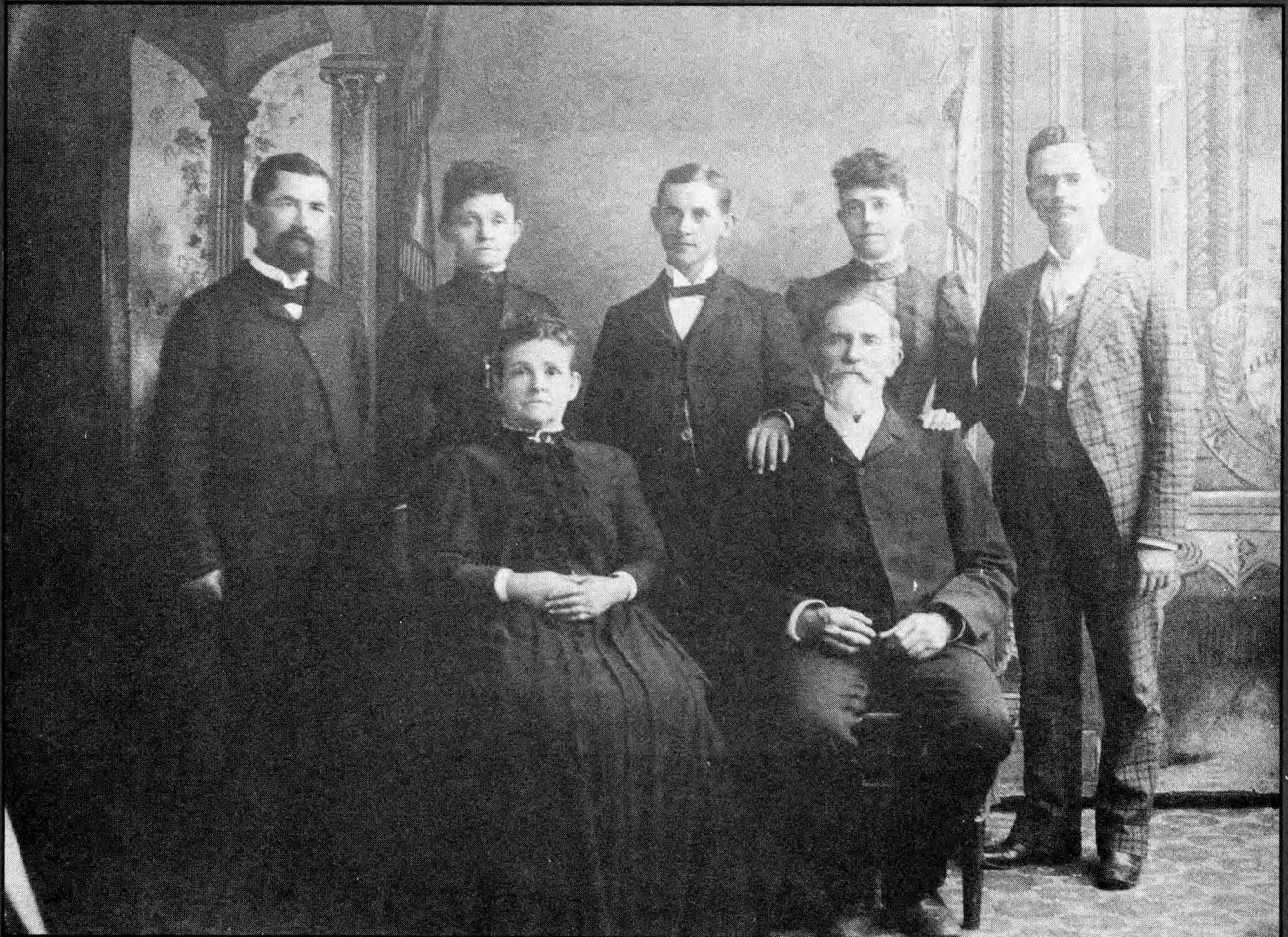


An Act Of Charity
The Hand Of Friendship
A Bond Between



Courtesy of Frank M. Bushnell

A SOUTHERN NURSE AND A NORTHERN PATIENT

By Mark Dunkelman
And Michael Winey

“**T**he Yankees are in the pocket!” The shrill scream of a little girl startled Mrs. Fannie A. Jackson awake. It was very warm that Sunday, May 8, 1864, and Mrs. Jackson had dozed off over a paper she was reading. For several days she had heard cannonading to the north, towards Dalton. Her assumption was that any advance of the Union army would be seven miles to the east, through Resaca, where the railroad ran. “The Yankees are in the pocket!” She was wide awake now. The Yankees were a flanking force of Major General William T. Sherman’s army. The pocket was a pass in the mountains of northern Georgia called Snake Creek Gap, where Mrs. Jackson had her home.

Her first thought was to hide some things, but she dismissed it. The soldiers would find anything she tried to conceal. Walking to her gate, she watched Confederate troops rush by, and they told her the whole Union army was moving through the gap. They hurried on and the road was again deserted and quiet. But soon after, a Yankee cavalryman galloped up to her gate, pistol drawn and cocked, and fired a barrage of questions at her. How long ago had she seen any Rebs? How far to Resaca? How large was the Confederate force? Where was her husband? Before he was through, there was a regiment of horsemen milling about beyond the gate, many of them repeating the same questions to her. At length a kindly trooper stopped the interrogation, suggested she remain indoors and said he would keep an eye on her mule, hitched to the fence. That night, Union pickets camped near the house. When morning came, the mule was gone. With the coming of daylight the din of a nearby battle swelled to fill the air. The road in front of the Jackson home was a swirling scene of men double-

quicking to the front and ambulances hurrying forward as officers shouted orders through the noise. War had come in terrible earnest to Snake Creek Gap, and to Fannie Jackson.

