

GROTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Newsletter

Volume 37 Issue 2

Groton, Vermont

Summer 2024

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CONTENTS

President's Letter.....p.2

Catching People's Stories...p.3

The Sleeping Sentinel...pp.1-9

GHS Calendar

Open House
August 3, 9-12:30

Open House and
Membership Meeting
August 24, 9-12:30

Come hear Richard Balzano, local
historian, speak at 11 a.m. about his
research on slavery in Vermont

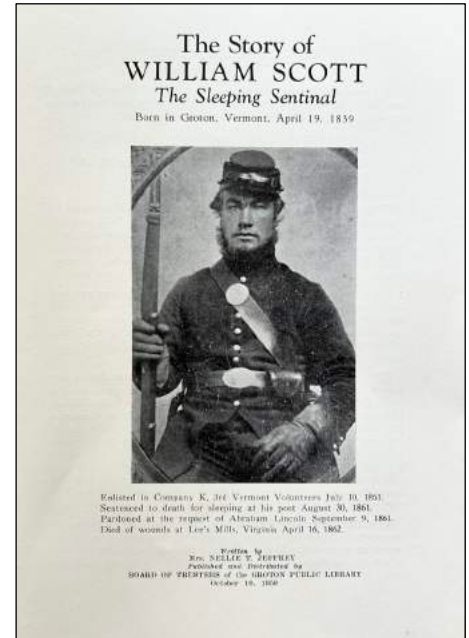
GHS President Deborah Jurist
will give her talk on the
Sleeping Sentinel
September 8, 3 p.m.
Ryegate Historical Society
54 Papermill Road, East Ryegate

The 'Sleeping Sentinel' Story: *A tale about facts, myth and exaggeration*

The following essay is taken from GHS President Deborah Jurist's August 2023 talk on the story of William Scott, known as "The Sleeping Sentinel." Scott, a 21-year-old Groton, Vermont boy grew up on a hill farm and, at the start of the Civil War, enlisted in the 3rd Vermont Regiment on June 1, 1861. Three months later, he fell asleep on sentry duty while guarding the District of Columbia side of Chain Bridge. For this offense, he was sentenced to death by firing squad. He was pardoned by President Lincoln and died in battle eight months later, on April 16, 1862.

Of interest is how that account changed, depending on who was telling the story and what was happening at the time. Here, Deborah focuses on the value of looking to original sources in preference to later retellings of an event. She writes, "The more we study history and discover all the ways that the stories of our past have been manipulated, it helps sharpen our ability to recognize when stories about current events are being manipulated, what we now refer to as 'misinformation.'"

Deborah used as her main source Waldo Glover's book, Abraham Lincoln and the Sleeping Sentinel of Vermont, which she judged "an in-depth and masterly study of using original sources." Waldo Glover was a proud steward of Groton history. Born in 1879 on the Glover Farm, he became a teacher, principal and superintendent of schools. His interests were in education,



Groton history and genealogy.

Glover's history of the town was unfinished at the time of his death in 1976, but members of the Groton Historical Society studied the existing manuscript and decided to undertake its publication, with a bit of editing and cutting as necessary. The first edition was published as Mr. Glover's Groton in 1978.

Abraham Lincoln and the Sleeping Sentinel of Vermont was originally published in 1936 by the Vermont Historical Society.

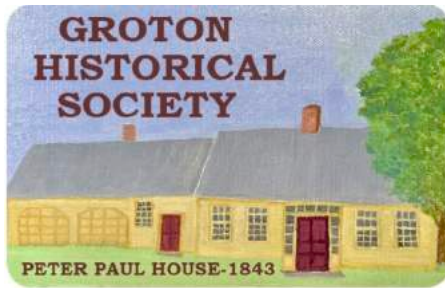
Who was William Scott?

William Scott's father, Thomas, was born in Scotland. His mother, Mary, was from Groton. They are first mentioned in the Groton 1840 census. William was born April 6, 1839. Records show that Mary Scott had a baby every two years, starting at the age of 28. William was the oldest; seven more would follow—six boys and one girl. One baby boy died at the age of two; she had another boy that same year. Her last child, Filander, which means "loving mankind" in Greek, was born two years after that, when she was 43 years old.

Five of Mary Scott's sons served in the Army during the Civil War. Four died during the war; only John made it through, and lived until 1921. He is buried in the West Groton Cemetery. Those who died were William, age 23; George, 21; Joseph, 18; and Daniel, 16 years old.

Mary died at age 54, just six months after her youngest soldier child died.

Continued on p.4



President's Report

Summer 2024

There are several good things to report that happened in the GHS this spring.

The Directors voted on a proposal to collaborate with the Groton Free Public Library to purchase a new printer. We had been using the printer at Mountain Meadows Pottery for several years, but the old girl made her final run and expired quietly on number 120 of the last newsletter. May she rest in peace.

The new set-up should work very well for the GHS, with access to excellent quality printing with a minimal investment. Newsletters are not the only thing we print. Flyers, and description signs, cards and stationery, order forms and donation forms are all part of sharing and keeping the GHS a healthy, growing entity.

A dehumidifier was installed in the basement bedroom at the PPH, and

now the humidity is being held at a steady 50%, the recommended percentage for textiles and historic documents. We hope to move many items into this room as we execute our plans to preserve our cherished artifacts.

