



From the Historian's Corner

New York City Chapter, NSDAR
Marianne Ward, Regent Jean Hayter, Historian

Special Issue

Reubena Hyde Walworth
February 20, 1867 - October 18, 1898
Early New York City Chapter Member
Saratoga Chapter, National Society Daughters of the American Revolution
Re-Dedication Monument Ceremony
Saturday, April 30, 2011

New York State Regent, Denise Doring Van Buren, keynote speaker at the re-dedication ceremony said:

Each year, in a formal celebration just blocks from the White House, the National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution presents the prestigious Dr. Anita Newcomb McGee award to that year's outstanding Army Nurse. The award is named in recognition of the DAR member who founded the DAR Hospital Corps during the Spanish-American War. Dr. McGee is buried in Arlington National Cemetery — recognized as the American patriot who founded what we know today as the Army Nurse Corps.

But here in this quiet place on this spring day, in Saratoga Springs, New York, we recall the life of a young woman whose name is not as well known, whose story is largely lost to the ages; another DAR member, but this one who literally lived and died in fulfillment of the patriotic mission of our organization; one who gave her very life in service to the Nursing Profession, to the DAR and to her nation: Reubena Hyde Walworth,



Reubena Hyde Walworth

No. 47, National Society Daughters of the American Revolution, in 1893, became a member of the New York City Chapter, and in 1895 transferred to the Saratoga Chapter, of which she continued to be a member until her death.

daughter of one of the National Society's four founders and DAR National Number 47.

Who was this woman? And why is it altogether fitting, that we, as modern day patriotic men and women, continue to tell her more-than-century-old story? I am honored to have the opportunity, as New York State Regent of the organization that she so loved, to address you today — and to pay tribute to Reubena Hyde Walworth's compelling story of service and sacrifice.

She was named, as so many of us well know, after her grandfather, Reuben Hyde Walworth, the last Chancellor of New York State, resident of this fine city. Many of us also well know the tragic events of their family's saga — mental illness, domestic abuse, divorce in a time when it was uncommon, the horror of her own brother's murder of their own father — a story that became a national sensation. But these events are not the proper way to honor Ruby's memory — and should not overshadow our ceremonies today.

Described by family and

contemporaries as sweet, reserved and artistic, surely it was the difficulties of her life that must have shaped in Reubena Hyde Walworth a delicate sensibility; a gentleness in response to near-continuous family conflict; a devotion to her nation that molded a selfless woman who gave her last ounce of strength to others so that they might live and know its true blessings.

Please allow me to begin this story not in her tumultuous family life but, instead, in a small village on the eastern most point of Long Island, at Montauk. It was there in 1898, that the United States government constructed Camp Wyckoff, named for Colonel Charles Wyckoff, who had been killed in action in Santiago in August. The camp was one of many detention sites across the country, designed to serve as temporary containment areas for soldiers returning from the Spanish-American war in Cuba and Puerto Rico; each camp contained at least one hospital unit. The medical community had less than two months to create these hospitals following the short war, and thousands of men needed to be first returned to full health before returning themselves to the populated cities the likes of New York, San Francisco and Chicago, where surely what were believed to be contagious diseases would have created thousands more deaths. It was estimated that 80 percent of the soldiers who served during the Spanish American war were to some degree ill at its conclusion. Typhoid fever, which resulted from poor sanitary conditions in the Caribbean war zone, was one of the most prominent causes of death, as it was Reubena's. But deadly yellow fever also returned to our shores with these men.

In the 19th century, yellow fever was one of the most dangerous of infectious diseases. It brings fever, nausea, and pain; it generally subsides after several days. In some patients, however, a toxic phase follows, in which liver damage with jaundice occurs, giving the name of the disease, and leading to death.

Medical officials of 1898, however, did not realize that these deadly illnesses were spread through



*New York State Regent
Denise Doring Van Buren*

mosquitoes or sanitary conditions, and instead believed they were airborne. They believed that the northerly breezes on Long Island would carry the illnesses out to sea, and so Camp Wyckoff was constructed in a remote location on the end of Long Island, accessible by both deep water transport ships and transport trains.

With little advance warning, 29,000 Spanish American war veterans set sail from Cuba to Montauk. The first ships arrived on what is still called today "Rough Rider" landing, on August 14, 1898. A brass band played and the crowd roared as Teddy Roosevelt himself was the first one down the gang plank. The Hero of San Juan Hill told reporters, "I am in a disgracefully healthy condition. I've had a bully time and a bully fight."

But the music and the bravado did not last long. The men who arrived at Camp Wyckoff were in dire need of rest, food, clothing, sanitary facilities, and most of all, medical care. Tragically, the hastily created tent city was not prepared for them. "Starving Men at Montauk," cried the New York Journal. "Story of Horrors Hourly Grows Worse," "It is Murder that is Being Done at Montauk," the headlines read.

Help arrived from private citizens, most notably the Women's National War Relief Association. Incorporated at Albany in August 1898, its president was Mrs. General U.S. Grant and its

first director was Ellen Hardin Walworth, Ruby's mother. These women took charge of providing clean sheets, bottled water and milk; fresh fruit, clean clothes, new boots.

When the camp hospital's population was at its highest with nearly 10,000 men to be cared for, the medical staff included 40 physicians, 133 hospital corpsmen, and 329 female nurses. Only one of those medical personnel died as result of working at Camp Wyckoff's hospital: Reubena Hyde Walworth, one of just 12 nurses who gave their lives during the entire Spanish American War.

Some contemporary press accounts of her day report that she was the first nurse to arrive at Camp Wyckoff, and the last to depart.