The war had already deeply affected Mrs. Jackson’s life. It had taken her husband away from her, and left her to provide for their three young children. And her husband had not been a willing volunteer. When it became evident that all able-bodied men had to join the army, he enlisted in a regiment of Georgia state troops. A few months later, his unit was conscripted for the duration of the war. Fannie had visited him several times, and he had been home occasionally. He had revealed to her his hatred of the Confederacy and vowed that if the army retreated past their house, he would desert and go north with her and the children.

Indeed, Fannie believed many in northern Georgia possessed strong Union sentiment. She knew of Union men living for months in caves in the mountains or other hiding places, fed by their friends. There were so many deserters in the mountains that state troops had been ordered to hunt them out. As a native, she loved the South but deplored secession. And the root cause of the war, she felt, was slavery. “My early life was spent among slaves,” she recalled in later years. “I loved my colored mama as my own, but from my earliest recollection, I felt as if slavery was wrong . . . a dark spot on American civilization . . . so foul an evil.”

She managed to take care of the family in her husband’s absence, but it was hard. The Union blockade of Southern seaports had a painful impact on home life in the Confederacy. Women spun and wove all the fabric for clothing — “Dixie silk,” they called it. The lack of cards — wire brushes to comb cotton before spinning — was especially trying. Barks, roots, leaves, berries and rocks were used to dye the homespun cloth. Spinning occupied nights; daytime was given to work in the fields. Fannie protected herself from the sun with a shaker bonnet she made of rushes from the swamps, trimmed with a strip of

her grandmother’s old dress. For salt, she dug up the brine-saturated earth in the smokehouse. After dousing the soil with water to wash out the salt, she boiled the resulting brine until the water evaporated and left the precious and savory white crystals. Shoes were made pairing cowhide soles with cloth uppers. Fannie chopped wood, hoed with a team and built fences with success, but she had trouble sowing grain and plowing. Then the Yankees came, and Fannie lost everything.