A great deal was accomplished on our work day, May 20th, and during the whole month of May. The fallen buckthorn tree in the backyard was sawed up. The firewood was given to a member/neighbor who has been allowing us to access water through his old residence since the house opened.

Brent Smith, Susan Pelkey Smith, Dwaine Smith and Allen Goodine did the lion's share of the work. The brush was burned as a training exercise for three fire departments.

This effort has created a complete restoration. Thanks to raking by Allen Goodine, and with the help of neighbor Mike Gibson, it is now being mowed almost to the river. Ben Gandin will continue to mow the front yard and small backyard we have kept up over the years.

The view from the south windows is spectacular.

Speaking of views, a special thank you goes out to Stephen Viviano, who lives across the road from the PPH and who keeps a close eye on it for us.

A pathway to the Japanese knotweed has been opened up, and under the supervision of Alan Eastman, it will be removed this summer.

Inside the house, the bedrooms were

thoroughly cleaned and a mattress was replaced on the rope bed. Brent and Patrick Ayer tightened the ropes on the bed, so now someone could actually "sleep tight" on that bed. If anyone has the tool used to tighten the ropes on this old style bed, we would love to try it out sometime.

Victoria Miller worked with Phyllis Burke upstairs and numerous description signs were documented for updating. Phyllis returned with Shelley Lauzon and the basement was cleaned, with more signs documented.

Various new donations were installed in the house, including a bed from Lois Boemig and some telephone pole climbers from Emile Bedard.

Dwaine Smith and Susan Pelkey Smith power washed the front of the house and washed the windows—Dwaine on the outside, with Susan on the inside. They are a power team!

The capstone of the day was when member Patrick Ayer, who had already helped out in many endeavors, shared the treasures he had uncovered in the old cellar hole on his property. He used a metal detector and found items as varied as oxen shoes, Revolutionary era buttons, shoe buckles, and coins! What a haul!

Others in the GHS interested in using a metal detector please let us know! If you own one and want to share knowledge let us know! We are excited about metal detectors.

Policy for Publishing Remembrances

The Groton Historical Society Newsletter is a small publication. As much as we would like to recognize all the town-folk of Groton, current and former, space limits our ability to honor everyone who has passed. With very few exceptions, we will publish remembrances only for GHS members, and only when you notify the GHS by email at GrotonVTHistory@gmail.com.

If you would like the GHS to write a remembrance for a community member, please note the following guidelines:

- Include "remembrance for" in your subject line.
- Attach a good digital photo, along with some information about the photo. (What's the occasion, if that's not clear? Who else is in the photo?)
- Birth and death dates
- Information about connection to Groton, education, career, passions, life journey
- Please share an anecdote that you think would help readers remember, or learn more about the subject's connection to Groton.
- If you'd like to mention the subject's family, please limit that to immediate family (parents, partner, children).
- Provide a link to a published obit.

'Catching People's Stories'

Vermont Folklife Center founder gives talk at Groton Library

Storytelling is both an art form and a practice as old as civilization. Humans' drive to tell the story of where they come from and who they are is exponentially older than written language. Historian and folklorist Jane Beck's talk at the Groton Free Library June 7 offered her audience a good look at the rewards of telling our stories—and gathering the stories of others.

Dr. Beck, who received her PhD in folklore from the University of Pennsylvania, founded the Vermont Folklife Center in 1984 and served as its executive director until 2007. Under her leadership, the Vermont Folklife Center has conducted extensive fieldwork, recorded oral histories, and curated exhibitions that celebrate the diverse cultural heritage of the state. In 2004, she received the Vermont Governor's Award for Excellence in the Arts.

In 2015, she published *Daisy Turner's Kin: An African American Family Saga*, the culmination of three decades of research. Dr. Beck first interviewed Daisy Turner, the 100-year-old daughter of a formerly enslaved man, in 1983. Over the next three years, Dr. Beck visited Daisy Turner, who lived on the family farm in Grafton, several times a month. Ms. Turner told her stories about her family—from her ancestors in West

Africa, to her grandfather's enslavement on a plantation in Virginia and her father's escape to serve with the Union Army and eventually settle in Vermont.

Daisy Turner died in 1988, and Dr. Beck spent years afterward traveling to Virginia, England and West Africa, researching and fact-checking the family history she had shared.

During a career that spans four decades of collecting people's stories, Dr. Beck has relied on the oral interview to give voice to folks who don't write down their stories. That includes many rural people. The emotional part of a story, which can sometimes color a memory a great deal, is key to keeping a memory alive, she explained.

Dr. Beck discovered the power of storytelling when she was in college, during the turbulent years of the Vietnam War. Individuals' personal accounts of situations and events in their lives helped to bring together those who held radically different views, she said, adding, "Understanding people's stories helps to build bridges."

"Touchstone stories" involve crises or pivotal moments in people's lives. In a recorded interview made years after it happened, listeners at the library heard Gussie Lavern, of Monkton, recall her feeling when electricity came to her farm, in tears at the memory of seeing the place all lit up.



