



Life Without Amos: Philinda Humiston and Her Three Children After the Battle of Gettysburg

Amos Humiston's death on the first day of the Battle of Gettysburg left his three children fatherless and his wife a widow, but they would not know that until 4 months later.

Of the many tragedies of the War Between the States (April 12, 1861 – May 10, 1865), also known as the American Civil War, one of the greatest was the wracking of families with gut-wrenching grief over the fate of loved ones who were missing, presumed dead.

- The closure of knowing was denied to them, as the number of bodies, bloated and disfigured, without discernible identification, piled up on battlefields and received hasty burials -- or subsequent re-interments -- with gravestone inscriptions of "Unknown."

In the aftermath of the three-day, stench-filled maelstrom of the Battle of Gettysburg (July 1 - 3, 1863), decaying bodies littered the small borough in southeastern Pennsylvania. The dead -- estimated at more than 7,000 -- outnumbered the borough's wispy population of 2,400.

- Also blanketing the Gettysburg landscape were miles of detritus including military paraphernalia, such as knapsacks, muskets, and shoes, and personal possessions, such as Bibles, scraps of letters, and bloodied photographs.

- Oftentimes it was impossible to link scattered mementoes with their dead owners.

Amos Humiston (April 26, 1830 - July 1, 1863) could have numbered among the war's unknown soldiers, but a great love rescued him from an anonymous grave on the Civil War's bloodiest battleground and gave closure to his widow and children.

- His solitary death occurred, not amid the seemingly endless sprawl of corpses which putrefied so much of Gettysburg's landscapes, but instead in a tree-shaded residential lot.

- Firmly held in his lifeless hands was an image, an ambrotype, of his three children.

- The poignancy of Amos' last moments motivated a search which brought closure to his family and friends and which has captivated generations with the touching greatness of Amos' love as a father for his young children.

What happened to Amos' wife and children after the realization that they would have to learn to live without Amos?

Only known image of Amos Humiston: undated ambrotype by unknown photographer.

Photo is presumed to have been taken during Amos' residency in Portville, New York, from c. 1858 to 1862.



Amos Humiston
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No greater love

Although Amos Humiston, a harness maker by trade, had a patriotic sense of duty to the United States of America, he held off involving himself in serving the Union cause in the burgeoning war between northern states and seceding southern states out of concern for the welfare of his wife and their three children.

- He had married Philinda Betsy Ensworth Smith (February 1, 1831 - November 18, 1913) eight years earlier on Tuesday, July 4, 1854, in a Methodist Episcopal ceremony held at the home of his brother Morris and sister-in-law Sarah Cowles, who was Philinda's first cousin.
- They were doting parents of three children: Franklin, born April 10, 1855; Alice Eliza, born on March 30, 1857; Frederick, born on January 17, 1859.

On Saturday, July 26, 1862, Amos, feeling assured of his family's care in his absence or in his unthinkable death, finally enlisted.

- At meetings in July 1862, in his adoptive village of Portville, in southwestern New York's Cattaraugus County, the citizenry raised money toward the support of enlistees' families and made assurances of continued assistance to affected families.
- On Monday, July 14, 1862, Congress set monthly pension rates at \$8 (\$186 in 2014) for widows and totally disabled soldiers.
- He thought that he would be able to send regular payments from his monthly military wages to his family.

By Friday, August 22, 1862, Amos was relocated 60 miles (96 kilometers) westward at Camp James M. Brown in Jamestown, in southern Chautauqua County, for the regimental rendezvous.

- The camp honored Colonel Col. James M. Brown (c. 1824 - May 31, 1862), a Jamestown commander of the 100th New York Volunteer Infantry who had been killed recently, on the first day of the Battle of Fair Oaks (May 31 – June 1, 1862), in south central Virginia's Henrico County.
- Visits from home folk, as well as home passes for recruits, were commonplace. In his first letter, dated Friday, September 5, 1862, Amos referenced Philinda's recent visit.

On Wednesday, September 24, 1862, Amos was mustered as a corporal of Company C in the 154th New York Infantry Regiment.