Late on the evening of May 13, five days after the Union penetration of Snake Creek Gap, Lieutenant Colonel William G. Le Duc lay down in his newly pitched tent for a much needed rest. Le Duc was chief quartermaster of the Union XX Corps, on the staff of corps commander Major General Joseph Hooker, whose headquarters were in the yard of a little house nearby. Le Duc couldn’t get to sleep. He was disturbed by a sound — he thought it might be the muffled crying of a baby. Rising, he approached the house, passing through the debris of a battlefield and past a broken-down garden fence. As he described the place in a letter to his wife, “The house was a log cabin, weather boarded, a building with one room and with a window — that is a square hole in one end, with a shutter hung on hinges on



Opposite: Southern nurse Fannie Jackson and her family, long after the Civil War. Her son Martin stands at the far right. **Right:** William G. Le Duc, Jackson’s army advocate.

the outside — no sash or frame for glazing.” Peering in the window, he saw a single bed and the entire floor covered with wounded or sick soldiers. Caring for them was a woman, who was preparing food or medicine by an open fire. She noticed Le Duc and asked if there was anything she could do for him. He replied by asking about the crying baby. The woman explained the noise was the bleating of her children’s pet lamb, hidden in a box in the shed. The lamb was all the family had left. Cows, sheep, hogs, chicken, bacon, meal, garden crops — all had been swept away. She didn’t cry as she told Le Duc the story, but he noted “every tone of her voice was a tear.”

The woman was Fannie Jackson. She had offered her home to an army surgeon for use as a hospital, and had volunteered to nurse the sick and injured. Le Duc, touched by her courage and compassion amid the wreckage of her home, had his orderlies attend to the lamb and gave Mrs. Jackson two sacks of corn and some pork. Fannie was in turn deeply grateful, and always remembered Le Duc as “an invaluable friend, a patriotic soldier & christian gentleman.” Le Duc also provided her with a recommendatory letter. She received similar letters from surgeons, hospital stewards and chaplains who were likewise impressed with her faithful nursing of the Union wounded. Two days after the last maimed soldier was removed from her home, Fannie went down the valley and stayed with friends for two weeks. She returned to her home at Snake Creek Gap once, but heartbroken by the desolation, she never returned again. On June 12, 1864, Fannie Jackson resumed her career as a nurse when she joined the General Field Hospital of the Army of the Cumberland.

On the spring day when Fannie had been rudely awakened from her nap by the Union invasion that would change her life, a young soldier from New York State was engaged in his first hard fighting. Now the Atlanta Campaign was in full swing, and he would see more and frequent action with the Army of the Cumberland. His name was Martin D. Bushnell — a

name that would become especially dear to Fannie Jackson.

Born February 15, 1842 at Napoli, Cattaraugus County, New York, Bushnell was working there as a farmer when the war broke out. On August 15, 1862, the twenty-year-old enlisted at Napoli to serve three years. He was five feet, eleven inches tall, with light complexion and hair and blue eyes. On September 25, Bushnell was mustered in as a corporal of Company H, in the newly formed 154th New York Infantry Volunteers. He moved with his regiment from its rendezvous at Jamestown, New York to an encampment across the Potomac from Washington, D.C. The unit began its service fighting in several inconsequential movements in northern Virginia.

Bushnell was temporarily disabled when he entered a hospital at Fairfax, Virginia on December 10, 1862, suffering from bronchitis. Eleven days later he was admitted to the hospital at Fort Schuyler in New York City’s harbor. A long convalescence ensued. Bushnell was released in June 1863, and on July 1 he wrote his parents from a distribution camp near Washington. “I could have got into the invalid corps. . .” he wrote, “but I did not prefer belonging to a crippled brigade. Whenever I was examined by a surgeon, I was sound as a rock. I could not afford to do as I had seen some do with crutches and 17 canes.”

By the time Bushnell rejoined his comrades in the 154th New York, they had been through two gruesome battles — Chancellorsville, Virginia (May 1863) and Gettysburg, Pennsylvania (July 1863). In September 1863 the regiment, as part of the XI Corps, was transferred from the Army of the Potomac to the Army of the Cumberland serving in the western theater. Moved to Tennessee, Corporal Bushnell and his regiment helped open the “Cracker Line,” a land and river supply route to besieged Chattanooga, in October. (The route was named for thehardtack rations it brought.) They skirmished with Confederates at the foot of Missionary Ridge in November, and marched to Knoxville in December to relieve besieged

Union forces there. The winter of 1863 was passed in camp at Lookout Valley, Tennessee. In April 1864, as the campaigning season approached, Bushnell was on daily duty as corporal of the color guard.

