native Americans of this country after their initial contact with white Europeans in the early settlement period of our history.^[8]

Private Abbott fell victim to the rampant diseases being traded among the men of the Old Vermont Brigade during its first winter cantonment. By February 28, 1862, he was in the General Hospital sick.^[9] The Company Muster Roll for March/April, 1862 placed him in Carver General Hospital, Washington, D.C.^[10] From May 1 to June 15, 1862 Pvt. Abbott served as a nurse at Carver General. On his discharge from that detached duty, he was sent back to his company in the Sixth Vermont.^[11] His overall health must have been severely compromised for he was back in a Philadelphia, Pennsylvania hospital in July of 1862. How long he remained in the Pennsylvania hospital was not determined. In fact, his whereabouts during the Fall of 1862 according to his military records, were frustratingly sparse. Company Muster Rolls claimed he was present in the ranks of Company A, Sixth Vermont from July to December, 1862.^[12] By January of 1863, Pvt. Abbott was sick enough again to be sent to the General Hospital according to the returns for him in his

military records. Of course, the same set of records list him dying in February, 1863 at Windmill Point, Virginia of diphtheria.^[13] Pvt. Abbott did die near Belle Plains, Virginia but two separate "Casualty Sheets" completed by the same clerk but at different times said he died on two different days in January; one said January 12, the other said January 27, 1863.^[14] His Muster-out Roll dated at Brattleboro, Vermont on October 28, 1864 declared he died at Wind Mill Point, Virginia January 27, 1863 from causes unknown.^[15] No matter what the timeline for Pvt. Abbott's tour of duty actually was, it was obvious he spent a great deal of his service time in a military hospital in one location or another from the very beginning of his time in the field with the Sixth Vermont.

His Compiled Service Record indicated he was sent back to Vermont to convalesce in one of the three Vermont military hospitals in operation in 1862. During his stay in Vermont, Pvt. Abbott used his recuperation time to get married. On March 28, 1862 in New Haven, he and Miss Mary Ann Williamson (abt. 1855-1906) were united in holy matrimony.^[16] She was seventeen and he was twenty. Mary Ann was the daughter of Robert Williamson and Elizabeth Woods. They were from Canada where Mary Ann was born. Her mother was from England. Her father's place of birth was unknown.^[17] Their marriage was too brief to produce any children. She was only a married woman for ten months before she was made a widow. Her life after Abram S. Abbott, Jr. was much longer than his and much more colorful.

As to Pvt. Abbott's death, more details emerged about it when Mary Ann applied for a widow's pension in July of 1864. She had to file supporting affidavits about her deceased husband's service to please the Government. Two individuals who either served with him in the Sixth or had access to the records of Company A of the Regiment filed statements on behalf of Mary Ann. Captain C.E. Joselyn and 1st Lieut. E.A. Barney specifically stated that Pvt. Abbott died January 12, 1863 of "lung fever" (pneumonia) at Windmill Point Hospital, Virginia.^[18] Mary had some difficulty initially providing proof of her marriage to Abram, Jr. This caused a considerable delay in processing her application for a widow's pension. Eventually, she found the justice of the peace who had married her and Abram, Jr. George W. Grandey had failed to register their marriage with the city of Vergennes where the ceremony was conducted, but was able to submit a certified copy of their marriage which satisfied the Government that Mary Ann actually was Abram S. Abbott's widow.^[19] Finally, three years after Pvt. Abbott's death, on March 1, 1866 Mary Ann was granted a pension of \$8 per month retroactive to January 12, 1863.^[20] Mary appeared reasonably well taken care of now. Abram, Jr. was laid to rest somewhere in Virginia soil and she had a steady income of \$8 per month guaranteed for her life time or until she remarried. She was young - only about twenty - so the likelihood of her taking a second husband was very good. From here on, however, the plot around the story of Mary thickens.

