"A Brave and Gallant Soldier"

Civil War Monuments and the Funerary Sphere

In a quiet glade amid the trees and lawns of Boston's Forest Hills Cemetery, a bronze soldier of the American Civil War stands on a low plinth clutching his rifle (fig. 1). His posture is reminiscent of parade rest, a pose often assumed by soldiers on ceremonial occasions, but he gazes downward and to his right with a wistful air (fig. 2). He wears the standard overcoat and forage cap issued to soldiers of the Union Army for winter service, and his finely modeled, unbearded face reflects the youth of the typical Civil War volunteer. The base of the statue declares that it was "Erected by the City of Roxbury in honor of Her Soldiers, who died for their Country in the Rebellion of 1861-1865." Its grassy clearing is enclosed with a low stone fence inscribed with the names, units, and dates of death of the Civil War soldiers of the Boston suburb of Roxbury (fig. 3). Amid the rolling hills and screening vegetation of the cemetery, the stone fence demarcates a space for quiet reflection. Overall, the monument is part gravestone and part triumph, mourning the deaths of the young soldiers of Roxbury while honoring their valorous deeds in the successful Union war effort.

This monument to the soldiers of the Civil War was designed and sculpted by

Boston artist Martin Milmore and erected in 1867, just two years after the bloody conflict came to a close. The Roxbury monument is an early example of a nationwide impulse to erect monuments to the war's soldiers in the decades following the Civil War. Before the war, few public monuments existed in the streets and parks of cities in the United States, and most of these were in honor of famous men. But in the years after the war, as both North and South tried to recover from a conflict that had caused more than 750,000 soldier deaths, communities across the nation began overwhelmingly to erect monuments to the memory of the citizen soldier. In the term *citizen* soldier, there is a strain of civic responsibility and behavior: these men were seen as volunteers for the cause of their nation, exemplars of how participants in a democracy should ideally behave. The monuments to their sacrifice sparked an industry that provided constant employment for both trained sculptors and artisan gravestone carvers who rushed to meet the demand for memorial sculpture. These sentinels in bronze and granite, placed in town squares or garden cemeteries, linked local loss with the broader national implications of the Civil War. With their presence, they created sites where families could remember the loss of loved ones killed and interred on faraway battlefields, and where communities could celebrate and commemorate their role in a cataclysmic national event.

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1. Martin Milmore, Roxbury Soldier Monument, Forest Hills Cemetery, Boston, Massachusetts, 1867. Photograph courtesy of the author.

> The first Civil War soldier monuments were more explicitly connected with mourning the war's dead than later monuments, which focused mainly on civic pride and responsibility. Most of the early monuments were placed in cemeteries, and many were fabricated by carvers who also specialized in gravestones. Like gravestones, these monuments bore the names of a town's dead. For many families who had lost loved ones in the war, these tombstone-like monuments may have stood in as surrogate tombstones for soldiers who never came home. As Drew Gilpin Faust has illustrated, the sudden confrontation with the realities of war death on the Civil War's grand scale forged a deep sense of anxiety for a society that had grown used to a certain amount of

ceremony accompanying the end of life. The enormous and costly battles of the Civil War left hundreds of dead soldiers littered across Southern battlefields, and the job of cleaning up this horrific mess often fell to local citizens. Gruesome and disfiguring battlefield injuries were compounded by days or weeks of exposure, making bodies difficult to identify, and thus many soldiers were buried in unmarked graves, their identities lost. Families who mourned their inability to tend to their soldier dead could turn to a town soldier monument as a site for remembrance.

2. Martin Milmore, Roxbury Soldier Monument, Forest Hills Cemetery, Boston, Massachusetts, 1867. Photograph courtesy of the author.

A poem that appeared in *Harper's Weekly* on April 1, 1865, shows how the soldier monument worked as a mourning site. The six stanzas describe a small town erecting a monument, first in memory of one slain soldier, and then for more and more, as war casualties grow and new names are engraved onto the same stone. Two stanzas in particular evoke the relationship between the monument and the grave that cannot be visited:

The grass had not been touched by spade
Where its slant shadow lay,
The soldier's resting-place was made
On red field far away,
And yet with bowed, uncovered heads
They kneeled around to pray.

[…]

So let the soldiers' monument
In every grave-yard stand—
Although their buried forms be blent
With distant sea or sand—
To keep their memory for aye
Within a grateful land.

The poem makes the relationship between the monument and the grave abundantly clear. The soldier's actual grave is far away, as is indicated by the fact that the ground around the monument "had not been touched by spade," and yet this imagined monument is a site for the enactment of the types of rituals usually held at a gravesite, namely prayer or later, patriotic celebration. The poem's writer makes clear that even if the remains of soldiers are encased in "distant sea or sand," the monument placed at home is an important repository for soldiers' memory.

