

# General And Brother Joshua L. Chamberlain

by  
Charles W. Plummer

"Colonel Chamberlain, your gallantry was magnificent, and your coolness and skill saved us."

- Colonel James Rice (commanding 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade, 1<sup>st</sup> Division, Fifth Corps) re Little Round Top, Gettysburg, July 2, 1863.

"Colonel J. L. Chamberlain was wounded . . . gallantly leading his brigade . . . I promoted him on the spot."

- U. S. Grant, speaking of Chamberlain at Rives' Salient, Petersburg, June 18, 1864.

"General, you have the soul of the lion and the heart of the woman."

- General Horatio G. Sikel to Chamberlain at the Quaker Road, Virginia, March 29, 1865.

"The pageant has passed. The day is over. But we linger, loath to think we shall see them no more together — these men, these horses, these colors afield."

- Joshua L. Chamberlain speaking of the last Grand Review of the Army of the Potomac held in Washington on May 23, 1865.

"I say this is a good age, and we need not quarrel with it. We must understand it if we can. At least we must do our work in it. We must have the spirit of reverence and faith, we must balance the mind and heart with God's higher revelation, but we must also take hold of this which we call science, and which makes knowledge power."

- Chamberlain, in his inaugural address as President of Bowdoin College, July, 1872.

"You understand what you want, do you? I am here to preserve the peace and honor of this State, until the rightful government is seated

(and) it is for me to see that the laws of this State are put into effect, without fraud, without force, but with calm thought and sincere purpose. I am here for that, and I shall do it. If anybody wants to kill me for it, here I am."

- Chamberlain to the mob threatening to kill him at Augusta during the crisis of January, 1880.

". . . true greatness is not in nor of the single self; it is of that larger personality, that shared and sharing life with others, in which, each giving of his best for their betterment, we are greater than ourselves; and self-surrender for the sake of that great belonging, is the true nobility."

- Chamberlain, speaking of Abraham Lincoln at Philadelphia, February 12, 1909.

First and foremost, Joshua L. Chamberlain was a State of Maine man through and through. He was Maine educated, he served with Maine regiments during the Civil War, he was elected governor four times, and he served as president of Bowdoin College.

He was also one of the most remarkable soldiers in American history. He was wounded six times, cited for bravery in action four times, awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for heroism at the Battle of Gettysburg, promoted to Brigadier General by order of Ulysses Grant for heroism at Petersburg, Brevetted Major General for heroism at Five Forks, chosen by Grant to have the honor of receiving the southern surrender at Appomattox, and given first place in the final Grand Review of the Army of the Potomac in Washington on May 23, 1865.

Last, and certainly not least, he was a Master Mason whose life was guided by a firm belief in the tenets of Freemasonry: brotherly love, relief and truth.

Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain was born in Brewer, Maine on September 8, 1828. His father, also named Joshua, was a farmer and one of the area's leading citizens in civil and military affairs. He was a hard-working man whose quiet demeanor and stern appearance were rather misleading for, by nature, he was a very kind man. He was determined that his son would have a career in the military.

His mother, Sarah Dupee Barstow Chamberlain, was a woman who outwardly was in sharp contrast to that of her husband. She was vibrant and full of laughter, yet firm when she needed to be. Overflowing with energy, she led a very active life. She had resolved early in her son's life that he would devote himself to carrying out the work of the Lord, and was not in the least disturbed by her husband's insistence that their son would one day enter upon a career in the military.

Lawrence, the name his parents were to call him by throughout their lifetime, led a busy and active life as a boy. There was always plenty of work to be done on the family farm, including the usual chores around the barn, the cutting of wood, the clearing and plowing of fields, and the planting of seeds in the spring and the harvesting of crops in the fall. From all of this, he learned one of life's important lessons that was to stand him in good stead during the trying years of the Civil War, and that was that few things are so difficult that they cannot be mastered.

It should be pointed out, however, that life for him did not center entirely around work. He learned to sail the family sloop, became a powerful swimmer, and a skillful player of the old game of "round ball." He enjoyed music and was an accomplished singer and choral director, as well as an adept player of the bass viola.

The importance of educational studies and career planning were not overlooked. His father sent him to Major Whiting's military academy in Ellsworth, where he learned military drill and became very proficient in Latin and French. Family financial difficulties, however,

necessitated his seeking paid employment, and he took a job as a schoolteacher. He developed a lasting love for this profession, as well as a high opinion of the value of education. He soon discovered, however, that teaching was not to be an unmixed joy, for he had to thrash the usual school bully, a lad as big as he was, before he could establish control of the classroom and credibility with his students.