Financially, Mary did not have the brightest of prospects. She was female and unskilled. Her meager pension was not sufficient to provide her with more than a survival existence. The only job opportunities for a woman in 1866 would have been menial labor or domestic work, especially in a small, rural, agricultural area like New Haven, Vermont. But, Mary Ann was fortunate in one respect. She was born in a time when more women,

particularly, young ones like herself, were going south to the cotton mills in Lowell, Massachusetts where they were employed in the thriving cotton factories. Even before her pension was approved, Mary Ann had left New Haven for work in Lowell. She spent three or four years, according to her own account, going back and forth from Lowell to New Haven to Lowell while her application was being considered in the Rutland, Vermont agency of the Pension Bureau.^[21]

It was around the time she was finally granted her pension that Mary Ann met a Canadian named Joseph McCrea. Joseph was born in Hemmingford, Quebec. The two of them had originally met when Mary Ann had visited Hemmingford where her sister had relocated after marrying Joseph's brother. When Mary Ann returned to the States, Joseph followed her and settled in Vergennes as a blacksmith. In September, 1867, Mary Ann and Joseph were married. This was Joseph's first marriage and Mary Ann's second. They had one daughter together sometime early in 1868^[22] At the time of their marriage, Joseph was seriously ill with consumption. According to a deposition given by Thomas Williamson, Mary Ann's brother, McCrea returned to his hometown of Hemmingford, Quebec soon after his marriage to be with his widowed mother and to receive treatment for his disease. He left his wife and sick child in New Haven. Thomas said Joseph had not been in Canada more than a month or two when he died.^[23] Church records found in Canada showed that he died on February 7, 1869 and was buried in Hemmingford on the ninth.^[24] As if the loss of her second husband was not bad enough, Mary Ann's child also died at almost the same time in New Haven from the same disease that took her father. Therefore, Mary Ann was unable to go to Canada and make arrangements for her husband's burial because she had another funeral to arrange in Vermont.^[25]

It seemed that after Joseph and Audie's deaths in February, 1869, Mary Ann went to Hemmingford, Quebec to live with her sister for a while. She then went to live with an aunt in LaCole, Canada near Toronto. Eventually Mary Ann returned to Vermont where she had two brothers living, one of them, Thomas, in Warren, Vermont. While there, she met a farmer named Edwin Freeman. He was a bachelor and she was a widow. He and Mary Ann were married in Mooretown, Vermont November 5, 1869. This was Mary Ann's third marriage. The couple lived in Warren for the next thirty-six years, until Edwin's death in 1905. All his life, Edwin worked as a hired man for local farmers in Warren. They lived a simple life, uncluttered with any accumulation of worldly goods. Edwin did own a small farm of thirty-six acres which had a house on it; both were mortgaged. The whole farm was worth maybe \$500.^[26] The couple had three children, two of whom reached maturity. Even before Edwin died in 1905, he and Mary were suffering financial difficulties. They were having trouble paying their bills. The physical demands of the labor Edwin forced himself to do in order to support himself and his wife, Mary, were too much for the aging man. All they really owned were a few pieces of household furniture and they were in danger of losing even that as age and physical debility hounded Edwin's heels. The only way they were able to keep a roof over their heads late in their lives was to deed the farm over to their son and let him pay the bills. This was what they ended up doing just before Edwin died. After his death, Mary Ann, sixty years old, was forced to support herself the best way she could. She worked part

time when she could take in some work. Her son was not bound to support her. Her third husband left her nothing. He never could afford life insurance. She was destitute and desperate.^[27] Mary applied to the Pension Bureau for re-instatement on the pension rolls, hoping to resume receiving widow's payments under Abram S. Abbott's service.

It was her applying for resumption of her widow's payments that sparked the next dark turn in Mary's story. It has never been a secret how fond of forms the Federal Government, or most governments for that matter, is. It was no surprise that she had to file out a lot of different forms and procure lots of supporting evidence to validate her claims, like to whom and when was she married. She claimed she had been married only twice - first to Abram S. Abbott, Jr. in 1862 and then for the second time to Edwin Freeman in 1869. Now the Government already had all of the documentation for Mary Ann's application for a pension from 1863 when she had filed after Abram's death from pneumonia while he was in the service during the Civil War. And among those papers were the documents that recorded when her pension began and ended. The records indicated she was awarded \$8 per month in March of 1866 retroactive to January of 1863. The records also showed that her widow's pension was stopped in September of 1867 due to her remarrying that month. Now these facts raised some concern on the part of the Pension Bureau as to the accuracy of the information they were being supplied by Mary Ann as to how many times she had been married. So, the Bureau put a special investigator on the case to specifically determine the truth regarding how many times she had really wedded. The man given the case was named W.H. Nelms, Special Examiner.^[28] In June, 1906 he met with Mary Ann in Warren, Vermont where she lived to take her deposition surrounding certain "facts" that needed clarification especially around the number of times she was married. In this meeting, she gave a lot of information about herself and her immediate family. She also restated her claim to have been married twice in her lifetime. Mr. Nelms, being a thorough man, asked Mary Ann if there were others who could verify the facts of her statement. Mary Ann told Mr. Nelms she had a brother, Thomas Williamson, who could speak to the issues of concern. The same day, Mr. Nelms contacted Thomas, who lived in Warren as well, and interviewed him. Thomas gave Mr. Nelms a different story about the number of husbands Mary Ann had had. He claimed she was married three times: in 1862 to Abbott; 1867 to McCrea; and 1869 to Freeman. Back to Mary Ann went Mr. Nelms armed with this new, contradictory information. When he confronted her with Thomas' declaration about the number of her marriages, Mary Ann broke down and admitted she had lied

