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The Maine Remembered: Responses to The Spanish-American War in The Pine Tree State

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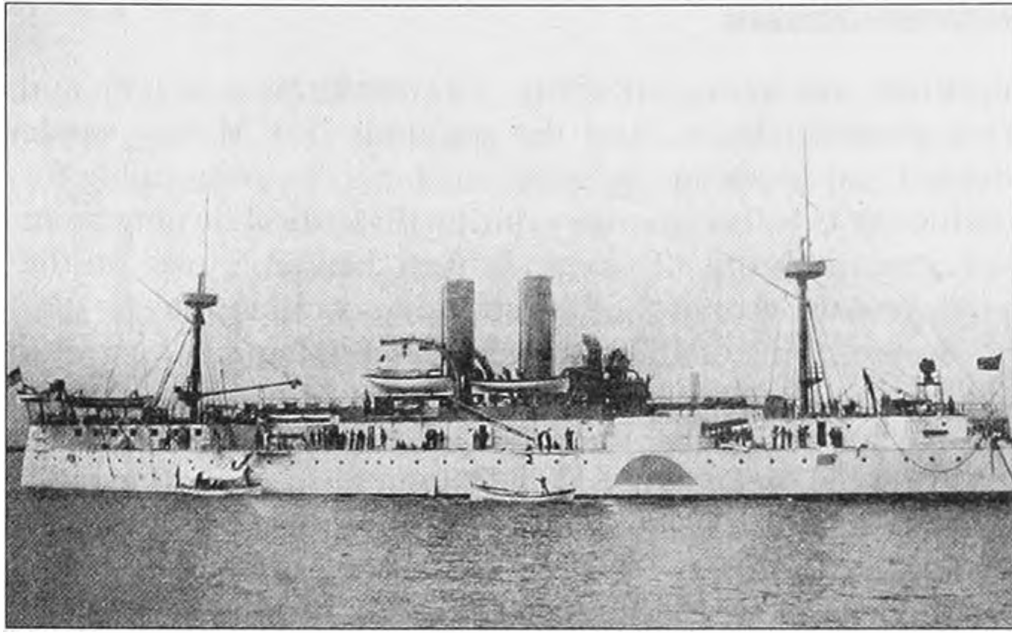
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ELIZABETH (WENDY) HAZARD

THE MAINE REMEMBERED:
RESPONSES TO THE SPANISH-AMERICAN WAR IN THE
PINE TREE STATE

The Spanish-American war marked the emergence of the United States from a country concerned primarily with its own internal development to one that exercised its power and influence on the world stage. Maine citizens and the state's political leaders understood that they were witnessing an historic turn in the nation's history. They were not passive observers, however. Many participated eagerly in the war effort. Others vehemently protested an expansionist foreign policy and the ambitions of the war's promoters. This article tracks the war's progress through the experiences of Maine people who lived through it and assesses the contributions they made to the important debate that accompanied the conflict. Elizabeth (Wendy) Hazard received her Ph.D. in History from Boston University in 1994. She lives in Belgrade and is the editor of THE DISSIDENT, a Maine journal of politics and culture.

The centennial anniversary of the Spanish-American War provides a compelling opportunity to look again at the legacy of that war, and the ways in which Americans responded to it in Maine and in the nation. "The Splendid Little War," as Secretary of State John Hay called the nation's first international conflict,



On February 15, 1898, at 9:40 P.M., the battleship *Maine* was destroyed by an explosion that killed 260 officers and men. The disaster touched off a nationwide debate that led to war with Spain that spring. Most of Maine's powerful congressional delegation, and many others throughout the state, opposed this bitter prelude to overseas empire. *THE MAINE: AN ACCOUNT OF HER DESTRUCTION IN HAVANA HARBOR* (1899).

ended in a quick and decisive victory over Spain and netted the United States an overseas empire of its own. That same war, and the one that resulted from it to quash insurrection in the Philippines, provoked a prolonged national debate that pitted Americans who supported the exercise of United States' global power against those who feared the exercise would threaten the interests of ordinary Americans and undermine the nation's commitment to democratic principles at home. In Maine that debate was vigorous. Despite its size, the state played an

MAINE REMEMBERED

important role in the war effort. Its contributions of men and arms were significant, and the positions that Maine people adopted had important implications for those responsible for conducting U.S. foreign policy during this critical turning point in American history. The war, in turn, had an impact on the people and the economy of the state that continues to this day.