On May 8, 1864, he found himself in Georgia, about ten miles north of Fannie Jackson’s old homestead. That day the 154th New York charged up Rocky Face Ridge and planted its colors on the crest. But the flag didn’t stay in place for long. The regiment was driven back down the mountainside with heavy casualties. In the days that followed, Bushnell and the remainder of the regiment passed the little house in Snake Creek Gap and proceeded onward to battles at Resaca (May 14-15), New Hope Church (May 25-27), and actions at Lost Mountain (June and July), fighting several skirmishes along the way. On June 3, Bushnell noted in a letter home, “We are now experiencing what may very well be called real field service and I stand up very well. . . . We had terrible rain yesterday. We were standing in line of battle all the time saying with a grin, ‘Who would not be a soldier?’ It is hard but all live in hopes of better times. You will please be as little concerned about me as possible. I trust that all will be well with me. My fate be what it may. My chance and situation is no worse than thousands of others. I have always felt I should survive this war, the end of which cannot be very far distant.”

For Bushnell, the end of the fighting came early. On June 24, 1864, near Kolb’s Farm, Georgia, a minié bullet smashed into his right ankle, fracturing the bones. Two hours later, in the division field hospital near the line of battle, Surgeon James Reiley of the 33d New Jersey administered chloroform to the young veteran. Then the surgeon amputated two thirds of Bushnell’s leg. As the operation ended, the hospital came under fire of enemy artillery. Surgeons and attendants fled, leaving their patients behind. When the firing ceased, Bushnell was carried farther to the rear, his fresh amputation bleeding pro-

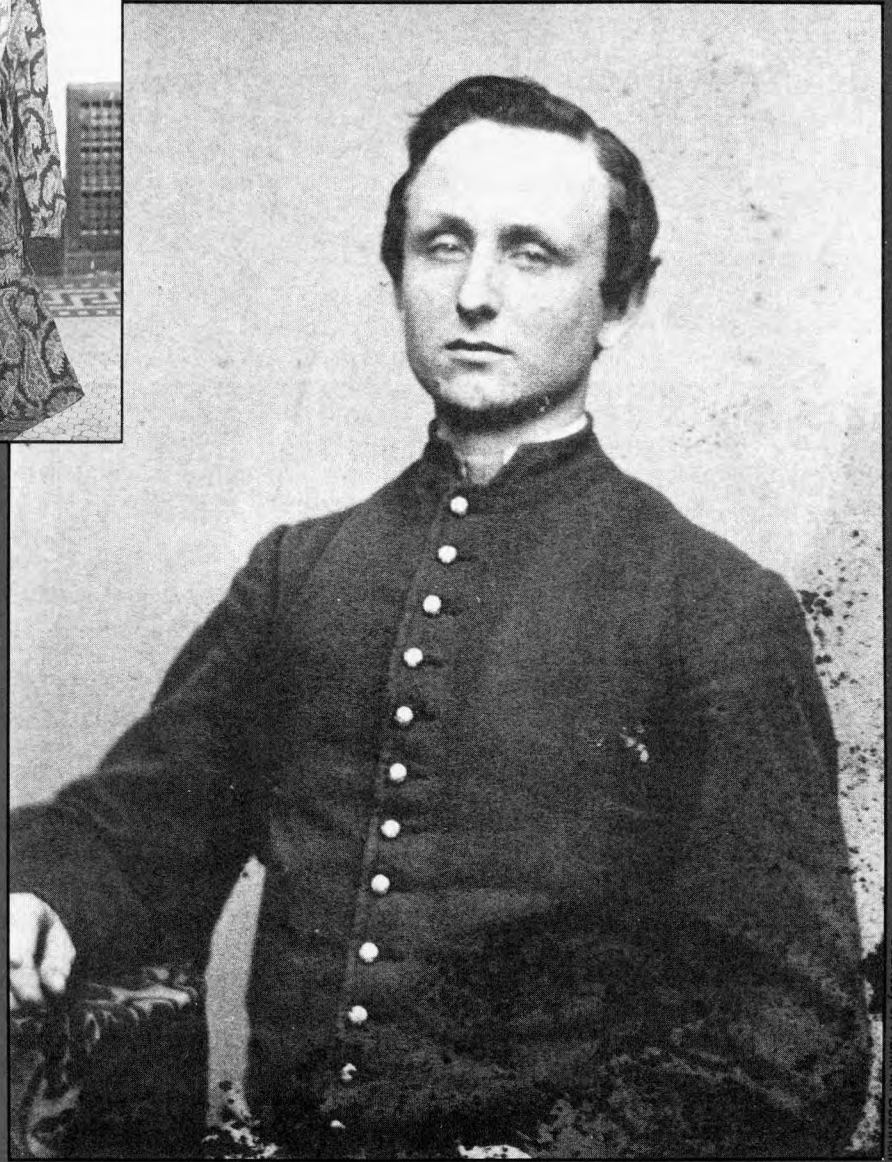
Below: Fannie Jackson's friend, Martin Bushnell of Napoli, New York. His 154th New York Regiment served through the March to the Sea and the Carolina Campaign, mustering out on June 11, 1865. Inset: The paisley robe worn by Bushnell.