With the realization that his teenage years were rapidly drawing to a close, he finally made the decision to become a minister, a missionary type, which would make it possible for him to continue to teach school, at the same time spreading the spiritual message of Christianity. Recognizing that to achieve his goal he must acquire a college education, he entered Bowdoin College in 1848. His record there was one of academic excellence, and he was elected Phi Beta Kappa.

As his senior year approached, he reached decisions on two specific matters relating to his personal life and future. The first was to enter Bangor Theological Seminary following his graduation from Bowdoin to train for the ministry. The second was to marry the girl who had captured his heart, a Miss Fanny Adams. He entered Bangor Theological Seminary in the fall of 1852, but set aside his plans for marriage until he had completed his ministerial training.

While attending the Seminary, he made an oral presentation at Bowdoin entitled "Law and Liberty." The Bowdoin faculty and administration were so impressed with his presentation that they invited him to become an instructor in logic and natural theology during the 1855-56 academic year. He enthusiastically accepted the invitation and celebrated by marrying his beloved Fanny Adams on December 7, 1855. He was to remain at Bowdoin from the fall of 1855 to mid-summer of 1862.

During his tenure as a member of the faculty at Bowdoin, he was considered something of a radical, as he strongly believed that students should be treated as adults and not young boys.

He believed they should be freed from the strait-jacket regulations governing their intellectual and social lives. This was in sharp contrast to the thinking of a number of other professors on the faculty who treated their students in a stern and parental manner. In 1859, he made the following statement; "My idea of a college course is that it should afford a liberal education, not a special or professional one, not in any way one-sided. It cannot be a finished education, but should be, I think, a general outline of a symmetrical development, involving such acquaintance with all the departments of knowledge and culture, proportionate to their several values as shall give some insight into the principles and powers by which thought passes into life, together with such practice and exercise in each of the great fields of study that the student may experience himself a little in all."

A review of Bowdoin College historical records reveals that following the bombardment at Fort Sumter, a number of seniors went rushing off to the war. The real impact, however, was to be felt in 1862. With the deepening of the national crisis during that year, Chamberlain grew more and more uneasy. He strongly disapproved of slavery on moral and religious grounds, but was even more adamant about secession. He was critical of secession as the abrogation of a government of laws which the Southern states had originally pledged themselves to support. For as long as he lived, he was to denounce the withdrawal of the South from the Union of the States. There were colleagues on the faculty, however, who did not share his views and did not feel as strongly about the conflict as he did. The more he debated the issues with them, the more the logic of his thinking guided him towards a personal participation in the war.

When it became apparent among the college trustees and faculty members that he harbored serious thoughts about leaving his position and joining the Union Army, attempts were made to persuade him to remain. The college, expressing concerns about his personal welfare and his future should he become seriously disabled from combat wounds, granted him a two-year leave

of absence to travel and study in Europe, hoping this would gradually eliminate any thoughts he had about going off to war. Perhaps it would not be unreasonable to speculate that another reason the college did not want him to leave was because it did not want to lose the services of one of its most able and popular professors.

Chamberlain tentatively accepted the leave of absence, but his conscience got the better of him. He felt that he had to commit himself wholeheartedly to the struggle in which "I saw the very citadel of civilization threatened, a respect for the laws of man and the laws of God." He traveled to Augusta to see Governor Israel Washburn and, as a result of his discussions, accepted appointment as a lieutenant colonel and command of a Maine regiment. When word of this got back to the college, he was severely criticized by the members of the faculty for his actions. They even went so far as to protest his lack of qualifications to Governor Washburn in the hope that the appointment would be withdrawn. The urgent need for troops, however, far exceeded those of Bowdoin College and he quickly dismissed the protest. On August 8, 1862, he wrote to Chamberlain commissioning him a Lieutenant Colonel of the new 20th Regiment Infantry, Maine Volunteers, a regiment whose service record was to become one of the most distinguished on the annals of the Civil War.

During the Civil War years, many Maine men who found themselves on the verge of entering military service were applying in haste for the degrees of Masonry. It is quite probable that they felt it would be helpful to be members of this great Order during their participation in the conflict. The historical records of United Lodge No. 8 in Brunswick reveal that Chamberlain was numbered among this group. We do not know for certain what his primary motivation was to join this great fraternity, but it would seem likely that he had received favorable reports about this ancient institution from colleagues on the Bowdoin faculty who were Masons. The principles of Freemasonry were certainly

consistent with the moral principles that guided his life.