In the spring of 1898, war fever swept Maine. Along with thousands across the nation, Mainers took up the national call to “Remember the Maine,” their state’s iron-hulled namesake that had exploded on February 15 in Havana’s harbor carrying 276 U.S. sailors to their death. Eager to avenge what a sensationalist press characterized as a blatant act of war against the United States, and what ardent militarists like Assistant Secretary of the Navy Theodore Roosevelt had called a “dirty act of Spanish treachery,” Mainers were ready to join what many believed would be a great and glorious national crusade. Before Congress declared war against Spain and President McKinley issued the first call for civilian volunteers to augment the critically understaffed regular Army, state Adjutant General John Richards, Governor Llewellyn Powers, and the Maine congressional delegation in Washington were deluged with letters from men eager to take up the fight. *The Lewiston Evening Journal* reported, “Men who couldn’t be hired to come home to vote are coming home of their own free will and accord to go to war.”¹

For months, Maine’s newspapers, like the national press, had teemed with news of war in Cuba and of the struggle of Cuban nationalists for independence from Spanish rule. Since 1895, when Cuban revolutionaries had announced a provisional, independent government, journalists and propagandists sympathetic to their cause, and those Americans who believed that the country’s interests and their own could profit from war with Spain, had worked tirelessly to rally public support for “Cuba Libre.” Proponents for a war with Spain, ardent expansionists like Captain Alfred Mahan, Theodore Roosevelt, and Massachusetts Senator Henry Cabot Lodge, were convinced that the United States’ prosperity required the nation to compete with Europe’s imperial powers in a grab for markets around the

world. Intervention in Cuba in 1898 appeared to provide a timely and critical opportunity to go to war, deliver Spain a crippling blow, and seize the last vestiges of its overseas empire.

President McKinley had not wanted war. But he did want the results that only war could bring, including the protection of American investments threatened by the fighting in Cuba and the extension of U.S. influence in the Caribbean and Pacific oceans. As the war in Cuba intensified, he dispatched the *Maine* to the Havana harbor on an ostensibly friendly mission to protect American lives and the \$50 million worth of American properties on the island. When the *Maine* exploded, he wanted no rush to judgment and ordered an official naval inquiry to determine the cause of the blast. Members of his administration, and many in Congress, doubted that Spain wanted to provoke war with the United States and believed it unlikely that the Spanish command in Cuba would have authorized an attack on a U.S. warship. The results of the inquiry proved inconclusive, but, by early April, the public pressure for war had become so intense that the President could delay it no longer.² In his war message on April 25, McKinley carefully cloaked any expansionist goals in the garb of humanitarian assistance that was sure to win favor with the American people. Speaking before a joint session of Congress, he said, “the United States will fight in the cause of humanity, to rescue the people of Cuba from bloodshed, starvation and horrible miseries.”³

Throughout the country, Americans responded ecstatically. In Maine, hometown companies rallied. Governor Powers reported that the Maine National Guard had two volunteer infantry regiments ready for enlistment, an ambulance corps, a signal corps, and three battalions with seventy-two officers and “the largest number of men per company allowed by law.”⁴

When the new recruits gathered in their respective towns and readied to board the troop trains that would carry them to the state training camp in Augusta, a fierce sense of local pride and local identification with the war’s goals accompanied them. *The Maine Farmer*, the weekly paper of the Maine State Grange, reported, “villages vied with towns in tendering receptions to the

MAINE REMEMBERED

boys in blue.... Loyalty reigned supreme.”⁵ In Westbrook, the town’s mayor told the recruits,

When Old Glory floats proudly over the Isle of Cuba, the people of Westbrook will all rejoice when you come proudly marching home. I have every confidence that the Almighty ruler of the universe through the instrumentality of the most intelligent people on the face of the globe, the American people, will pass safely through this crisis as we have in centuries before.