- Two days later Amos sent \$40 (\$930.00 in 2014) to Philinda by way of Franklin Witherell, a Portville day laborer whose son, Burnett Franklin Witherell (c. 1844 - May 31, 1922), was a private in Company C.

Monday, September 29th, 1862, Amos departed from Camp Brown aboard a train which briefly stopped at each station in the 154th Regiment's two home counties of Chataqua and Cattaraugus.

- The closest station to Portville was about six miles (9 kilometers) away, at Olean. It is unknown whether Philinda and the children numbered among the well-wishing crowds.
- If she were there, that slight sight would have been the last view husband and wife had of each other.

Nine months and two days later, Amos laid himself down to die from mortal injuries suffered on Wednesday, July 1, 1863, the first day of the Battle of Gettysburg.

- As he lay dying, he firmly held in his hands a photographic portrait of his three children which he had received from Philinda after nearly missing a bullet during the Battle of Chancellorsville (April 30 – May 6, 1863) in northern Virginia's Spotsylvania County.

Thus it was -- with his childrens' dear images clasped in a death grip -- that Amos was found in the trio of days after the bloody battle's end devoted to clearing the landscape and burying the battle's legions of sacrificial victims.

The poignant image of Amos' last earthly moments, expressed so touchingly in his dying posture of a loving farewell to his now fatherless children, has captivated generations with its human-interest affirmation of great love:

"Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends." (John 15:13)

"Children of the Battlefield: reproduction of tintype portrait of Frank, Frederick, and Alice Humiston, children of Sergeant Amos Humiston of Co. C, 154th New York Infantry Regiment, who died at the Battle of Gettysburg with the photograph in his hands."

1865 carte de visite by Wenderoth, Taylor & Brown, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania



1 photographic print on carte de visite mount : albumen

Public Domain, via Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division/Liljenquist Family Collection of Civil War Photographs

Dr. John Francis Bourns' great human interest campaign

A search launched via newspaper articles by Philadelphia-based physician John Francis Bourns (May 17, 1814 - December 20, 1899) succeeded in locating Philinda within four months of the Battle of Gettysburg and led to the confirmation of Amos Humiston as the identity of the unknown soldier whose paternal thoughts at death had transfixed northern states even as the war continued to rage.

- Prior to his newspaper campaign, Dr. Bourns made arrangements with three of Philadelphia's prominent photography studios for a stash of copies of the Humiston children's portrait, which were

then offered for sale at authorized agents, purportedly as a fundraiser, with proceeds targeted for the family, if identified, or, if unsuccessful, allocated to a soldiers' benevolent institution.

On Saturday, January 2, 1864, Dr. Bourns disembarked at the Erie Railroad in depot in Olean -- the same depot where Amos Humiston may have had his last view of his family over 15 months earlier.

- A welcoming party of four of Portville's leading citizens transported Dr. Bourns to the village, where he met with Philinda to restore the ambrotype to her and to hand over unspecified sums from the sales of her children's copied images.

The next day, Sunday, January 3, 1864, a public reception was held after the worship service at Philinda's church, Portville Presbyterian Church.

- After giving the first public reading of a poem, "The Unknown Soldier! Who Is He?," by Baltimore's military poet, General William Henry Hayward (1813 - 1876), Dr. Bourns offered copies of the children's photo for sale, thereby raising an additional sum \$51 (\$761.00 in 2014) for Amos' family.

Apart from the sums bestowed upon her during Dr. Bourns' visit, Philinda survived on work as a seamstress and charity from her neighborly villagers.

On Wednesday, June 8, 1864, Philinda began her application for an army widow's pension.

- The slow process kept her waiting for three days shy of a year, before certification of approval on Tuesday, June 5, 1866.
- The pension payments of \$8.00 (\$119.00 in 2014) per month were retroactive to Amos' death date of July 1, 1863.

Meanwhile, Dr. Bourns continued to enjoy success in the sale of the children's photo as well as net proceeds from the sale of the sheet music for "The Children of the Battle Field."

- The song by popular balladeer-composer-poet James Gowdy Clark (1830 - 1897) was offered for sale in support of the Humiston family after selection on Monday, February 1, 1864, as the winning entry in a contest sponsored by the American Presbyterian.

