

ONCE IN A GREAT WHILE, a nineteenth-century treasure emerges from a closet, a basement, or in this case, a dresser drawer. The Civil War journal and papers of Sgt. George R. Buckman of the famed First Minnesota Volunteer Infantry Regiment, donated to the Minnesota Historical Society 2006, are one such find.

Born in New York in 1832, Buckman moved to Minnesota in 1855 and settled in Waseca County, where he worked as a carpenter. He enlisted in 1861, at age 28, in the First Minnesota, Company G. Buckman purchased his journal in Gettysburg on July 22, 1863, and used it until his muster out in May 1864. His almost daily entries are often graphic, emotional, detailed descriptions that create a timeless narrative of the human experience during war.

While working at the Second Corps field hospital at Gettysburg, Buckman wrote:

24th [July 1863] Have been busy in erecting bunks in the tents for the wounded. Saw Mr. Silas Newcomb of Faribault Minn^a. Went with him to the graves of the Minn^a. men. After dinner took a walk over the battlefield for the first time. Everything bore testimony to the terrible struggle. The stench of buried horses and of half buried men—in some instances was nearly suffocating. . . . A person must see for himself—to have any idea of the sad appearance of a great battle field. Language must fail to describe scene. Parted with friend N—at the Cemetery and made my way



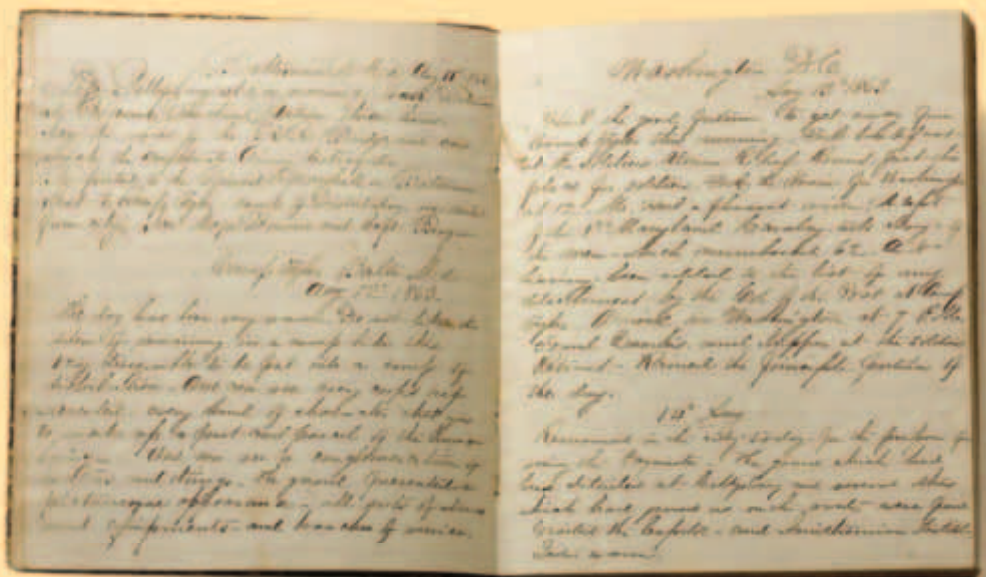
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to the Hosp'l. with sad feelings— After sundown—at the request of a young man whose brother died from wounds received at the late battle—took up the remains by moonlight—placed them in a coffin—and buried them again.

Also among Buckman's papers is a 19-page manuscript written in 1897, recounting the Gettysburg campaign and his work in field hospitals. A May 11, 1862, letter from Dover Landing, Virginia, describes the First Minnesota's role in the Battle of West Point and capture of Yorktown and relates vivid details of the Confederate camps, Confederate arming of African Americans, and of buried torpedoes killing soldiers.

After the war George Buckman returned to Minnesota. He married Isadora Wood in 1869, and they had three children. He died, aged 66, in Waseca in 1899.

—Molly Tierney, curator of manuscripts at the Minnesota Historical Society when the Buckman papers were acquired



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