The mayor of Lewiston told the volunteers from that city, “Go forth, and as you take leave, the loyal sons and daughters of the city cheer you on.”⁶ In Portland, the send-off was thunderous. City Hall and the Armory were draped in banners and illuminated with signs reading “Remember the *Maine*.” As the men marched up Middle Street to Monument Square and down Congress Street, crowds lined their route, waving flags, cheering and firing off small canons. National colors and military trappings were reportedly the fashion rage for women: “Red white and blue is assuredly somewhere about her and she is begging insignia and ribbons, buttons or buckles from every man she can.”⁷

Maine’s Civil War veterans led the chorus of supporters, thrilling to the idea that Americans who only thirty-five years earlier had been wrenched apart in violent sectional struggle were ready at last to march together in a national crusade.⁸ Commander Southard of the GAR addressed the Lewiston volunteers: “Let your battle cry be Freedom — American Freedom! ... We of the Grand Army wish it were possible that we could go with you and once more rally under Old Glory for freedom and right.”⁹

A pro-war editorial in the *Lewiston Evening Journal* entitled “The Value of the War Fever” expressed a widely held belief that war with Spain would finally unite the nation as it had not been united since the Civil War. It included the story of an Auburn man just returned from a month’s tour of the South who had found national sentiment there soaring: “In the first half of his



In mid-June a force of 17,000 regulars and volunteers arrived at Tampa, Florida, to await transport to Cuba. The invasionary troops included the 1st U. S. Volunteer Cavalry Regiment – the “Rough Riders” – under Col. Leonard Wood and Lt. Col. Theodore Roosevelt, who later made their famous assault on San Juan Hill. As assistant secretary of the Navy, Roosevelt had been an outspoken proponent of overseas expansion. *Beck, CUBA'S FIGHT FOR FREEDOM AND THE WAR WITH SPAIN (1898)*

trip, his ears were filled with local prejudice, narrow politics and crude social views. Then came the incident of the Maine;...the result is the South is federalized....There have been men who were feeble until they had the typhoid; so there are nations that have been regarded as deficient in patriotism until they have had a fever of war.”¹⁰

The great outpouring of national sentiment seemed to put to rest concern among veteran’s groups and patriotic organizations that patriotism had waned in the years following the Civil War. Long years of peace, they feared, had undermined military preparedness and had discouraged a spirit of national unity even as unrestricted immigration and labor unrest in industrial centers had divided the country along class and ethnic lines.¹¹ At the same time that expansion-

MAINE REMEMBERED

ists like Roosevelt and Mahan were blasting the country's military unpreparedness and promoting an internationalist foreign policy, these patriotic societies launched campaigns to foster patriotism and introduce nationalist rituals and military training in the nation's schools. In 1888, a widely circulated magazine, *Youth's Companion*, led a drive for a "flag in every school," and in 1892, the magazine's editor, James Bailey Upton, wrote and published the *Pledge of Allegiance* in hopes that school children all over America would recite it as part of a daily ritual expression.¹² In Maine, the DAR adopted the project and began furnishing flags for schools around the state.¹³ When war was declared in April 1898, the Superintendent of Schools in Belfast, following the example of others throughout the country, ordered his schools, for the first time, to raise the flag daily and to begin each day with the national anthem and the pledge of allegiance.¹⁴ Clearly the jingoism that accompanied the onset of the Spanish-American war had given patriotic initiatives an aura of urgency.

When war was first declared, a brief flurry of panic ensued throughout Maine's coastal communities; exaggerated notions of Spain's maritime power convinced residents that their towns would become targets of a naval assault. As one paper editorialized: "The Spaniards are a crafty race and...the thirst for vengeance is so deeply implanted in the Spanish nature that he is capable of anything to get even."¹⁵ Fears soon subsided, however, when the War Department began to fortify the Maine coastline. By April 26, two hundred soldiers had arrived to take up positions at Fort Preble and Portland Head in Casco Bay. Mine fields were placed at the entrance to Portland Harbor and ten-inch guns were installed at Portland Head.¹⁶ An eight-inch rifled cannon, and one hundred mines and torpedoes guarded the mouth of the Kennebec, and a "mosquito fleet" of small vessels was dispatched upriver to defend Bath. Twenty-one mines were placed in the Penobscot River in the Bucksport Narrows to protect Fort Knox.¹⁷ Over one hundred volunteers from the First Maine Heavy Artillery were garrisoned at Fort Popham and three and six-inch gun installations were erected at Fort Lyon on Cow Island and Fort Levett on Cushing Island.¹⁸