While the Humistons scraped by, in June 1865, Wenderoth, Taylor & Brown Studio printed a new version of carte-de-visite photo of the children.

- The National Sabbath School's effort toward founding a home in Pennsylvania for war orphans was now identified as the beneficiary of sales.

"THE CHILDREN OF THE BATTLE FIELD."

This is a copy of the Ferrotypic found in the hands of Sergeant Humiston of the 154th N.Y. Volunteers as he lay dead on the Battle Field of Gettysburg.

The copies are sold in furtherance of the National Sabbath-School effort to found in Pennsylvania an Asylum for dependent Orphans of Soldiers; in memorial of our Perpetuated Union.



WENDEROTH, TAYLOR & BROWN
912-914
Chestnut Street
Philadelphia.

This Picture is private property, and can not be copied without wronging the Soldiers' Orphans for whom it is published.

Philadelphia, Sep^r 23^d 1865.

J. Francis Bourns.

verso of carte de visite

[Public Domain, via Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division/Liljenquist Family Collection of Civil War Photographs](#)

The popularity of Humiston-themed merchandise now openly served as the vehicle for the realization of Dr. Bourns' dream of establishing a home for war orphans in Pennsylvania.

- An announcement in the November 30, 1865, issue of the *American Presbyterian* revealed the formation of the Homestead Association in October 1865 as an organization dedicated to establishing a war orphanage.
- The announcement, which sought funds in addition to \$22,000 (\$314,286.00 in 2014) already raised, included Dr. Bourns' signature as the association's secretary.
- Formal organization of the Homestead Association, with Dr. Bourns on the executive committee as one of seven directors, occurred in March 1866.

June 21, 1867, photo by Charles J. Tyson (1838-1906) of Tyson Brothers Photography Studio, Gettysburg
Public Domain, via Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division

Beyond the orphanage

On Tuesday, October 26, 1869, Philinda became a wife for the third time. (Her first marriage, which lasted for 9 brief months, from April 15, 1850, to January 10, 1851, ended in widowhood with the death of her teen-aged husband, Justin H. Smith, from unknown causes.)

- In a ceremony with about 100 attendees at the orphanage, Philinda married Asa Barnes (1807 - February 12, 1881), a twice-widowed, retired Methodist Episcopal minister who was 24 years her senior.
- According to Humiston family lore, it was a marriage of convenience which offered an escape from the orphanage.

After a ten-day honeymoon in Nunda, in western New York's Livingston County, the couple settled into Asa's home in the hill-dotted town of Becket, in the southern Berkshire Mountains in western Massachusetts.

- The three children remained in the orphanage, where they numbered among 88 orphans recorded in the 1870 census for Pennsylvania.
- In 1871 the children relocated to their new home in Becket.
- On Tuesday, May 2, 1871, Asa became the court-appointed guardian of his stepchildren.

Philinda's third marriage disqualified her from further receipt of her army widow's pension.

- As guardian, Asa, however, applied for a pension on the children's behalf. His application was approved in November 1872 and was retroactive to October 1869, the date of his marriage to Philinda. Monthly payments were \$8.00 (\$154.00 in 2014), plus \$2.00 (\$38.00 in 2014) per child up to the age of 16.

Mid-19th century building dating from Philinda's stay in Becket: built in Greek Revival style in 1855 as schoolhouse for North Becket, historic village in town of Becket



The Becket Arts Center, located in North Becket, intersection of Main St (Rte. 8) & Booker Hill Rd, Becket, MA
[ToddC4176, CC BY SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons](#)

Amos' oldest son Frank

At some point, the Barnes family relocated over 110 miles (177 kilometers) eastward to Shirley, in northeastern Massachusetts' Middlesex County, to be near Lawrence Academy, the private, co-educational boarding school, founded in 1792 in nearby Groton, where the children were enrolled.

Upon entrance at the Academy, Frank and Fred added middle names of Goodwin and Roy, respectively.

Graduating in 1878, Frank became the only one of the three to pursue higher education.