Because of the pressure being placed on lodges to waive the usual waiting period of a month, and the Grand Lodge of Maine's concern that hurry-up work might result in a weakening of the Order at its foundation level, it was decreed that dispensations must be secured and a fee of five dollars charged for a waiver. At a special communication of United Lodge No. 8, held on the evening of August 27, 1862, the secretary presented a dispensation from Grand Master Josiah H. Drumond, to allow Chamberlain to take his Masonic degrees in less than the prescribed time. This, in itself, was somewhat unusual, for dispensations were usually handled by the District Deputy Grand Master. A ballot was taken and Chamberlain was accepted for the Entered Apprentice Degree. While he was being notified of his acceptance and in the process of being brought to the lodge to take the degree, another ballot was taken and it was voted to confer upon him the Fellowcraft Degree. Thus, on that very same night, he was initiated as an Entered Apprentice and passed to the degree of Fellowcraft. At 8:00 a.m. the very next morning, the lodge reconvened and he was raised to the sublime degree of Master Mason. On September 12, 1862, he was proposed as a member, and on October 7, 1862, a ballot was taken and he was officially elected a member of United Lodge.

Within a matter of days, he and the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine Regiment were off to Washington, arriving there on Sunday, September 7, 1862. On September 12, the regiment started on a forced march that was eventually to lead them to Antietam and a memorable place in history. By war's end, the name of Chamberlain and the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine were famous and battle honors were earned at Antietam, Shepherdstown Ford, Fredericksburg, Middleburg, Gettysburg, Rappahannock Station, Mine Run, The Wilderness, Laurel Hill, North Anna, Bethesda Church, Petersburg, Weldon Railroad, Peebles' Farm, Hatcher's Run, Quaker Road, White Oak Road, Five Forks and Appomattox. Chamberlain's courage and leadership were ever

present, but of all the battles in which he participated, he is best remembered for the courage displayed at Little Round Top during the Battle of Gettysburg on July 2, 1863. His gallant actions there won him the Congressional Medal of Honor. Colonel John Oates of the 15th Alabama, Army of the Confederacy, a man who clearly saw the South's lost opportunity at Little Round Top, best described the action of Chamberlain and his men when he said, "There never were harder fighters than the Twentieth Maine men and their gallant Colonel (Chamberlain). Their skill and persistency and great bravery saved Little Round Top and the Army of the Potomac from defeat. Great events sometimes turn on comparatively small affairs."

Further honors were to come to Chamberlain. On Palm Sunday night, April 9, 1865, General Griffin summoned him to his headquarters and informed him that he was to have the honor of receiving the surrender of the Southern infantry on April 12. The morning of April 12 dawned chill and grey. It was the fourth anniversary of that day when a Confederate shell burst over Fort Sumter in Charleston Harbor, ushering in the Civil War. At 9:00, the Confederates began falling in for the final surrender and, as Chamberlain watched the remnant of General Lee's once-great army, one some historians have described as the most effective fighting machine of its size ever created by the American people, the significance of the occasion made a deep impression upon his mind. He had resolved earlier to recognize the moment by saluting the Southern troops. He was well-aware of the responsibility he was taking upon himself with this decision and the criticism that was sure to follow as it indeed did. But he was to defend his actions by saying, "My chief reason was one for which I sought no authority or asked forgiveness. Before us in proud humiliation stood the embodiment of mankind; men whom neither toils and sufferings, nor the face of death, nor disaster, nor hopelessness could bend from their resolve; standing before us now, thin, worn and famished, but erect, and with eyes looking level into ours, waking memories that bound us together as no other bond; was not such manhood to be welcomed back into a

union so tested and assured?" This act of brotherly love literally astounded the world, and years later the people of the South still refer to him as a great general.

In addition to being accorded the honor of receiving the Southern surrender, he was numbered among the select few who were to lead the troops of the Army of the Potomac as they passed in review during the Grand Review held in Washington on May 23, 1865. This turned out to be a great emotional experience for him and he described it in the following words, "The pageant has passed. The day is over. But we linger, loath to think we shall see them no more together - these men, these horses, these colors afield."