Debates over the erection of individual town monuments reflected the rhetoric of the *Harper's Weekly* poem. In an 1866 meeting devoted to the question of whether to erect a monument to the soldier dead of Illinois, Major General Benjamin M. Prentiss explicitly advocated for the soldier monument as a duty to soldiers who had not returned home:

When we persuaded these boys to go into the army, we pledged not only the faith of the nation, but our own and that of the State that they should not be forgotten. At this day there are thousands of our Illinois soldiers who are lying in Southern soil, and many of their parents and those who loved them, ignorant of their last resting place. It would be a consolation to the families bewailing the loss of those dear to them, to know that the people of the State, and particularly their military associates, do not forget them.

For Prentiss, the soldier monument served as an answer to the dispersal of the remains of Union dead and a site for mourning families to remember their lost sons.

3. Martin Milmore, Roxbury Soldier Monument, Forest Hills Cemetery, Boston, Massachusetts, 1867. Photograph courtesy of the author.

In shaping local sites for remembrance of fallen soldiers, the Northern towns that sponsored soldier monuments may have been looking to emulate the recently created national cemetery system. During and immediately following the war, the loose connection of burial grounds that had been instituted by military leaders was reconstituted into a network of national cemeteries with the help of federal and local governments. The first of these was the Soldiers' National Cemetery at Gettysburg. It was dedicated on November 19, 1863, five months after the battle of Gettysburg, as the first of many cities of the dead that would honor fallen soldiers with uniform white headstones. One of the earliest citizen soldier monuments, an elaborate assemblage of allegorical figures surrounding a central columnar element, was designed by James Batterson for this cemetery (fig. 4). The monument is topped by an allegory of Liberty, with the four statues around the base representing War, History, Peace, and Plenty. This basic arrangement of figures around a column remained popular for the priciest soldier monuments through the end of the nineteenth century, although the taste for allegory eventually gave way to soldier figures representing the Army, Navy, Cavalry, and Artillery. These elaborate

assemblages soon began appearing in town squares in addition to national cemeteries.

4. "National monument to be erected at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania," engraving by Major & Knapp from the original design by James G. Batterson, Hartford, Connecticut (1863). Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts.

For both Northerners and Southerners interested in reburying their soldier dead, new cemeteries were the response to a sense that most soldiers did not receive a proper burial on the first attempt, and that these hastily dug and shallow graves might be disturbed by animals or enemies. To create the national cemetery at Gettysburg, the bodies of Union soldiers were disinterred from the temporary graves where they had been laid to prevent decomposition in the late summer heat and reburied in a new cemetery on land that had been purchased as a planned extension of the town's burial grounds. At Gettysburg and other national cemeteries connected with Civil War battlefields, only Union soldiers were allowed in the hallowed grounds, with careful attention paid to the deceased's uniform to determine which side of the conflict the individual had supported. The macabre business of disinterring and reinterring bodies was famously captured in a photograph from *Gardner's Photographic Sketchbook of the Civil War* titled ["A Burial Party on the battle-field of Cold Harbor,"](#) in which the faces of five African American members of a burial party at the scene of the battle of Cold Harbor are juxtaposed with five bleached skulls atop a cart filled with human remains. The men who worked to rebury Union troops, many of them members of the United States Colored Troops who continued to serve the army after the war had ended, played a significant role in creating a memorial landscape to honor the soldiers of the Civil War. And yet, the contribution of African American men to the war effort was not recognized in sculptural form until 1897, when Augustus Saint-Gaudens included troops of the 54th

Massachusetts Regiment in his famous *Shaw Memorial* in Boston.

In the decades following the Civil War, the national cemeteries served as pilgrimage sites for the families of fallen soldiers. The uniform headstones of the cemetery, arranged in even geometric lines, echoed the precision of military drill, and often an elaborate monument served as a commemorative focal point. An 1865 writer in the *New York Times*, advocating for a soldier monument at Fortress Monroe in Hampton, Virginia, saw the monument as a centerpiece for a cemetery where families of soldiers could "visit their graves in future years with a quiet, though sad satisfaction, and plant thereon the flowers of the most sacred affection." A lithograph by Currier and Ives showing the national cemetery and monument at Fortress Monroe depicts two pairs of mourners visiting the graves of departed soldiers (fig. 5). While two adult men lean against the fence surrounding the cemetery's central obelisk, another man holds the hand of a small boy as both ponder a single white headstone, perhaps discussing a father's sacrifice for his country. For these visitors, the national cemetery served as a site for mourning and moral instruction.