An 1896 graduate of Vassar College, Ruby had been employed as a teacher when war broke out with Spain. She knew well that every generation of her esteemed family had served this nation in its hour of need. She had no brothers who could fight, and so she volunteered to serve, training as a nurse here in Saratoga Hospital. She served first at Fortress Monroe, Virginia, in a large tent hospital. But the need was far greater at Camp Wyckoff.

Newspaper accounts of her death report that Reubena, during her short stay at the hospital, cared for patients with measles, yellow fever, malaria, diphtheria and typhoid, in what we can only imagine would be, by today's standards, extremely primitive field hospital conditions. Her quarters there were a tent, on a hill below the camp's graveyard. It is tragically easy to understand, through our eyes today, how she was exposed to diseases that were spread and exacerbated by poor sanitary conditions.

Camp Wyckoff was closed by the late fall, but surely Reubena had begun to feel the effects of the disease during the days she spent helping to close the camp's hospital. She was taken to her mother's New York City apartment and later to the Presbyterian Hospital in New York City, where she died October 18, 1898. She was just 31 years old.

Her remains were removed here to Saratoga, where she was afforded a full military funeral, and was said to be

laid to rest draped in the flag of our nation. It is tragic for me, as a mother, to think of Ellen Hardin Walworth's sorrow — by this time, she had buried three of her children and was estranged from two of the others. Ruby had been her right hand, her near constant companion, in so much of her service work; how heavy must have been that mother's heart. Though two days shy of just 66 when Ruby died, Ellen dressed in mourning for the rest of her life. On the pages of her Journal, months later she described her life "...as a horrible waking dream....I cannot get back to the other life that I left on October 18, 1898."

The President of Vassar College wrote the following Ruby's death: "I have spoken of Reubena's heroic death — a service to her country as marked as any made on the field at Santiago. It was a life well lived and nobly given up. We shall not forget her here, and we shall add to all our happy recollections of her years with us, the memory of the sacrifice she made to the service of her country."

The well known poet of the era, Charles Hanson Towne, the day after Reubena's death, was so moved that he wrote the following verse, which appeared in the New York Times on October 20, 1898:

"No storm of praise will be bestowed upon her.

Sweet nurse — yea angel — gentle minister.

And yet she served her flag — not as a man,

But, better still, as only woman can."

A sentiment that we see inscribed on this beautiful marker.

Immediately upon her death, a member of the Mary Washington Colonial Chapter of the DAR, (a

chapter still today based in New York City), Lillian Montgomery, proposed to erect a monument as a fitting tribute to Reubena's patriotic self sacrifice. Members of the Saratoga Chapter, of which Ruby was a member, immediately agreed to help. Joined by members of the New York City Chapter, which Ruby had first joined, and the Yonkers Chapter, these women issued a call to DAR members across the nation via what became an official National DAR organization called "The Committee of the Reubena Hyde Walworth Monument." Their desire was to dedicate this monument on the first anniversary of Reubena's death.

It was constructed and designed by the New England Monument Company, which had recently built monuments to Presidents Arthur and Grant, as well as General Sherman. The unveiling took place at 2:30 p.m.,



and according to the DAR Magazine of November 1899, with some 4,000 people in attendance. A large delegation of Civil War veterans formed in double ranks from the entrance of the cemetery all the way to the monument. A full military band played. A large platform, draped with flags, held some 200 dignitaries. Miss Montgomery, who had begun the idea for the monument, placed a bouquet

of American beauty roses at the base of the monument before drawing a cord that unloosened a large Flag that had completely veiled the monument. The flag was drawn back by Captain James Andrews and by two small boys who were the youngest contributors to the fund.

Upon the front of the monument, as we see restored so beautifully this day thanks to the efforts of today's members of the Saratoga Chapter, echo so appropriately the simple words of the poet, "She served her country, not as a man, but better still, as only woman can."

The monument was given by the National Society to the Saratoga Chapter for its care; then-Chapter-Regent Miss E.M. Brown took charge of the parchment deed of transfer during the ceremony.

The National Society's President General, Mrs. Daniel Manning, was

unable to attend the ceremony, but in her message read aloud, she shared: "The committee in charge wisely reared no broken pillar, signifying an incomplete life, but this symmetrical shaft, a fitting symbol of the life and services of one whom we meet to honor today — Reubena Hyde Walworth. Its foundations suggest her heroic ancestry of earlier generations; the delicately furnished shaft her perfected character; the apex, pointing upward, the future

of our Nation and Him whose high purposes it was designed to fulfill.

"No one would have supposed that *this one* of all our nearly 30,000 members of the Daughters of the American Revolution would have been the one to volunteer for this notably high endeavor. We knew her as rare in intellectual gifts and devoted all the exceptional claims of every day life.

Yet this work of her's was but the blossoming out of what she truly was."

Recall that the DAR was a relatively new organization, just nine years old at this time, having been formed in 1890. Interestingly, Mrs. Manning's remarks continued, "The war has vindicated the existence of our Society; before it, many doubted its value or scoffed at its aims as historical — merely social or encouraging our looking back to the

past, instead of attending to daily duty. This monument shows what *is* its real power as exemplified in the life and death of this one devoted Daughter.

Here will come as years go on, the soldiers to whom she ministered. And here, though coming generations, will gather the members of our own and other patriotic societies to find an example and incentive to live — *or if*

need be to die — for home, for country, and for God."

Those the words of NSDAR President General Mrs. Daniel Manning — a reminder why we gather today: to find an example and incentive to live — *or if need be to die* — for home, for country, and for God." A mission of service that resonates within us still, as members of the Daughters of the American Revolution.



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