Hearing a recording of an oral interview allows the listener to experience the story more fully. In another example, the audience heard Nellie Staves, who was a cook at a lumber camp on Walden Mountain, talk about the weather there. The saying was, she recounted, "The wind blew so hard that if a hen was sitting backwards, she could lay the same egg four times."

To conclude her talk, Dr. Beck played a recording of Daisy Turner telling the story of "The Black Doll," a recollection of a school performance at age eight. If you were unable to attend Dr. Beck's talk, it's a remarkable story and you can hear it on the Vermont Folklife website, <https://www.vtfolklife.org/big-bucket-media-fieldwork/daisy-turner>.

The story was written as a children's book, "Daisy and the Doll" in 2005.

'Researching Slavery and the Precarious States of Freedom in Northeastern Vermont'

Saturday, August 24, 11a.m. at the Peter Paul House

Richard Balzano, PhD., will be speaking about his research on slavery in Vermont. Richard will talk about recovered examples of slavery in Ryegate, along with other examples in Vermont. He will also speak about laws regarding care of the poor and "poor farms," town warnings, de facto slavery, human trafficking, the "precarious states of freedom" and the changing legal framework(s) that made all this possible. Richard will share his research methodology and share the stories of early individuals and families of color in northeastern Vermont.

This program is brought to you by the Groton Historical Society in collaboration with the Groton Free Public Library.



This is the old Seyon Pond Road schoolhouse. Can you identify any of the children in this 1941(?) photo? If you can, please email us at grotonvthistory@gmail.com

“Sleeping” cont.

The same year Mary died, Thomas remarried. He had three more children. The second one was named William T. Scott (Benzie).

How much did “regular people” know about the political climate and what led up to the Civil War?

We often think we know so much more now than folks did back then, but they were not ignorant of the battle over slavery and what it meant for the country that their grandparents had fought and died for. Three years after the Constitution was signed, according to the 1790 census, there were nearly 700,000 people enslaved in America. In 1860, the year Lincoln was elected, the number was practically 4 million (“1790”, “1860”).

As the United States acquired more territory and expanded to the west, conflict intensified between the North and South over political power and slavery.

Mr. Glover wrote about how people in Groton were informed of current events:

During the war, “Every evening except Sunday a large portion of the male population would gather at the store of Hosea Welch II to await the arrival of the daily stage from Wells River, bringing in the mail and the one copy of the daily newspaper. After the mail was sorted and distributed Mr. Welch, the storekeeper and postmaster, would take a vantage position, adjust the kerosene lamp, and read from the Boston Journal the news of the day to a most eager and attentive audience” (Glover 2015, 235-236).

Folks in Groton were tuned into the national news. Henry Clay Glover, Waldo Glover’s father, was born in 1846 in Groton. His parents, Otis and Esther Glover, must have had a strong admiration for Henry Clay, who was a Whig and was devoted to the power of the legislature as opposed to that of the president. Certainly this shows they were aware of national issues.

In 1860 Vermonters voted resoundingly for Abraham Lincoln, the Republican candidate, for president, even though the northern Democratic candidate, Stephen Douglas, was from Brandon, VT. Lincoln won Vermont

with 75 percent of the popular vote, the highest percentage in the country (Leip).

I was very curious about how our Groton boys became soldiers in the Union Army. There was no draft, but quotas were created whenever Lincoln, as Commander in Chief, called for troops. Waldo Glover writes about it in *Mr. Glover’s Groton*:

“At first when it was thought that the subjugation of the Confederacy would be an easy matter, it was not difficult to fill the town’s quota with volunteers, the men taking whatever pay the federal and state governments offered, but when the situation became increasingly serious, Groton, like all other towns began to offer bounties for enlistments” (233).

Waldo Glover cited six special town meetings during the war when the people of Groton voted for “bounties,” what we might call “signing bonuses.” They ranged from \$50 to \$600, depending on the length and type of duty the soldier would have.

At the regular town meeting in March of 1865, Groton voted a tax of \$4.00 on the Grand List to pay for these bounties. Groton sent a total of 79 men overall; 17 died (349-353).

The timeline

William Scott volunteered on June 1st, 1861. On August 31, he fell asleep on guard duty. He was tried for this offense, convicted and sentenced to be shot to death. The execution was set; he was brought before the firing squad, but... on Abraham Lincoln’s orders, he was pardoned at the last minute.

In April of the next year, Scott was mortally wounded in the battle of Lee’s Mills. He is buried in Yorktown National Cemetery in Pennsylvania.

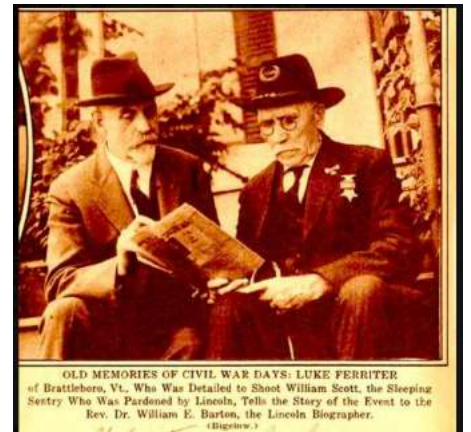
The story evolved

This story was particularly appealing to the public. It became a symbol of Lincoln’s generous heart. Here was a good boy’s well intentioned act to help a fellow soldier who was ill by taking his overnight sentry duty, meaning he would go without sleep two nights in a row. But everything went horribly wrong.

