

"The Burial of a Maine Soldier"

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During the Civil War tens of thousands of Union and Confederate soldiers passed through Carroll County during the Antietam, Gettysburg and Monocacy Campaigns. Most of the men passed safely through the region to find their destinies elsewhere, however, a few died here. In addition to the four cavalrymen killed during the June 29, 1863 skirmish in Westminster, several men died of disease. Among the latter was Pvt. Robert H. Clark who lies buried in the Westminster Cemetery.

Pvt. Clark's military records at the National Archives provide details about his service and subsequent death in Westminster. His Volunteer Enlistment document notes that was twenty-three years old when he enlisted on August 25, 1862 for three years in Co. B, 7th Regiment, Maine Volunteer Infantry. Pvt. Clark had been born in Parrish Kent, Province of New Brunswick and was married. He had gray eyes, dark brown hair, a dark complexion and stood five feet, seven inches tall. He was apparently illiterate since he signed his enlistment form with an "X".

Pvt. Clark was present with his company throughout the fall of 1862 and spring of 1863. His unit was engaged in the Battle of Chancellorsville on May 3 and 4, 1863 and he received a slight wound in the leg. The wound probably resulted in the loss of his musket and accouterments. His records show that his pay was stopped since he owed the government \$46.56 "for arms & equipment also for knapsack, canteen & tent d'abri."

The 7th Maine Infantry was with the VI Army Corps as it marched from Virginia to Maryland during the early stages of the Gettysburg Campaign. He became ill on the march and was brought to Westminster where he died. The records of the Ascension Episcopal Church contain a reference to his burial and that of the four soldiers killed in the June 29th cavalry skirmish:

"The R. H. Clarke [sic] whose burial is mentioned above was from Presque Isle, Maine, and was at the time of his death in the United States Army. He was brought in an ambulance to the McAllen hotel, corner of Baltimore and Court Streets with the 6th army corps, (Sedgwick's) June 30, 1863 and died the same night. He was sunstruck on the march from Va. to Pa. from the effects of which he seems to have died. He was not buried at the same hour as the four men above mentioned. He was buried at about 3 p. m. The others were buried at about 9 a.m. R. H. Clarke, a memorandum before me states, was a member of "Co. B, 7th Maine Volunteers, 6th Army Corps."

The Casualty Sheet in Pvt. Clark's records at the National Archives reveals a different cause of death. Clark's company commander Capt. James Jones certified that the soldier had died from typhoid fever. Perhaps both accounts are partly correct.

Pvt. Clark's coffin was probably purchased from Westminster cabinetmaker and undertaker Francis A. Sharrer. Sharrer's account books are in the Historical Society's collection includes an entry "June 30 1863 To a coffin for the 6 core [Corps] \$4" which almost certainly refers to Clark's unit. Sharrer sent the bill for the coffin to the Commissioners of Carroll County. The relatively low price indicates that Clark was buried in a simple wooden coffin.

The accompanying historic photographs provide some additional details about Pvt. Clark. The badly faded c.1890 image of Mary B. Shellman placing a flag and flowers on Pvt. Clark's grave is inscribed, "Mary B. Shellman decorating the grave of Lt. [sic] R. H. Clark of the 7th Maine Vols. U. S. A. on

Memorial Day. Lt. Clark died from sunstroke on march from Va. to Gettysburg July 1st 1863. Buried in lot owned by Miss Shellman for burial of friendless soldiers in the Westminster Cemetery."

The second image is a tintype portrait of Pvt. Clark's son taken shortly after the war. Mary Shellman wrote a poignant inscription on the reverse, "Son of R. H. Clarke who was sun struck on the march from Va. to Gettysburg and died at the City Hotel, Westminster as I sat and fanned him. He called me by a boy's name. He was a member of the 7th Maine Vols. U. S. A. Through Sen. James G. Blaine I found he had a son who was adopted by a lumberman, his uncle, at Presque Isle, Maine. I wrote to him and he sent me his picture after he was grown.

Local residents have decorated the graves of Pvt. Clark and other veterans since observances began in 1868. His tombstone is a monument to one man's ultimate sacrifice and also to a grateful community that made sure his service would not be forgotten.

Photo caption 1: Mary B. Shellman of Westminster decorated the grave of Civil War soldier Pvt. Robert H. Clark of Maine as part of Memorial Day observances c.1890. Pvt. Clark died on June 30, 1863 and was buried in the Westminster Cemetery. Historical Society of Carroll County collection, gift of Rev. Paul Reese, 1941.

Photo caption 2: Pvt. Clark's son sent this picture of himself to Mary B. Shellman after the war. Historical Society of Carroll County collection, gift of Rev. Paul Reese, 1941.