- He moved about 130 miles (209 kilometers) north of the family's residence in Shirley to Hanover, in west central New Hampshire's Grafton County, to study algebra, Greek, and Latin at Dartmouth College. During his studies at the prestigious college, which, having been established in 1769, comprised the elite group of nine Colonial Colleges founded before the American Revolution, Frank decided upon a career in medicine.
- During Frank's junior year, his stepfather succumbed to pneumonia on Saturday, February 12, 1881.

- After graduating from Dartmouth in 1882, Frank briefly taught school in Southwick, in southwestern Massachusetts' Hampden County, before moving 230 miles (370 kilometers) southwestward to enroll in the University of Pennsylvania Medical School in Philadelphia.

Finances for Frank's studies were tenuous.

- He worked his way through Dartmouth College.
- In Philadelphia, he received inconsistent support from Dr. Bourns, who had, nevertheless, earned untold sums over the years from ongoing sales of a series of portraits of the three Humiston children.

Despite challenges, Frank received his medical degree in April 1886. Seven months later, on November 3, 1886, he married Carrie Relief Tarbell, with whom he had been smitten for years since meeting her as one of Alice's classmates at Lawrence Academy, in Carrie's hometown of West Groton.

The couple settled into the village of East Jaffrey and raised six children:

- Alice Mildred (1887);
- Ruth Tarbell (1889);
- Helen Ensworth (1891);
- Frank (1894);
- John (1897); and
- Freda (1899).

On Monday, December 2, 1912, one month after the townspeople had honored their beloved doctor on Sunday, November 3rd, with a surprise 25th-wedding anniversary celebration -- which also represented the length of his service as the town's doctor, deliverer of 1,000 babies -- Frank underwent an operation for gallstones at Boston's Eliot Hospital. Weakened by pericarditis, an inflammation of the double-walled sac covering the heart, Frank passed away on Monday, December 30, 1912, at the age of 57, after undergoing a second operation.

- Frank was buried in Jaffrey's Conant Cemetery, where he would be joined over the years by his mother and his siblings.

view of Mount Monadnock: one of the most frequently climbed mountains in the world; scaled fondly by Ralph Waldo Emerson (May 25, 1803 – April 27, 1882) and Henry David Thoreau (July 12, 1817 – May 6, 1862).

Amos Humiston's oldest son, Franklin, practiced medicine for 25 years in Jaffrey, New Hampshire, in Monadnock's foothills.



"Monadnock Orchard": oil painting by Richard Whitney (born 1946)
[Richard Whitney, CC BY SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons](#)

Philinda, Fred, and Alice

In the 1880s, after Asa's death in 1881, Philinda, Alice, and Fred, uprooting from Shirley, had settled 35 miles (56 kilometers) to the southeast in Cambridge, across the Charles River from Boston.

By 1896, the trio had relocated about 3 miles (5 kilometers) south, in West Somerville, where their life was comfortable, thanks to Alice's employment as a stenographer for a real estate firm in Boston and Fred's success as a Boston-based traveling salesman.

- On Thursday, September 17, 1896, Frank married West Somerville-native Nettie Orne. Within a decade the couple became happy parents of two daughters: Doris Orne in 1897 and Eleanor Ensworth in 1906.

After relocating back to Cambridge after Frank's marriage, Philinda applied in 1901 for restoration of her widow's pension, which had been cancelled by her third marriage 31 years earlier in 1969.

Then in 1903 mother and daughter moved to Ashburnham, in north central Massachusetts' Worcester County, at a distance of about 18 miles (29 kilometers) from Frank's home across the New Hampshire border in Jaffrey.

In 1906, the nomadic mother and daughter settled into a chicken farm, which Alice named Westview, in North Leominster, about five miles (8 kilometers) west of their earlier home in Shirley.

During a visit to her grandchildren and widowed daughter-in-law Carrie in Jaffrey, Philinda suffered a fatal stroke on Tuesday, November 18, 1913, 10+ months after Frank's death.

- Philinda was laid to rest alongside Frank in Conant Cemetery.

Now completely orphaned, Amos' two surviving adult children persevered and maintained family ties, despite Alice's recurrent nomadism.