In the roll call of valor, his name certainly stands out. He had participated in twenty four battles, capturing 2,700 prisoners and eight battle flags. He was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for his gallantry at Gettysburg, was promoted to Brigadier General for his efforts at Rives' Salient, and was promoted to Major General for his courage at the Quaker Road. There were at least five horses shot from under him and six times he was seriously or slightly wounded. A miniball at Rives' Salient nearly killed him and caused him untold agony until the day he died.

Reflecting on his Civil War experiences years later, Chamberlain did not perceive war as something dreadful and defined it in solid human values. He was to say, "We cannot accept General Sherman's synonym as a complete connotation or definition of war. Fighting and destruction are terrible, but are sometimes agencies of heavenly, rather than hellish, powers. In the privations and sufferings endured, as well as in the strenuous action of battle, some of the highest qualities of manhood are called forth - courage, self-command, sacrifice of self for the sake of something held higher - wherein we take it chivalry finds its value, and on another side fortitude, patience, warmth of comradeship and, in the darkest hours, tenderness of caring for the wounded and stricken, exhausting and unceasing as that of

gentlest womanhood which allies us to the highest personality."

On January 16, 1866, he was released from military service and returned to Bowdoin College. As spring approached, leaders of the Republican Party discussed with him the possibility of his becoming the party's candidate for governor during the next election. Giving this some thought, he finally allowed his name to be entered as a candidate in the Republican convention to be held in June and he was elected as the party candidate. During this election for governor, he won out over his Democratic opponent, Eben F. Pillsbury, an Augusta newspaperman. He was reelected to that office three more times before his gubernatorial career was to come to an end. Years later, President William DeWitt Hyde of Bowdoin College said of him, "As a statesman, he was in advance of his time. Called to solve the problems entailed by the Civil War, his administration as Governor was marked by patience and fairness. He refused to use the power that people gave him for ends other than the people's good, and when the leaders of his party advocated the impeachment of the President (Johnson), the protracted agitation of sectional differences, and immediate suffrage for the emancipated Negroes, he stood firmly, sagaciously and self-sacrificing for more moderate and pacific measures - measures which subsequent history has shown to be far more beneficial than those which, in the flush of military victory, the heat of party strife, and the fire of personal ambition, unfortunately prevailed."

In 1871, with the impending departure of Bowdoin's president Samuel Harris, he was offered the presidency of his alma mater, which he accepted with enthusiasm. He was to remain in that position until 1883 when failing health persuaded him to resign the office.

As the year 1913 was drawing to a close, his old battle wound again became inflamed and, by January of 1914, he was completely prostrated at his home in Brunswick. Shortly after half-past

nine on the morning of February 24, 1914, he passed into quiet death.

Following a volley of rifles in a final salute, and the haunting notes of Dan Butterfield's "Taps," he was laid to rest in Pinegrove Cemetery next to Bowdoin College. Using those beautiful words written by John Bunyan long ago, one might say of him, "So he passed over, and all the trumpets sounded for him on the other side." A simple stone marks his resting place, on which is engraved simply his name and the date of birth and the date of death.

It would be very difficult to find words to describe the life of this remarkable man and Freemason, and perhaps we would do well to borrow those spoken by General Horatio Sickel at the Quaker Road, Virginia, on March 29, 1865, when he described him as a man who had "the soul of the lion and the heart of the woman."

# BIBLIOGRAPHY

Davis, Burke, To Appomattox, Rinehard and Company, Inc., (New York), 1959.

Norton, Oliver W., The Attack and Defense of Little Round Top, Gettysburg, July 2, 1863, The Neale Publishing Company, (New York), 1913.

Pullen, John J., The Twentieth Maine, J. B. Lippincott Company, (Philadelphia), 1957.

Shaara, Michael, The Killer Angels, Ballantine Books, (New York), 1974.

Wallace, Willard M., Soul of the Lion, Thomas Nelson and Sons, (New York), 1960.

Annual Report of the Adjutant General of the State of Maine for the Year 1863, Stevens and Sayward Printers, (Augusta), 1855.

Chamberlain Collection, Maine Historical Society, Portland, Maine.

History of United Lodge No. 8, Brunswick, Maine.

In Memoriam: Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain, Late Major-General, U.S.V. Circular No. 5, Series of 1914, Whole Number 328, Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States, Commandery of the State of Maine, Portland, 1914.

Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain, A Sketch, Prepared for the Report of the Chamberlain Association of America, No. Author, Place or Date, Auburn Public Library, Auburn, Maine.