

PURSUIING THE PAST

Civil War fan working on book to honor past New Hampshire soldiers

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MERRIMACK - Steve Closs is a Civil War buff.

On the walls of his home, he has wide, framed prints of soldiers in battle. A selection of rifles, one armed with a gleaming bayonet. He's got figurines, a collection of themed plates and replica uniforms.

Closs has watched Ken Burns' "The Civil War" documentary so many times he wore out the nine-tape set.

But whenever Closs picks up a book about the war between the north and south, it inevitably slights the Granite State, he says.

Sometimes, there are brief nods to the 5th New Hampshire Regiment, which sustained the most deaths in battle of any infantry or cavalry in the entire Union Army. Other times, a text simply lists the number of New Hampshire dead in a particular battle.

But mostly, there is nothing.

Finally, four years ago, Closs had enough.

"I was just tired of looking at the numbers," he said. "Only 33 killed." Well, who were the 33? What were the circumstances of their death? Did they have a family?

"I wanted to know who the people were."

So Closs set out on his own mission: to research all the men who were in New Hampshire regiments and died during the war.

In the past four years, he's found 2,000 of them.

One by one, he's compiled a thumbnail sketch of each, which will soon appear in a 300-page book he'll call "Granite State Sacrifice for Union: 1861-1865." Each of the sketches includes the soldier's name, birth date and birthplace, where they enlisted, plus the date and manner of death.

"This is personal," Closs said of his work. "It's more about the individual than the fighting man."

In his research, Closs primarily uses two sources of information. Regimental histories, written by officers who were charged with chronicling activity during the war, are his favorite because of the first-person account. Closs has 18 or so volumes on a shelf in his dining room.

He also uses Adjutant Gen. Augustus D. Ayling's "Register of New Hampshire Soldiers and Sailors in the War of the Rebellion," which is basically a list of anyone from New Hampshire who was ever involved in the war.

In his work around the kitchen table, Closs believes he's found some interesting links, such as the brothers McClure. All were from the same area in New Hampshire, and their ages suggest it's possible they were related. Two were in battle; one was accidentally shot.

He also learned New Hampshire sent 18 regiments of infantry, one cavalry, one battery of light artillery, one regiment of heavy artillery and three companies of sharpshooters into the war.

Within those groups were 173 men who had ties to Merrimack and who died for the cause.

Pursuing the past

Civil War buff to publish book honoring past N.H. soldiers

By **KAREN LOVETT**
Staff Writer

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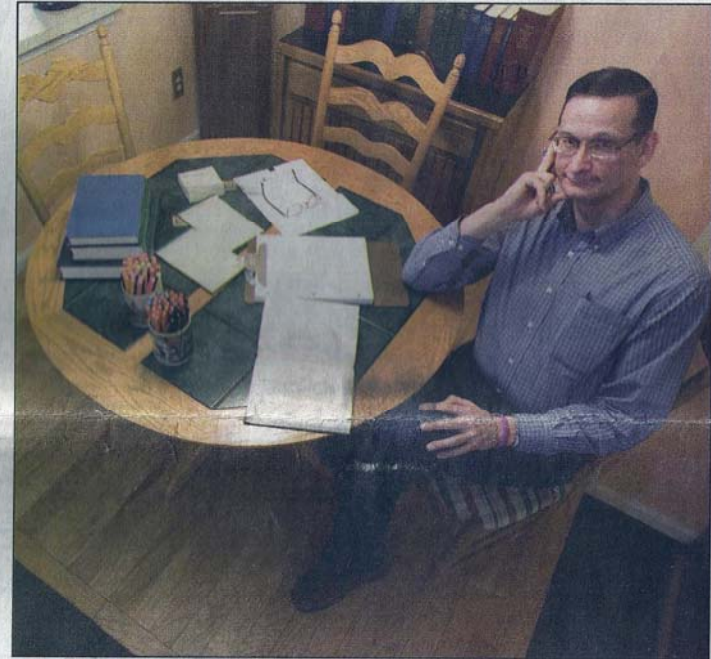
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Grant Morris photo

Steve Closs of Merrimack poses with materials he's using to write a book about men from New Hampshire regiments who died in the Civil War. The now four-year-long project is an undertaking based upon Closs' feeling that these men have not been accurately remembered for their service. He hopes to have the book completed by the end of the year.

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"I'm just amazed at how involved New Hampshire was in that war," Closs said.

Closs' interest in the Civil War emerged when he was young, but it faded for a long time. The topic was brushed over in school, he feels, perhaps because it was a "black eye" in the country's history. Finally, in 1990, Closs' wife Patricia rented the film "Glory," which he had to watch a second time immediately after the first.

Then, he watched the Burns documentary. Next, he bought his first Civil War book, a day-by-day sketch of major events. He topped that off with trips to major war landmarks of Gettysburg, Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville, Manassas and Antietam.

Closs' book collection has grown, and soon, it will include his own title.

"I gotta do it for them," he said, tapping the first page of his manuscript. "And for anybody who's interested in these people."

Closs' wife Patricia died of cancer three years ago, he said. One of her last wishes was that he continue his passion and finish the book.

"Hundreds and thousands of people pass away of cancer," said Closs, a retired Nashua police officer. "I don't want her to be a statistic, and I don't want them to be a statistic."