William Scott’s story was told in newspapers, memoirs, biographies, school books and even as a hugely popular poem, “The Sleeping Sentinel.” It



Chain Bridge was one of only three bridges across the Potomac. The 3rd Vermont artillery battery, camped on the high ground in Washington, DC, defended this important location. Photo from National Park Service



Historian William Barton (left) meets with Civil War Veteran Luke Ferriter. The young soldier had been part of the firing squad detailed to shoot William Scott before his last-minute pardon by President Lincoln. Photo from the Barre Montpelier Times Argus online

was exaggerated and embellished over and over as individuals placed themselves in prominent parts of the events.

In the 1920’s a well respected Lincoln scholar named William Barton published a biography of President Lincoln. In it, he denied that Lincoln actually pardoned William Scott at all.

Waldo Glover took this inaccuracy very seriously, and he was active in an editorial battle between *The New York Times*, *the Boston Herald* and other papers to establish the facts of the story.

At the conclusion of this controversy, Barton traveled to Vermont to apologize to Civil War veteran Luke Ferriter, who had actually been on guard duty with Scott and was detailed to be part of the firing squad (Heller 2018).

Continued on p.5

William Scott's story: The beginning

The Civil War officially began with the bombardment of Fort Sumter on April 12, 1861. Regiments of soldiers were called to duty.

William Scott and seven others from Groton went to St. Johnsbury and enlisted in the 3rd Regiment on June 1. They traveled by train to Washington; it took two days. They marched to the head of the Chain Bridge, which spanned the Potomac River from Washington to Virginia. Here at Camp Lyon, the regiment was led by Brigadier General William Smith, a Vermonter known as "Baldy."

Seth Eastman, author of *The Civil War Journal (as recollected by an ordinary soldier)*, published by the GHS, also enlisted in the 3rd Regiment at the same time as William, but according to his memoir, he got cold feet. He climbed the wall at the Fairgrounds in St Johnsbury and ran home, following the railroad tracks. It took him eight hours, he wrote. He re-enlisted in the Sixth regiment in Bradford a few months later.

General Baldy Smith worked to make this motley collection of untrained soldiers into a disciplined brigade. "Drill, picket duty, fatigue duty, together with an occasional all night vigil in the rifle pits, constituted the daily routine." (Glover 1936,16).

A series of stern rules with punishments was instituted. One of these rules stated that a soldier found asleep on picket duty would be shot to death (17).

On August 31, William Scott was found asleep by a sergeant, and was arrested. He was brought before a general court martial on September 3, and the order was read to him. He was asked if he objected to any detail and he said "no." The Court found him guilty. He was sentenced to be shot to death on September 9. The death warrant was issued by Major General McClellan. This original warrant is at the Fairbanks Museum (19).

What happened next

On September 7, a petition signed by 191 officers and privates asking that the life of William Scott be spared, was submitted to General Smith (Glover 1936, 21).

The next day, General McClellan wrote a letter to his wife, saying, "Mr. Lincoln came this morning to ask me to pardon a man that I had ordered to be shot...." (22).

The following day, September 9, the regiments of the brigade were drawn up in a hollow square in the morning to witness the execution of William Scott. The firing squad took its position, the prisoner was brought forth, the death sentence was read to him.

Then the pardon was read. It said, "Viewed in connection with the inexperience of the condemned as a soldier, his previous good conduct and general good character, and the urgent entreaties made on his behalf, the Major General has determined to grant the pardon so earnestly prayed for." It was signed by Major General McClellan (24).

The story was picked up by the press

The story of the pardon was published in newspapers in Vermont, Boston, Washington and Philadelphia. Some had a political slant; some embellished the story.

September 10: *The National Republican* of Washington printed an editorial declaring, "We are opposed to capital punishment but if there is an offense for which a man should be put to death, we think young Scott committed it." However, the editorial later praises Lincoln for his pardon (Glover 1936, 29).

September 14: *The Green Mountain Freeman* published an article by a lawyer from Montpelier named Francis Randall. He adds to the story that Lincoln traveled, on horseback, to Camp Lyon the night before to make sure that a potential faulty telegraph transmission—which might have delayed the pardon—did not overrule his wishes. This is an example of embellishing a story to make it more dramatic.

This article was republished at least six times by other Vermont newspapers (25-27).

September 15: *The Sunday Morning Chronicle* of Vermont ran an article that called the pardon "a tribute to the great goodness of heart of our excellent President" (30). Here, the *Chronicle* is clearly taking a political perspective.

September 19: *The Vermont Phoenix* wrote that Gen. McClellan was prepared to execute Scott, but Lincoln "interposed to save his life" (31). While this is true, it's also phrased to suggest a pro-Lincoln slant.

In Groton, Mrs. Elmira Welch recalled, "...as a girl, she had spent the day of the planned execution of Scott with his Mother, trying in every way possible to comfort her" (32).

The Scott family was grateful to President Lincoln. "So great was the gratitude in the Scott family that Thomas Scott, William's father, on a visit [no date given] to see his other sons, called on the President to thank him personally for pardoning William and, upon hearing that Thomas had no help on his farm in Groton, Lincoln gave him \$10."