Cattaraugus County Historical Museum

fusely. The skin over the wound began to slough off, a condition later worsened by gangrene. Initially, however, Bushnell was not believed to be in mortal danger. Emory Sweetland, a member of the 154th New York serving as a hospital steward, wrote his wife the day after the operation: "Martin Bushnell was hit yesterday in the ankle by a stray bullet fired by the rebs & has had his right foot taken off. he is doing well. he was a first rate soldier."

A day or two later, at the Army of the Cumberland's general field hospital, Dr. M.C. Woodworth, surgeon in charge, approached nurse Fannie Jackson. He told her he had discovered a relative of his among the wounded. He had never met this cousin before, but he wanted Mrs. Jackson to take special care of him. Soon Martin Bushnell was carried in on a cot, pale and reduced from his hemorrhagic wound and exhausted from the extreme heat. "I was drawn to him at first sight," Mrs. Jackson later recalled. "Dr. Woodworth told the young man I was to be a Mother to him for the present. . . . His classic face, resigned submissive look and helpless condition made me feel that I had a patient who would be patient and a pleasure to take care of. I found it to be so. A more noble, patriotic, unselfish soldier I



Courtesy of Frank M. Bushnell

never met. I had the opportunity to know his every day life as I was his nurse and had him in my apartments, and knew his every day life for four months."

Through the soldier's weeks of weariness and pain, his life "suspended by a thread," Fannie Jackson nursed him. "The long days of watching with such a patient sufferer endeared him & he became to us as a brother" she wrote. Any little extras she could obtain went to Martin. A silken paisley robe she found became his. The only

complaint she ever knew him to make was an entry in his diary: "Mrs. J. is gone & I am lonely."

By October 1864, Martin Bushnell and Fannie Jackson had parted. Late that month he was at home at Napoli on furlough. While there he received a letter from another Napolian, First Lieutenant George C. "Guy" Waterman of the 154th New York, with the regiment at Atlanta. Waterman was glad Martin had got home all

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right, and included this rather cryptic and callous message: "You must take good care of yourself and not get 'Shot' (in the neck I mean) and keep that 'Stump' away from the girls & lookout for Martin D. Bushnell & you are all right."

Bushnell was admitted to Sisters of Charity General Hospital in Buffalo in mid-November. He was there for the next seven months. His wound appeared to have healed, and he was fitted for an artificial leg. During his stay in Buffalo, the disabled soldier participated in a memorable but sad event. In late April 1865, he rode in President Lincoln's funeral procession through the city. He described the cortege for his parents: "Invalid Soldiers like myself had the honor of riding in carriages a little ways behind the hearse. There was a continual tolling of bells kept up and at regular intervals the firing of cannon. As we halted a prayer and speech was made. The whole scene was marked with Solemnity and the day one long to be remembered by me and all who love the name and memory of Abraham Lincoln."