There was a third husband, a Canadian native named Joseph McCrea. They had been married in September, 1867 in Vergennes by the same justice of the peace that had married her to Abbott in 1862. Neither Thomas nor Mary Ann were positively sure of the exact date, but were confident the ceremony occurred some three or four years after Abram's death. Eliza McCrea, Mary Ann's sister, confirmed this fact of a second marriage to Joseph. Her testimony was plausible because she was married to Joseph's brother before her sister's marriage to McCrea. And Thomas' statements were credible because he had been invited to the wedding when it happened although he was unable to attend in person. But, of course, a certificate of marriage could not be found to verify the date, it had not been recorded in the Vergennes city records and George, the Justice of the

Peace who had performed the ceremony, had died before 1906. When asked why she had lied about being married again between 1862 and 1869, Mary related to Mr. Nelms that someone in Canada had told her she was not eligible to receive a widow's pension if she could not prove her marriage to Joseph McCrea. His being born and having died in Canada meant it was unlikely that any records of either event existed in the small, rural district of Hemmingford. Mary did have a family Bible in which events like births, deaths and marriages had been recorded. And her second marriage to Joseph was written in it. However, there were two major problems with the entry that made any information in it invalid as proof. One was that her Bible was a copy of the original family Bible that had worn out and been destroyed. Second, Mary Ann admitted to having altered the date of the entry for her marriage to McCrea and Freeman in an attempt to cover up the second marriage. She also revealed that she had altered other supporting documents to make it look like she was only married to Abbott and Freeman. Now, before any thought of approving Mary Ann's application for re-instatement to the pension rolls could be entertained, it had to be proved that Joseph McCrea, her second husband, was actually dead. Even though Mr. Nelson said in his report to his boss in the Pension Bureau that the claimant was "not averse to committing perjury and forgery for the purpose of saving herself a little trouble and expense in establishing her claim", he was a determined man who was quite good at what he did and he was determined to find out what he could about Joseph McCrea.^[29]

Since Joseph McCrea had gone to Hemmingford, Quebec, his hometown, to be with his widowed mother and to receive treatment for his consumption in late 1868 leaving his wife and sick child in the States, and had died there a month or two later, Canada was where Mr. Nelson was going to find out what he could about Joseph, his supposed marriage to Mary Ann and his death. After arriving, he searched the public records, but Hemmingford, being a little village where few, if any, vital records were kept had nothing to share about McCrea. In hopes of finding some evidence, Mr. Nelson began a systematic search of the local church records. By sheer luck, the Presbyterian Church in town had the records he was looking for. He found that Joseph McCrea had died on February 7, 1869 and been buried on the 9th just as Mary Ann had related to him in her second deposition. Mr. Nelson then returned to Montpelier, Vermont and wrote his report to the Commissioner of Pensions on October 27, 1906. He laid out the facts as he knew them based on the evidence he had accumulated. Mary Ann, he clearly stated, was willing to lie and forge documents to get her pension. But he was also quick to point out that she was motivated by fear and desperation and not malice or greed. He made it clear that her present circumstances were dismal, stating she was "entirely without means" and "works out by the week" to support herself. He also made it clear that she had received some bad advice from people in Canada who told her she would not be eligible for a U.S. pension if she could not prove her marriage to and the death of her second husband, McCrea.^[30] Mr. Nelms made no recommendation one way or another concerning whether Mary Ann's application for re-instatement should or should not be approved. He left that decision up to the Commissioner.