The Rev. Joseph Hamilton of the Methodist Episcopal Church in Vermont told the story of William Scott several years after the war. At the end, Waldo Glover wrote, an old man came up to him and told him that he was Thomas Scott, and retold the tale of his trip to Washington" (33).

After the pardon

General McClellan was building a large army for a great attack on Richmond. In March, 1862, the Vermont Brigade made the journey with "rain overhead and mud under foot" to Virginia, to a base which became known as Camp Misery. Here they were ravaged by disease and cold. Several died.

William Scott was a young man of sterling character, but he was not skilled in the art of the military drill. Mr. Glover (1936) cites a letter from Arthur E. Worthen of St. Johnsbury, a fellow soldier at Camp Misery: "Scott couldn't keep step, to a march, to save his life, and whoever marched in front of him was greatly annoyed by Scott hitting his heels" (36).

We have four letters that William Scott wrote during this time, copies made available courtesy of the Vermont Historical Society ("Scott"). In one letter to his friend Peter Welch, he wrote, "...the boyes is all fuly wel her now the wether is vry cold her now the ground has ben whit her now we went on a rewev the other day it was a fine sit to se tham thar intfry and artily to and Cavlry thar was

about ninty thousand thar they sad it was a fine sit to se tham the next day we went out on A forgen Party we went about nine miles each day it draged us out puty wel now thar hant much nuse her now all the nuse is to cep a stiff uper lip tel nancy that she must not forget the folks out her Jane I should like to be thar this winter to have a pot pie..."

The Peninsula Campaign to capture the Confederate capital had begun. The Confederates were bivouacked on high bluffs above Yorktown. A stream below their encampment had been dammed up in two places to make mill ponds. One was called Lee's Mill. The Federal soldiers spent many days bringing down siege guns from Washington and building "corduroy roads," which were made of logs over swampy areas.

On April 16, McClellan ordered that the building of fortifications by the Confederates at Yorktown be stopped. General Smith posted his sharpshooters in the woods and brought out his artillery.

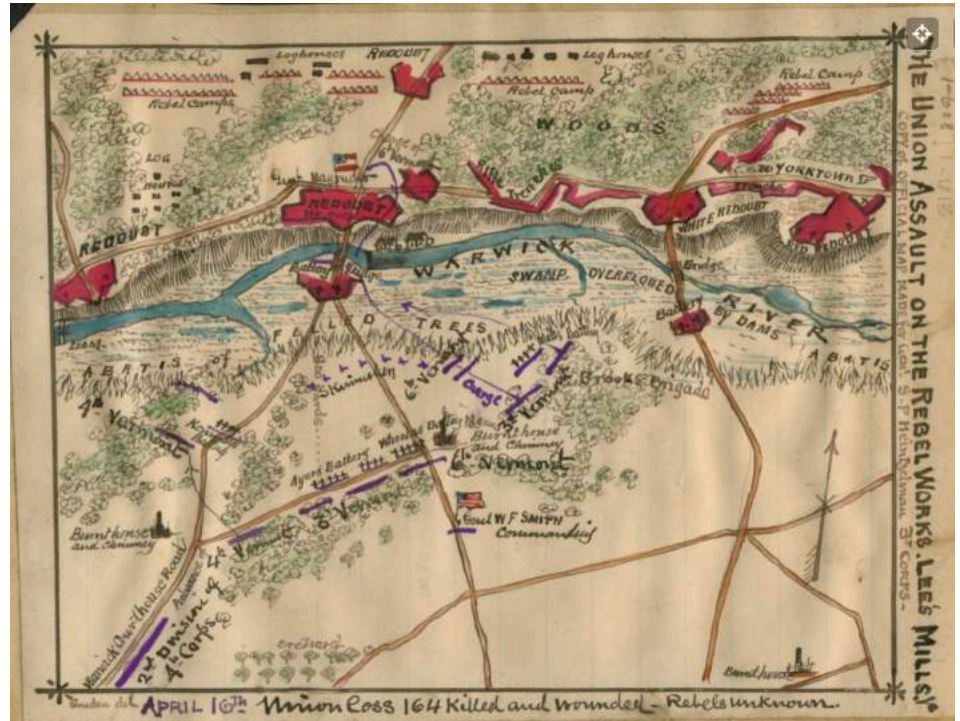
Four companies, including Scott's Vermont 3rd Regiment, burst out of the woods and waded across the waist-high river, holding their cartridges in one hand and their muskets in the other. Amidst a shower of bullets, they charged up the bank and routed the enemy, who fled.

While the Union soldiers waited for reinforcements, the Confederates made a counterattack. Mr. Glover (1936) wrote, "To their dismay, the Vermonters discovered that, notwithstanding their precautions crossing the river, much of their ammunition was ruined by water. Sharing with one another whatever dry cartridges were to be found, they held their ground and waited, hemmed in on three sides... Of the 192 men who made that heroic charge into the jaws of death barely 100 returned unharmed.

"Among the mortally wounded was William Scott" (41).