While the Maine volunteers who responded to the president's call in 1898 were infused with patriotic enthusiasm, their motives for enlistment varied. Most, undoubtedly, sought after great adventure. They hoped also that the whole of their hometown companies would be incorporated into Maine's two regionally based National Guard regiments, and that they would be allowed to serve alongside neighbors and friends, as a visible expression of their own communities' contribution to the national cause. Their insistence created difficulties for Powers, whose orders from the Secretary of War expressly indicated that Maine's quota be filled by the National Guard regiments. When he learned that a third of the volunteers did not pass the medical examination required by the U.S. Army, the governor requested that those who had not been rejected combine to form the First Infantry Regiment. Most of the men of the Second Regiment decided to refuse immediate enlistment, preferring instead to return home and await a future call when they might rally sufficient numbers to serve together as a complete regiment. Fortunately for Powers, who needed to fill Maine's quota in a timely fashion, forty students from the University of Maine, all of whom had received drill and tactical instruction at school, came forward to enlist with the First Maine Infantry.¹⁹

The majority of volunteers were farmers, industrial workers, office clerks, and day laborers. Many may have welcomed escape from the monotony of their jobs, but others, no doubt, were also attracted by the monthly stipend that was offered for enlistment and service: \$22 for privates, \$26 for corporals, and \$34 for sergeants.²⁰ Maine's economy had staggered through a twenty-five year national depression that had grown particularly acute in the 1890s. Chronic unemployment stalked communities throughout the state. Maine farmers, suffering from western competition, reduced their acreage and abandoned their farms to look for a better living in the industrial sector.²¹ For those who did not have employable skills or who could not find steady work, day labor was often the only alternative. The hard work of digging ditches and grading roads was seasonal, usually poorly paid, and offered little security. As labor historian Charles

MAINE REMEMBERED

Scontras has written, the line between day labor and destitution was thin.²² Day laborers and farmers made up the largest categories of volunteers in 1898.²³

After day laborers and farmers, the largest numbers of enlistees derived from weavers, spinners, paper makers, machinists, and clerks, all of whom had also suffered from the long depression. Increasing regional competition from southern manufacturers had led the managements of textile, paper and shoe and other Maine industries to adopt cost-cutting strategies in the 1890s. These included frequent lay-offs, wage cuts, and shorter hours. Scontras, using data collected for the annual state labor reports, calculated that up to 42 percent of the state's shoemakers, 38 percent of the textile operatives, 35 percent of the quarry workers, and 64 percent of the lime workers were unemployed during the period. The pay checks of those who still retained their jobs reflected the frequent cuts in hours and wages.²⁴

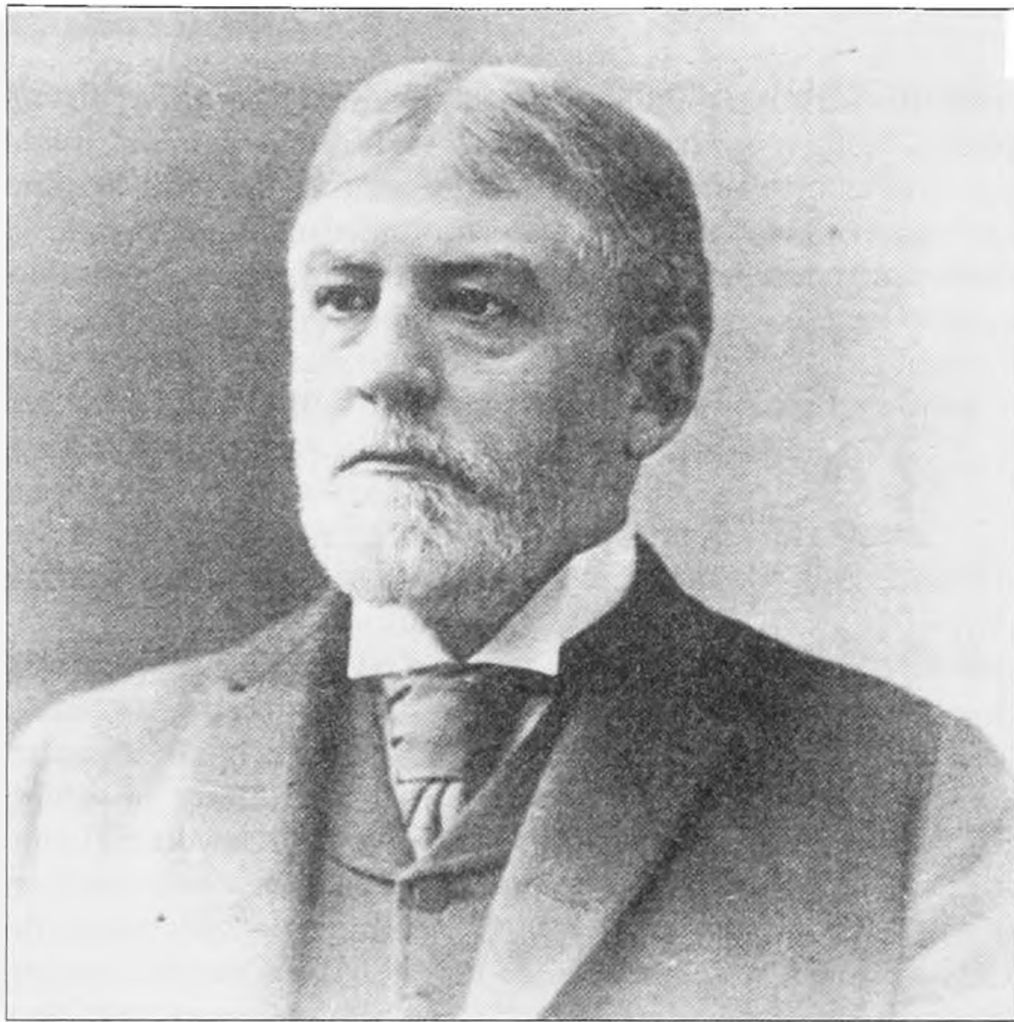
To encourage early enlistment, Governor Powers assured workers that the state would make up any difference between their army pay and what they had earned before their enlistment, even if it meant that he had to raise the funds on his own. As he told the legislature when it met in January 1899, "many of the men were in pressing need...and others must have something to send to their very destitute families or leave them in want."²⁵ The owners of the Pepperill textile mills, not to be outdone by the governor's expression of patriotism, promised that any worker who responded to the nation's call to arms would be assured of his job upon return from duty.²⁶