- Fred was the next to join his mother and brother in Conant Cemetery: on Sunday, March 10, 1918, he succumbed to acute heart disease.
- His obituary, printed in the *Somerville Journal's* March 15, 1918 issue, was the only one to reference Amos Humiston.

Having filed for bankruptcy in Boston in February 1916, Alice lost her chicken farm and resumed a nomadic lifestyle which featured brief stays with her sisters-in-law and adult nieces, in addition to jaunts far afield for temporary employment in New York and Rhode Island.

- Finally in October 1929 Alice boarded a westward train for California, where she settled in Glendale, a suburban city on the northern outskirts of Los Angeles, in proximity to her namesake niece Alice, Frank's oldest daughter, and her first cousin Charles R. Ensworth, son of maternal uncle George.
- Shortly after her arrival, Alice lost everything in the Black Tuesday stock market crash, on Tuesday, October 29, 1929.
- A series of at least ten rooming houses served as Alice's home for the next four years.

On Saturday, December 16, 1933, while sweeping the rugs in her room and talking to her neighbor, Alice was instantly engulfed in flames after her skirt made contact with a heater's open flame. Awakened by the neighbor's screams, the young baker across the hall rescued Alice, extinguishing the flames by rolling her in the hall carpet.

- Alice passed away two days on Monday, December 18, 1933, from second degree burns to her lower body, from waist to ankles, and to her hands.
- Alice's microscopic assets, including only \$10.00 (\$179.00 in 2014) in cash, precluded shipping her body to far-away Conant Cemetery. So, instead, Alice was laid to rest in Glendale's Grand View Memorial Park, in view of the San Gabriel Mountains.

Amos Humiston's only daughter, Alice, found her final resting place in view of a majestic range, the San Gabriel Mountains, on the west coast.

Across the North American continent, on the east coast, Philinda and Alice's two brothers also were laid to rest with a mountain view, in the foothills of the Monadnock.



Glendale and the San Gabriel Mountains
Mitch Barrie (simonov), CC BY SA 2.0, via Flickr

Conclusion: "The love that never falters"

How did Philinda and the three children fare after the death of Amos Humiston on the first day of fighting in the Battle of Gettysburg (July 1 - 3, 1863)?

No matter what their circumstances, the family always seemed to have been sustained by a great love which guided them to maintain their closeness while, at the same time, welcoming the world around them and giving the best parts of themselves to all their activities.

Perhaps their reserve in shielding the deep gashes of pain carved across their hearts by the loss of Amos stemmed from the glaring barrage of publicity in the eight years after his death. Their human interest story brought profits more to others and less to themselves.

The love which Amos expressed, in his letters and in his dying moments as he looked upon the ambrotype of his children, contained so much grandeur that it is clear that the closeness which his survivors maintained throughout their lives would have accorded with Amos' dying wishes.

His sentiments, then and forever, seem perfectly expressed in the first stanza of "I Vow to Thee My Country" by Sir Cecil Arthur Spring Rice (February 27, 1859 – February 14, 1918):

"I vow to thee, my country, all earthly things above,

*Entire and whole and perfect, the service of my love;
The love that asks no question, the love that stands the test,
That lays upon the altar the dearest and the best;
The love that never falters, the love that pays the price,
The love that makes undaunted the final sacrifice."*

Cathedral of the Pines: located about 4 miles (6 kilometers) south of the trio of gravesites for Philinda and her two sons in Conant Cemetery

Cathedral of the Pines expresses another family's loss through sacrifice for country; built as a memorial for Sanderson "Sandy" Sloane, shot down over Germany in 1944; the memorial welcomes visitors of all faiths at the patriotic memorial.



Rindge, Cheshire County, southwestern New Hampshire
[Doug Kerr \(Dougtone\), CC BY SA 2.0, via Flickr](#)

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Gettysburg & The Children of the Battle Field ~ performance of song about Amos Humiston by Bobby Horton (born ca. 1948)

Published on YouTube on October 16, 2012 by Phil Pursley ~ URL:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sc7JUCyYB3c>

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