William Scott died a hero at the Battle of Lee's Mill. His story grew beyond the facts

Waldo Glover (1936) wrote, "It should require no effort of the imagination to perceive that a series of events such as is recorded in the preceding pages would, very readily, lend itself to exag-



This map, by Robert Knox Sweden (1832-1918), shows the fortifications of the Union and Confederate forces on opposite sides of the Warwick River in Warwick County, now city of Newport News, Virginia. William Scott was mortally wounded here, in the Battle of Lee's Mills. Photo from the Library of Congress

gerated treatment" (47).

April 21, 1862: The Philadelphia Inquirer ran an article with the following headline:

A THRILLING ROMANCE: TRUTH STRANGER THAN FICTION
A DYING SOLDIER PRAYS FOR PRESIDENT

The editorial summarized the events leading up to the pardon, then continued, "'Suppose,' thought the President, 'that my pardon has not reached him...Bring up my carriage!' And soon important state matters were dropped and through the broiling sun and dusty roads he rode to camp, about 10 miles and saw that the soldier was saved.

"The first man who fell at Lee's Mills with six bullets in his body, was William Scott of Company K. His comrades caught him up, and as his life blood ebbed away, he raised to heaven, amid the din of war, the cries of the dying and the shouts of the enemy, he made a prayer for the President, and remarked that he had shown that he was no coward and not afraid to die."

The writer elaborated on Scott's burial in a grove of "holly and vines and a few cherry trees in full bloom," adding, as the grave digger worked, a

skeleton of a Revolutionary soldier was found, along with some metal buttons in the exact spot where Scott was buried (Glover, 1936, 43-44).

This story of Scott's death was printed in northern newspapers, as well as in a book by Frank Moore called *Anecdotes, Poetry, and Incidents of the War*, and thus it gained a permanent place in the literature of the Civil War (44).

Who made the story famous?

Francis De Hayes Janvier and James E. Murdoch

First came Francis De Hayes Janvier, who wrote a poem, "The Sleeping Sentinel," in 1863. This is the final stanza:

*While yet his voice grew tremulous, and death bedimmed his eye-
He called his comrades to attest he had not feared to die!
And, in his last expiring breath, a prayer to heaven was sent,
That God, with his unfailing grace, would bless our President.*

A famous elocutionist named James Murdoch read the poem at the "Executive Mansion" to President Lincoln, his wife and guests. Then he read it in the Senate Chamber, with the

Continued on p.7

President and First Lady present again. He read it in Philadelphia to a crowd of 3,000 and then in Boston, Baltimore, Albany and other cities (Glover 1936, 50-52).

Sergeant Isaac W. Ambler

Sergeant Ambler took huge liberties with Scott's story in his autobiography, published in 1873. He placed himself praying with Scott, before the scheduled execution. He was the first to describe a man on horseback riding up, waving his sword above his head carrying the pardon by President Lincoln at the execution. Ambler (2021) wrote, "When the word fell on Scott's ear he ran to me and fell on my neck with both arms around me, exclaiming 'I am saved' (59).

This book is widely available for purchase today and is described on Amazon as "a fascinating and inspiring account of one man's journey through one of the most tumultuous periods in American history" ("Life").

George G. Benedict

The Legislature of Vermont authorized Colonel George Benedict's history, *Vermont in the Civil War*, published in 1886. In it, he tells of Lincoln's personal carriage ride to the camp the night before the scheduled execution. He recounts Scott's dying prayer for Lincoln, and describes his resting place as a grove of cherry trees where the remains of a Revolutionary soldier were unearthed, including his belt clasp and buttons.

Lucius E. Chittenden

The most famous version of the story was by Lucius Chittenden in his 1891 *Recollections of President Lincoln and his Administration*. During the Civil War, Chittenden, a lawyer from Burlington, became Registrar of the Treasury, at Lincoln's request. Chittenden was a member of the very famous Vermont family who had given the state its first governor. (This early Gov. Chittenden was also responsible for the first division of land in the town of Groton and was honored with the first pick of the lots. He chose lot #21, subsequently sold it to Dominicus Gray, who sold it to Waldo Glover's grandparents, Otis and Esther in 1840) (Gleicher/Jurist).

Chittenden devoted a chapter to Scott's story. It was so popular that a pamphlet comprised of just that chapter was published. His version became the basis for most subsequent stories. He claimed that the Vermonters seeking Scott's pardon tried to hire him as a lawyer to secure a new trial. Instead, he led them directly to President Lincoln, who agreed to halt the execution.

He also wrote that Lincoln visited Scott at the Camp the night before the scheduled execution and he promised to pardon him, but for a fee. Scott offered to mortgage the family farm! Then Lincoln said that when Scott died, he would have to be able to look Lincoln in the eye and say, "I have done my duty."

Chittenden's retelling of Scott's death is quite romantic, to say the least. He claimed that Scott, as he was dying, pleaded with Chittenden to bring a message to Lincoln. He also took credit for having Scott's body buried in the grove of cherry trees which, according to Chittenden, also contained a stately oak in its center and that they carved "W.S" in the tree and the words "A Brave Soldier."

Finally, Chittenden says he carried Scott's message to Lincoln, and was praised by the President for intervening on Scott's behalf (Glover 1936, 63-67).