5. "Monument. 75 feet high containing 720 tons solid granite. Erected in the National Cemetery near Fortress Monroe by subscriptions of loyal citizen in northern cities in memory of Union soldiers who perished in the War of the Rebellion," lithograph by Currier & Ives (1865-1870). Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts.

6. The Soldier's Grave, lithograph by Currier & Ives (1862). Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts.

But not all families who lost a loved one could afford to visit the faraway national cemetery where their son, father, or husband was buried. For these people, a kind of solace could be found in images like*The Soldier's Grave*, an 1862 lithograph by Currier and Ives that provided buyers with space to write the name of the deceased onto an elaborate gravestone (fig. 6). Images like this one participated in a trend toward memorial lithography, existing in the United States since at least the 1830s. In the antebellum convention, a printed gravestone with space to write the identity of the deceased would be accompanied by mourners, usually a lone female in mourning costume, and other emblems,

often including a willow tree. In *The Soldier's Grave*, this conventional type is adapted for a military purpose. Instead of an urn or other Greek Revival symbols, the gravestone is decorated with the accoutrements of war: rifles, drums, cannons, and an eagle with outstretched wings bearing a laurel wreath. As the young lady in mourning leans against the gravestone, a column of marching troops appears to the right. And as Mark S. Schantz has pointed out, the unmediated space for inscribing the name of the dead on the antebellum lithographs has been replaced by a much more regimented form: "In memory of [Name of deceased] of the [Corps, Brigade, Regiment, etc.] who died at [Place, date], 186[year]." The discipline of military life is reflected in the structuring of form.

Soldier monuments like the Roxbury monument by Martin Milmore were public, permanent versions of these paper gravestones. Like the more ephemeral mourning lithograph, the soldier monument often employed iconography such as the eagle, the laurel, and the collections of armaments. Both, too, helped to ameliorate the anxiety of losing a loved one in a distant land. Those who bought copies of *The Soldiers' Grave* could inscribe the paper gravestone with the memory of their lost loved one to display in the home as a replacement for another resting place that might be too far away to visit, or even unknown. Likewise, the soldier monument provided a physical location for enacting rituals of grief and memorialization in front of a stone carved with the names of the dead. Even the regimented formal structure of *The Soldier's Grave* reflects the monument. The lithograph provides the generic inscription "A brave and gallant soldier and a true patriot," alongside a poem evoking the "victory won" and the soldier's final rest. Rather than leaving space for the owner of the lithograph to write her own description of the deceased, the image assumes that all soldiers are "gallant" and "true," and that a single inscription can be adapted to any circumstance. The soldier monument participates in the same form of collective rhetoric, providing a list of names along with an inscription meant to speak for all of them. Even in memory, the soldier is memorialized through military discipline.

7. Stonewall Confederate Cemetery, Winchester, Virginia, with 1879 Confederate Monument, attributed to Thomas Delahunty. Photograph (February 2012) courtesy of the author.

Southern communities that erected soldier monuments also incorporated both mourning and commemoration into their memorial programs, but for Southerners, the mourning aspect was even more pronounced than it was for their Northern counterparts. In the North, communities mourned a great loss of life as families lamented the faraway or unknown graves of loved ones, but victory in the war served as a balm for grief. In Southern towns, where much greater percentages of the white male population had participated in the war, grief over individual loss was coupled with the need to cope with the defeat of the Southern cause. Further, while Union soldiers who had died in battle were given dignified burials in national cemeteries, Confederate remains were denied entrance into these spaces. Instead, Southern women formed Ladies' Memorial Associations, organizations that established Confederate cemeteries and paid for the reburial of Southern soldiers' bodies and the erection of monuments to their memory. Stonewall Confederate Cemetery in Winchester, Virginia, with its even rows of simple headstones and tall columnar monument, is such a site (fig. 7). Founded in 1866 as a section of the larger Mount Hebron Cemetery, this resting place for the bodies of 2,575 Confederate soldiers received its soldier monument in 1879.

The long delay 8. Confederate Monument, Winchester, Virginia, 1879, attributed to Thomas Delahunty. Photograph courtesy of the author.between the founding of Stonewall Confederate Cemetery and the dedication of its monument speaks to the scarcity of funds for monument building in the war-ravaged South. In the first years after the war, most Southern communities prioritized the rebuilding of towns and the reburial of Confederate soldiers over the purchase of memorial sculpture. But as a famous poem by Henry Timrod implies, a monument was usually part of the plan. Timrod's "Ode Sung on the Occasion of Decorating the Graves of the Confederate Dead" was written for a ceremony that took place on June 16, 1866, at Magnolia Cemetery in Charleston, South Carolina. In the first few stanzas, Timrod explains that a monument will soon watch over the deceased in their sleep:

Sleep sweetly in your humble graves,
Sleep, martyrs of a fallen cause;
Though yet no marble column craves
The pilgrim here to pause.