No Maine community benefited more from the war with Spain than Bath, where congressional war appropriations brought a sudden and welcome surge in prosperity. The Bath Iron Works, the naval shipyard established in 1884, won valuable contracts from the U.S. government in 1897 and 1898 to repair two American warships and build five torpedo boats, two gunboats, a cargo steamer, and a training vessel for the Naval Academy at Annapolis. By the end of 1898, a much expanded shipyard had contracts worth more than \$2 million and enough

work to carry it profitably into the twentieth century. It employed 1,000 men, had a payroll of over \$360,000, and made substantial investments in its manufacturing potential. The expansion had a critical impact on the entire midcoast. As a 1898 state report noted, "Maine and the city of Bath cannot too highly appreciate the value of the Bath Iron Works. Besides the vast sums of money it distributes for labor..., it enables the Pine Tree State to say in shipbuilding as in statesmanship, "Dirigo, I lead."²⁷

Despite the excited frenzy of the early days of recruitment and the enthusiasm of local officials and business leaders, the war against Spain did not go unopposed in Maine. For a small but vocal group of leading politicians, writers, and reform activists, the war, and the assertion of American power overseas, had dangerous implications. A cohesive anti-imperialist movement failed to emerge in Maine as it did in Massachusetts, New York, and Illinois, but the Spanish American War did trigger protest and debate among those who feared that the acquisition of foreign territories would violate fundamental principles of American democracy. Four members of Maine's powerful congressional delegation — Speaker of the House Thomas Brackett Reed, House Ways and Means Committee Chair Nelson Dingley, House Naval Affairs Committee Chair Charles Boutelle, and Senate Naval Appropriations Committee Chair Eugene Hale — opposed the drift to war and used their personal and political influence to avert it. The fact that all were Republicans, and members of the president's party, gave them extra prominence, and their powerful positions in the Congress provided them ample forum to advocate their cause. In addition, they enjoyed the support of some of Maine's leading newspapers. Boutelle owned a controlling interest in the *Bangor Whig and Courier*, and the *Eastern Argus*, although a Democratic paper, consistently gave Portland's Thomas Brackett Reed its editorial backing.