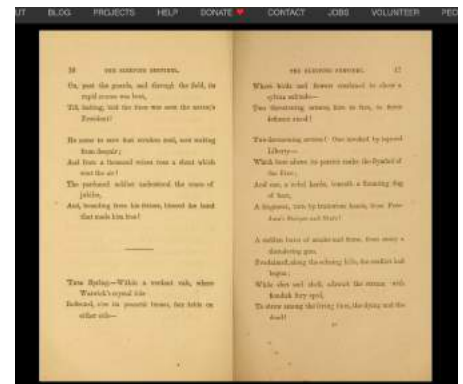
George G. Benedict revisited

Eight years after Benedict's authorized history of the Civil War, he gave a talk on "Romance in Military History." He corrected his own recounting of the story, which had largely been based on Chittenden's account.

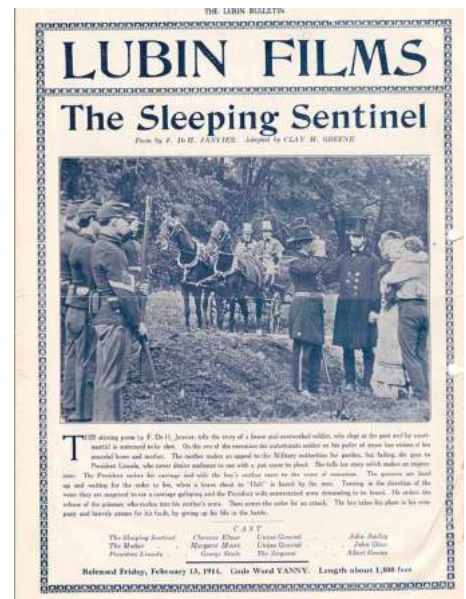
He ends by saying, "But the fable has had a strong hold of the public heart, and it will undoubtedly long outlive the belated prosaic correction, if indeed the latter ever obtains general currency" (73).

The Controversy

The Reverend William Eleazar Barton (1861-1930) was born in Illinois in the same year Abraham Lincoln became president. He grew up in a house and a community in which Lincoln was greatly revered.



Francis De Hayes Janvier wrote "The Sleeping Sentinel," in 1863. Renowned elocutionist James Murdoch read Janvier's poem in the White House and the Senate Chamber. He then read the poem in front of crowds in Boston and numerous other cities. Photo from Internet Archive.



This 1914 silent film depicted President Abraham Lincoln pardoning William Scott, who had been sentenced to death by firing squad for sleeping on duty. Photo from Wikipedia, "The Sleeping Sentinel"

In addition to ministering to parishioners in several Congregational churches, from Boston to Oak Park, Illinois, Barton was a prolific writer—boys' stories, novels, sermons, articles, and humor. His most enduring passion, to which he devoted his last decade, was the life of Abraham Lincoln, a subject that produced six books and a number of public lectures by the Reverend ("Barton").

Continued on p.8

William Barton had already published several books about Lincoln by 1925 when his “Life of Abraham Lincoln” came out. This time he included the story of William Scott.

He had read the Chittenden version and declared, “Mr. Chittenden was not the greatest liar in Washington; he was not. But he was one of many men who colored their memories with their imagination until their accounts became wholly unsafe as historical data” (Glover 1936, 77).

One cannot disagree with him there!

Barton asserted “Who pardoned the prisoner or mitigated his sentence does not appear on record” (78).

It is worthwhile to point out that during this period, the “Lost Cause” myth was being popularized. This was a narrative that the Confederacy was not fighting to preserve slavery; rather that the war was simply about economics and states’ rights and was fueled by Northern aggression. This view sees the Confederate cause as the more righteous and heroic one, claiming, for instance, that Robert E. Lee was the best general in the war. This was the period when statues of Confederate officers were erected and Federal officers were discredited... including Lincoln.

The error in Barton’s biography was exposed. With further research, Barton discovered the pardon that had been signed by General McClellan. However, his claim had taken hold.

The Boston Post published an article that concluded, “There is not the slightest evidence that President Lincoln ever heard of Scott’s case. There is nothing to show that he ever issued a pardon to Scott. The story told by Mr. Chittenden is flatly contradicted by the records” (81).

The next development: A veteran named Luke Ferriter, from Brattleboro, spoke up. He had been recorded as one of the men on guard duty with William Scott. He also had the horrible luck of being randomly chosen to serve as one of the squad to “do the shooting,” as he put it.

He unequivocally states that

1. They had heard that Lincoln had pardoned Scott the night before and
2. Lincoln was there when Scott was pardoned (84).

Ferriter’s statement launched a full



William Barton, a noted Lincoln historian, asserted in this front-page article in the New York Times that the president had not been the one who pardoned William Scott. Photo from New York Times

scale battle that took place in the *New York Times*, the *Boston Herald*, the *Burlington Free Press*, *Brattleboro Reformer* and the *Barre Times*. The opinions of the writers were as varied as the stories that had been told over the last 65 years.

Eventually Barton conceded in the *New York Times* that he had made four errors in his *Life of Lincoln*.

1. He admitted that Lincoln knew about Scott’s case.
2. He admitted that General McClellan’s letter to his wife referred to Scott.
3. He admitted that the Regiments were drawn up and heard the pardon.
4. He admitted that Chittenden had some credibility (87).