On June 29, 1865, Bushnell was transferred from the Sisters of Charity Hospital to New York City. There, on August 12, he was discharged by reason of total disability from the army's general hospital in Central Park. In addition to his discharge, the crippled soldier received a brevet as first lieutenant in Company H of the 154th New York. Twelve days later, Bushnell was in Buffalo, where he applied for a pension. "Guy" Waterman supplied an affidavit stating he was with the corporal at Kolb's Farm and saw him wounded. In January 1866, Bushnell was admitted to the pension rolls at a rate of eight dollars per month, retroactive to the date of his application.

But Bushnell's stump never healed properly. In 1866, he traveled from Napoli to the home of his cousin, Dr. Woodworth, in Warren, Ohio. There, on June 5, Woodworth amputated part of the remaining portion of the leg.

Bushnell died a few hours later.

Bushnell's body was returned to Napoli for burial. A marble stone marked his grave, and Fannie Jackson was honored by a request to write an epitaph. Time has eroded the last two lines of her quatrain, but the first two can still be deciphered:

"Sleep on our loving brother, sleep

This marble shall thy memory keep. . ."

Fannie Jackson had not seen her friend Bushnell since he had left her care in Autumn 1864. She had remained a nurse with the Army of the Cumberland's general field hospital, following the army through the Atlanta Campaign and on its moves southward. She received a commission from the Western Sanitary Commission, headquartered in St. Louis. And in later years she recalled her duties — preparing special diets, sewing on buttons and patches, encouraging the homesick, brushing flies from and bathing fevered brows, and consoling the dying. She bore up to these tasks stoically, but one night during the siege of Atlanta she broke down. The mingled sounds of artillery fire and a heavy thunderstorm seemed intolerable to her. She went to bed, covered her head and stopped up her ears.

Through all her months as a nurse, Fannie hoped for a reunion with her husband. She wrote letters to him but received no reply. She even had a soldier searching

for him among Confederate prisoners, but without luck. After the fall of Atlanta, Fannie considered crossing the truce line to search for him. Then, one day during the occupation of Atlanta, Colonel Le Duc entered the provost marshal's office to conduct business. He found the provost marshal arguing with a surgeon about a recently captured prisoner, whose wife had been a nurse under the surgeon. He asked how a Rebel woman was a nurse in a Union hospital, and the surgeon replied by handing Le Duc the letter he had written at Snake Creek Gap recommending Mrs. Jackson. Because of the urgings of Le Duc, Dr. Woodworth and others, Fannie's husband was released and the couple had a joyous reunion.

Before Sherman abandoned Atlanta for his seaward march, the Jacksons went to Chattanooga, Tennessee. Mr. Jackson began working for the U.S. Government in the Military Construction Corps, and Fannie became chief female nurse of the Federals' General Hospital No. 3 on Lookout Mountain. She fell ill but was nursed back to health by her husband and hospital personnel. Then Fannie continued her work months after the war's end, serving until September 6, 1865, when she was relieved of duty and commended for performing faithfully.

Little is known of Mrs. Jackson's postwar life. In 1874 her application for a federal pension was disallowed, but she obtained William Le Duc's address from his brother, a member of the Kansas legislature. Le Duc added his persuasion to a sheaf of testimonial letters from former army surgeons, and in the early 1890s Fannie was granted a nurse's pension. She was then living in Cedar Junction, Johnson County, Kansas, suffering from a variety of ailments. She moved to Olathe, Kansas sometime before her death on February 19, 1925.

Fannie Jackson never forgot her wartime encounter with Martin Bushnell. She named her youngest son Martin in his honor, and around 1910 she journeyed from Kansas to Napoli, New York. There she placed a wax wreath on her friend's grave. The wreath remained there for years. ■



Martin's headstone.

Mark H. Dunkelmann