Early on, Reed had broken with other Republican party stalwarts, determined to use his formidable power to block U.S. expansion overseas. An imposing figure who stood over six feet three inches tall and weighed between 250 and 275 pounds,



Along with three other members of Maine's congressional delegation, Senator Eugene Hale, chair of the Senate Naval Appropriations Committee, opposed the drift to war. As members of the party in office, holding key committee positions, Maine delegates wielded enormous power in Congress. *Maine Historical Society photo.*

Reed towered over his colleagues. He had dominated the House since he was elected speaker in 1889. He made a lasting mark on the institution when he introduced "Reed's Rules," a key parliamentary reform that had finally ended the ability of an obstructionist minority to block legislation. The tactics he used to bring recalcitrant Democrats to heel earned him the nickname "Czar Reed."²⁸ Wielding his power brilliantly, he derailed army appropriations bills, repeatedly blocked legislation for the annexation of Hawaii, and fought to deny any diplomatic or military assistance to Cuba that would precipitate war with Spain. In a series

of articles for the *North American Review* and *The Illustrated American*, Reed used the persuasive powers of his prodigious intellect to dampen public enthusiasm for territorial expansion. He tracked the rise and fall of empires over the course of history and concluded that the rapid extension of power over too wide a territory led invariably to discord and decline. Americans, he cautioned, should instead heed the admonition of George Washington, in his Farewell Address, to stay clear of international entanglements. So doing, Reed argued, “we shall grow, unattached and peaceful up to the gigantic possibilities of the territory we have already acquired.”²⁹

For over a decade, Reed had supported expenditures to modernize the Navy, but in 1897, as pressure for war mounted, he began to resist further appropriations. Responding to the contention made by Henry Cabot Lodge that the naval build-up was a critical form of “national insurance,” Reed wrote that if this was the case, its buildup should not engage the U.S. in a expensive arms race with other countries. “We must be careful about over insurance,” he wrote.³⁰ After the explosion of the *Maine*, Reed denounced the jingo hysteria and announced that he would no longer support appropriations for battleships, an extraordinary position for a representative from a state that stood to benefit handsomely from military contracts for its nascent ship-building industry.

Eugene Hale shared Reed’s antipathy for war and his concern about the dangers of overseas expansion. As chair of the Senate Naval Affairs committee, he too advocated military preparedness and had worked to modernize the Navy.³¹ As the pressure for war grew, Hale cautioned restraint and became an advocate for peace: “I for one have been disturbed and made anxious by the growth of what I may call the aggressive spirit as shown particularly within the last year;...the desire to aggress, the desire to incite trouble, the desire to make difficulties with foreign powers,...the turning aside the plowshare and pruning hook and giving men’s attention to the sword and rifle.”³² In 1896 and 1897, Hale argued against recognizing Cuban sovereignty, certain that this would lead to war with Spain. Instead, he

compared the Cuban insurrection to the Confederacy's rebellion and reminded his colleagues that Spain had remained the Union's loyal ally during the Civil War.

Congressmen Nelson Dingley and Charles Boutelle resisted efforts to recognize Cuban independence and opposed the annexation of Spanish territories. Dingley did not want to break openly with the administration, however, and when war was declared, it was "with a heavy heart but with a patriotic sense of duty," that he began preparing a \$500 million war revenue bill.³³ Boutelle joined fellow Republicans Reed and Hale, and several Democrats, in a anti-imperialist coalition that began to focus its attention on the probable results of the war.

Only one member of the Maine delegation, Republican Senator William Frye, supported the war. Frye had been elected to the Senate to fill James G. Blaine's seat when the latter was appointed Secretary of State in 1881. He embraced his predecessor's enthusiasm for American expansion and, like Blaine, lobbied hard for a strong navy.³⁴ As chair of the Senate Commerce Committee, Frye maintained steady pressure for the annexation of Hawaii and the acquisition of an isthmian canal to expedite trade with the Far East. When war with Spain grew imminent, he threw his full support behind it, allying himself with Vermont Senator Redfield Proctor, an ardent expansionist who had just returned from an official visit to Cuba. Proctor had prepared an inflammatory speech detailing the brutalities of Spanish rule, and Frye used his considerable influence to interrupt Senate proceedings to allow Proctor to take the floor. The speech, which told in chilling detail about the suffering, imprisonment, and starvation of Cuban civilians, had its desired effect, and was credited with galvanizing popular and congressional support for the war.³⁵ Reed remained unmoved, caustically remarking that the speech was just what might have been expected from Proctor, who happened to own controlling interest in the lucrative Vermont Marble Company: "The war will make a large market for gravestones," Reed said.³⁶ Frye's orchestration of Proctor's speech proved critical, and his ardent support for the war won him the lasting gratitude of Theodore



Spanish prisoners of war confined to a camp on Seavey's Island at Portsmouth, New Hampshire. Novelist William Dean Howells, after rowing around the island in a small boat, wrote Mark Twain that "it seemed impossible that we should have entered upon this abominable business." *Courtesy Department of the Navy Historian, Portsmouth Naval Shipyard.*



MAINE REMEMBERED

Roosevelt and other leading expansionists, who honored him with a lavish reception in New York City the following year.