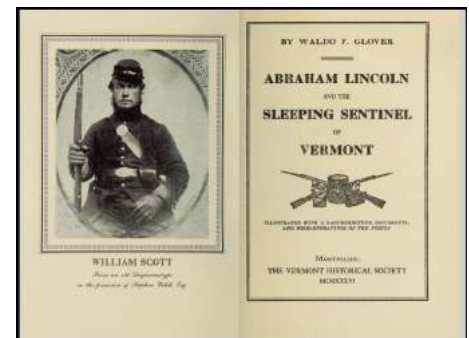
Waldo Glover put the matter to rest

Had Scott taken an extra night of sentry duty for his friend?

Mr. Glover had correspondence with a man from Barre who knew the sergeant in William Scott’s Company K. The sergeant said he always blamed himself for allowing Scott to stand in for his sick friend.

Who actually brought the case to Lincoln?

It seems there might have been more than one person. General “Baldy” Smith thought that the execution should go forward, so Scott’s supporters might have felt the need to have the petition delivered by another



Groton historian Waldo Glover published this meticulously researched rebuttal to William Barton’s argument ten years later, in 1936. Photo from Vermont Historical Society

messenger. It might well have been Chittenden.

Did President Lincoln visit the encampment on the morning of the 9th?

Even though Mr. Ferriter said, “There was no disputing that Lincoln was there. He stepped from the background. We stacked arms and cheered for him. He took off his hat in recognition of us, and we cheered again and again,” Waldo Glover seems to doubt that Lincoln was there the morning of the pardon. However, he does have more than one witness who corroborates that Lincoln was at Camp Lyon the night before and that he was cheered by the men (Glover 1936, 104).

Did Scott thank and pray for Lincoln on his deathbed?

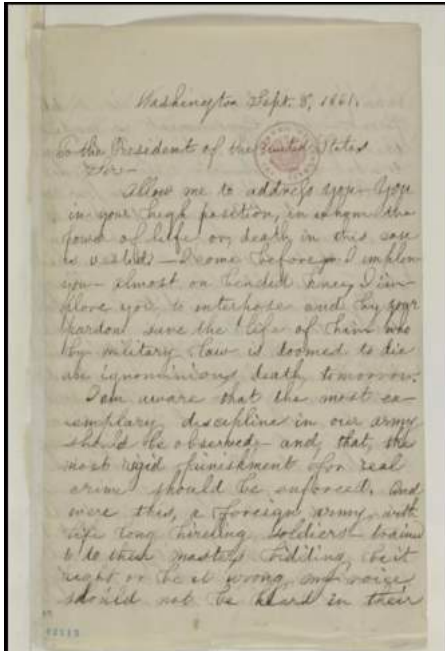
It seems quite possible that he could have done so before he fell unconscious. The surgeon who tended to him did not see him for several hours after he had fallen into a coma.

Was Scott buried in a Revolutionary soldier’s grave?

Contemporary newspapers did state that the Vermont dead at Lee’s Mills were buried on ground used by Revolutionary soldiers as a burial place during the siege of Yorktown.

And the cherry trees?

George Philbrick, who was a friend of Scott’s, said, “I did not see him after he was killed, but I saw where he was buried in a peach grove. The trees were all blossomed out, and it was a beautiful place.” (11).



Anne C. King, the wife of the former Postmaster General, Horatio King, was one of many who wrote to President Lincoln to implore him to pardon William Scott. She wrote, *"From the moment he enrolls himself with those who shall go forth a willing band — the sacrifice with himself is made. He comes to Washington — full of noble — brave resolve— And he has never changed!"* Photo from the Library of Congress

Finally...Was there a document showing Lincoln's signed pardon?

I visited the Vermont Historical Society Library while doing research for this story and I learned that in the 1990's a group of autograph hunters came across the pardon with an authentic Lincoln signature! To see a copy, one would have to obtain it from the Library of Congress. No easy task as it was explained to me.

The Monument and the Naming of Route 302 as Scott Highway

For a community project in the 1930's, the Groton Grange wanted to erect a monument to honor William Scott, the Sleeping Sentinel, whose story was being challenged by skeptics. Probably, the idea was to write it in stone and thereby preserve history. They formed the William Scott Memorial Association.

Members collected donations from

individuals and businesses. James Main manufactured the monument in his stone shed from Groton granite, which is a relatively soft granite. Hence, the monument now has several blemishes on its face. McLure's Student Band of Groton played one of their first concerts at the dedication on June 25, 1936. It was billed as a "Pilgrimage of Veterans of the Grand Army of the Republic." That same year, Waldo Glover's book was published.

Several attempts were made to have U. S. Highway 302 named for the Sleeping Sentinel. In 1945, Groton's legislative representative, Mrs. Nellie Jeffrey, introduced a resolution to name the road that passes through our town the "William Scott Memorial Highway." It passed unanimously.



This memorial, dedicated to William Scott, was erected in 1936 on the former site of the Scott family farm. It's located in West Groton on Route 302, which, from the New Hampshire border to Barre, was renamed the "William Scott Memorial Highway" in 1945. Photo from "Read the Plaque—Sleeping Sentinel"

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Groton Historical Society
P.O. Box 89
Groton, VT 05046-0089