In seeds of laurel in the earth
The blossom of your fame is blown,
And somewhere, waiting for its birth,
The shaft is in the stone!

Timrod makes clear that while the soldiers' cause is lost,
their fame carries on, and he reassures the sleeping soldiers
that their marble monument is already planned, lying in wait
in a stone block. Soon, just as the finished shaft will be
born from the uncut stone, its memorial function will grow in
the visitor's mind from the presence of the monument.

Like Martin Milmore's Union soldier in Forest Hills Cemetery,
the Confederate soldier in Stonewall Confederate Cemetery
stands at quiet rest, gazing off to one side as if
remembering fallen comrades (fig. 8). But this soldier takes
the mourning motif even further by standing with reversed
arms, his rifle barrel pointed at the ground. The command to
"reverse arms," first appearing in infantry drill manuals
around the time of the Civil War, was employed at solemn
occasions, such as soldiers' funerals or military executions,
to symbolize mourning, respect, and even surrender. A
connection between soldier monuments and "reverse arms" is
evoked in the first verse of the song "[Brave Battery Boys](),"
composed for the dedication of a monument to the Bridges
Battery at Rose Hill Cemetery in Chicago on May 30, 1870:

We come with reversed arms, O comrades who sleep,
To rear the proud marble, to muse and to weep,
To speak of the dark days that yet had their joys
When we were together—
Brave Battery Boys.

In the poem, joy and sorrow are merged in front of the marble
monument, which is honored by the ceremonial rifle gesture.
In a Confederate context, this gesture points to the still-
complicated position of Southern memory toward the end of the
Reconstruction era. This monument mourns the dead Confederate
soldiers and the Lost Cause for which the war was fought.

The soldier monuments of the post-Civil War era were not
always so explicitly connected with the funerary sphere. As
the decades passed, the raw collective grief generated by the
war's terrible losses mellowed into a general appreciation of
the soldiers' sacrifice in battle. In other words, the
monuments became less associated with individual mourning
families, and instead answered a larger cultural need for
civic pride and education. By the 1880s, monuments North and

South were generally erected in prominent civic locations rather than in cemeteries. Soldier statues, too, lost their mourning focus, and the contemplative air of the statues in Forest Hills Cemetery and Stonewall Confederate Cemetery was exchanged for a more militant, confident attitude. Monumental inscriptions focused less on reflections of loss and more on the war's nationalistic and ideological aims. But the soldier monument continued its material association with the cemetery industry, as the same monument firms were often responsible for producing both soldier monuments and funerary sculpture. This army of bronze and granite sentinels, dotted across the landscape, continues to evoke the enormous impact of the Civil War on the lives of American citizens.

Acknowledgements

Further Reading

Civil War soldier monuments have been the subject of several scholarly works, including Kirk Savage, *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves: Race, War and Monument in Nineteenth-Century America* (Princeton, N.J., 1997); Thomas J. Brown, *The Public Art of Civil War Commemoration: A Brief History with Documents* (Boston, 2004); Carol Grissom, *Zinc Sculpture in America, 1850-1950* (Newark, Del., 2009); and Cynthia Mills and Pamela H. Simpson, eds., *Monuments to the Lost Cause: Women, Art, and the Landscapes of Southern Memory* (Knoxville, Tenn., 2003).

For more on how the Civil War affected America's culture of death and mourning, see Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (New York, 2008); and Mark S. Schantz, *Awaiting the Heavenly Country: The Civil War and America's Culture of Death* (Ithaca, N.Y., 2008).

To learn more about the reburial of Civil War soldiers in the North and the South, see John R. Neff, *Honoring the Civil War Dead: Commemoration and the Problem of Reconciliation*(Lawrence, Kansas, 2005); William A. Blair,

Cities of the Dead: Contesting the Memory of the Civil War in the South, 1865-1914 (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2004); and Caroline E. Janney, *Burying the Dead but Not the Past: Ladies' Memorial Associations and the Lost Cause* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2008).

[The Chipstone Foundation](#) is a Milwaukee-based arts organization devoted to the study and interpretation of early American decorative arts and material culture.

This article originally appeared in issue 14.2 (Winter, 2014).

Sarah Beetham is a doctoral candidate in art history at the University of Delaware. Her dissertation, titled "Sculpting the Citizen Soldier: Reproduction and National Memory, 1865-1917," investigates citizen soldier monuments in an effort to understand the relation between sculptural form, national memory, and the marketing of multiplied art in the late nineteenth century.