Prominent members of Maine's literary community also opposed the war. Poet E.A. Robinson became an outspoken critic, and joined the New England Anti-Imperialist League when it was founded in January 1899. In a letter to a friend in April 1898, he wrote: "My Americanism is not at all rampant — in fact the crudeness and the general cussedness of things American makes me sick."³⁷ Novelist William Dean Howells, who observed the war fever from his summer home in Kittery, characterized the Spanish-American war as "the height of greed and folly." In a letter to his sister in May 1898 he wrote, "We are deafened by war talk here. I hope that you will not be surprised to hear that I think we are wickedly wrong."³⁸ In 1898 Howells wrote his close friend and colleague Mark Twain that he had sailed his little boat from Kittery up the Piscataqua River to Seavey's Island, where 1,700 Spanish sailors captured in the Cuban campaign had been imprisoned. Seeing them cowed and despondent in a prison so near his idyllic Maine summer home deepened Howell's disgust for the war and those responsible for it:

We saw them lying on the grass, or crowding the doors of their long barracks....Gatling guns overlooked them from three heights above....What must such captivity be to those poor boys!...It seemed impossible that we should have entered upon this abominable business. If we were still in the habit of fearing God, we might well tremble when we remembered that he is just, just as Jefferson did when he thought of slavery.³⁹

One of the most eloquent of Maine's anti-imperialists was the prominent feminist and progressive activist Hannah Bailey. A resident of Winthrop and the widow of a wealthy Maine textile manufacturer, Bailey became a leading activist in the causes of temperance, women's rights, and peace. She was also a prolific writer on suffrage and peace issues, temperance, capital punishment, and prison reform. Believing that women needed to take a more active role in public life, Bailey served as treasurer of the

National Council of Women, president of the National American Women's Suffrage Association, and superintendent of the Women's Christian Temperance Union's (WCTU) Department of Peace and Arbitration.

For Bailey, the causes of temperance and peace were closely related. "Nothing leads toward war like intemperance," she wrote, because "rebellious liquor in the blood poisons its peace." The war with Spain, she believed, was a crude, intemperate response to an international conflict that could have been averted by diplomacy. Quoting from Reed, who had become an important ally in a number of causes, Bailey wrote that "the time is not far distant when the idea of going to war to settle international difficulties will be thought as strange and out of date as we now consider many other beliefs and practises [sic]." In contrast to the DAR and other patriotic and militaristic societies, the WCTU lobbied for peace education and the elimination of war toys. Bailey wrote, "the young person possessing fighting instincts should be directed to use them not against human foes, but against his own baser self." Responding to Theodore Roosevelt's noisy blandishments that nothing fostered manliness and courage better than warfare, she countered: "Man, by engaging in warfare, defies nature whose plan is that no species shall become self-destructive."⁴⁰ Throughout the Spanish-American war and during the subsequent conflict in the Philippines, Hannah Bailey consistently argued in behalf of international arbitration and an end to U.S. military occupation of the Philippine Archipelago.

Bailey and the WCTU found an ally in their opposition to the war with Spain in the Grange (The Patrons of Husbandry), a farmers' organization which decried the wastefulness of war and the dangerous militancy it engendered. In April 1898, when war was first declared, the Grange's weekly paper, *Maine Farmer*, editorialized against the "false patriotism" that had been "inflamed by an unprincipled press and the fires of greed and gain." On May 5, as Maine volunteers gathered for training at Fort Richards in Augusta, an editorial cautioned, "an ounce of sober judgment would save millions of lives and hasten operations