The Government, after sending not one, but two special investigators to look into the veracity of Mary Ann's application, ultimately decided she did not deserve a pension and

rejected her application in 1906. Apparently they did not like being lied to regardless of the reasons. The Commissioner's decision made very little difference to Mary Ann however. On a visit to her sister, Eliza, in Dalton, Massachusetts in August of 1906, she took seriously ill and died.^[31]

NOTES

1. www.findagrave.com, Memorial #136900628 for Abram S. Abbott, Sr.
2. www.ancestry.com, 1850 U.S. Federal Census for Abram Abbott.
3. www.newspapers.com, Vermont Journal, Fri., April 13, 1849 for Abram Abbott.
4. *Ibid.*, The Enterprise and Vermonter, Fri., June 15, 1860 for Abram Abbott.
5. www.ancestry.com, 1860 U.S. Federal Census for Abram Abbott.
6. www.fold3.com, Compiled Service Records Of Union Soldiers Who Served in Organization From The State of Vermont, p. 3, image 311375955. Hereinafter referred to as Compiled Service Record.
7. *Ibid.*, Compiled Service Record, p. 4, image 311375960.
8. Vermont in the Civil War.org/Units/1st Brigade/Sixth VT Infantry/History.
9. www.fold3.com, Compiled Service Record, p. 7, image 311375973.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 9, image 311375986.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 12, image 311376024.
12. *Ibid.*, pp. 13 and following, image 311376037 and following.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 18, image 311376086.
14. *Ibid.*, pp. 24 & 26, images 311376131 &...154.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 20, image 311376097.
16. www.familysearch.org, Vermont, Vital Records, 1760-1954 for Mary Ann Williamson; www.fold3.com, Widow Pension records for Abbott, Abram S., Jr., image 270813353; www.ancestry.com, Vermont, Vital Records, 1720-1908 for Abram S. Abbott; www.familysearch.org, Vermont, Vital Records, 1760-1954 for Williamson, Mary Ann; www.fold3.com, Compiled Service Record, p. 26, image 311376154.
17. www.fold3.com, Copy, Record of Death, Commonwealth of Massachusetts, image 270813353.
18. *Ibid.*, Affidavit, pp.17 & 19, image 270813276 &...264.
19. *Ibid.*, Copy of Certificate of Marriage, subscribed & sworn to by Geo. W. Grandey, p. 10, image 270813232.
20. *Ibid.*, Claim for Widow's Pension, p. 2, image 270813193.
21. *Ibid.*, Deposition for return to pension rolls, Mary A. Freeman, June 25, 1906, image 270813435.
22. *Ibid.*, Deposition by Thomas F. Williamson, brother of Mary Ann Williamson Abbott, June 25, 1906.
23. *Ibid.*
24. *Ibid.*, Burial of Joseph McCrea, Registrar of the Presbyterian Church, Hemmingford, Quebec, image 270813463.
25. *Ibid.*, Deposition by Thomas F. Williamson, brother of Mary Ann Williamson Abbott McCrea, June 25, 1906, image 270813456.

26. Ibid., Deposition by Mary A. Freeman, June 25, 1906, image 270813480.
27. Ibid., General Affidavits from Mary A. Freeman, J.W. Hill, H.H. Robinson and J. Eldridge, images 270813412, ...422, ...401, and ...398.
28. Ibid., Special Examiner's (Nelms') report to Commissioner of Pensions, dated October 27, 1906, image 270813429 through ...433.
29. Ibid., image 270813429.
30. The basis for the story of the investigation of Mary Ann Freeman's application to be re-instated to the pension rolls came from the following documents:
Depositions of: Mary A. Freeman, June 25, 1906, images 270813435 to ...449 at Warren, VT; Thomas F. Williamson, June 25, 1906, images 270813454 to ...456 at Warren, VT; Eliza McCrea, December 12, 1906, images 270813341 to ...351 at Dalton, Massachusetts.

Letters to Commissioner of Pensions: by W.H. Nelms, dated Montpelier, VT, October 27, 1906, images 270813429 to ...433; by Chas. F. Nichols, dated Springfield, Massachusetts, December 21, 1906, images 270813334 to ...337.
- 31 Ibid., Copy of Record of Death, Commonwealth of Massachusetts, August 3, 1906 for Mary A. Freeman.