MAINE REMEMBERED

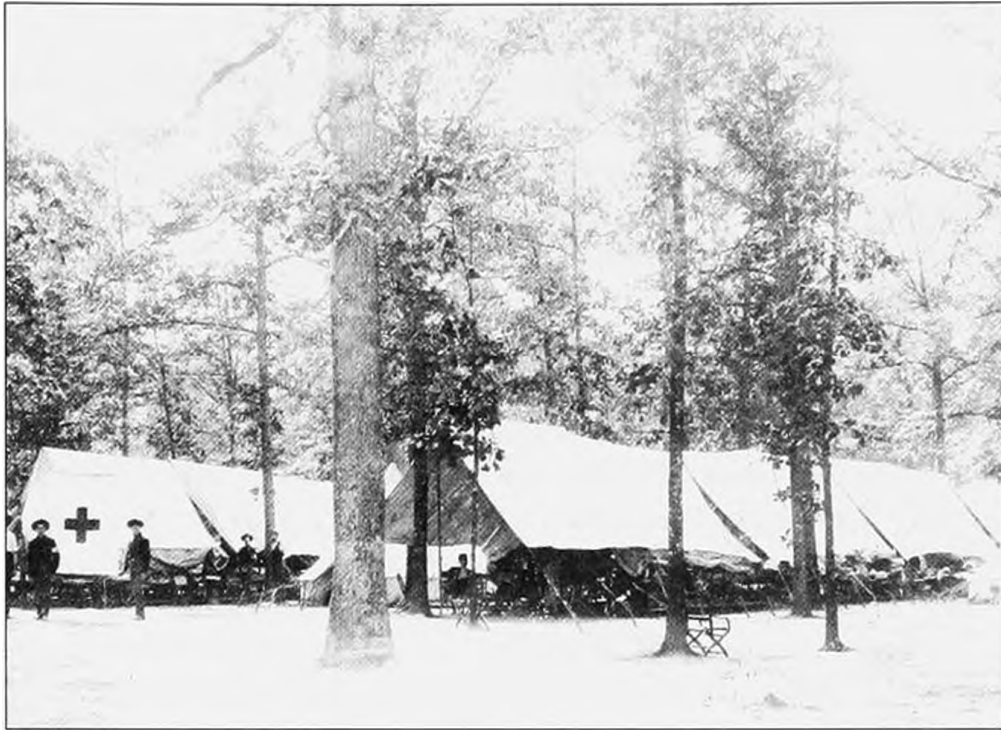
looking to action which would ensure speedy peace.” Clearly, Maine farmers, who had seen their farms and fortunes dwindle in the years since the Civil War and who hoped for government programs to alleviate their debt and provide affordable transportation, saw little to be gained from costly military campaigns overseas.

On May 4, 1898, when the news broke that Admiral Dewey had achieved the first great naval victory of the war by destroying the Spanish fleet in the Philippines, the *Maine Farmer* did not indulge in the general euphoria. The *Maine Farmer* saw Dewey’s easy triumph as a harbinger of danger and was quick to reiterate its critique of the war.

This war was declared to be for humanity, to relieve the starving in Cuba, and free [sic] from the bonds of oppressor, but the first guns of victory have wrought a change, and already argument on argument is presented to show the necessity for the United States taking its place with other nations, holding territory outside its present domain....It is a serious question whether it is possible to pursue any longer the policy which the United States has pursued for so many years. A largely increased Army and Navy and the extension of jurisdiction are all involved and the danger is that politics will force a radical change from the avowed purpose in opening the hostilities.⁴¹

Dewey’s victory in the Philippines was followed by another smashing naval success outside Santiago Harbor on Cuba’s northern coast and land campaigns in Cuba and Puerto Rico. It was all over in just four months.

Only seventeen of Maine’s 1,717 civilian volunteers who had enlisted so eagerly in April ever saw military action. The rest did not return home unscarred, however. One hundred and fifty-one Maine soldiers died during the war, many of them victims of typhoid fever in the Army training camp in Chickamauga, Tennessee.⁴² In late May, Maine’s First Infantry volunteers had been ordered to Camp Thomas in Chickamauga, a poorly constructed base surrounded by fetid swamp land. Crowded barracks and poor sanitation combined to make the camp a cesspool of contagion, and men



Only seventeen of Maine's 1,717 volunteers saw action in the Spanish-American War. Poor sanitary conditions at the Army training camp in Chickamauga, Tennessee, cost the lives of many others, however. In all, 151 Maine soldiers died during the war. *National Archives photo.*

soon began to sicken and die. Major W.H. Daly, the Surgeon in Chief of Volunteers who was sent in to inspect conditions, reported the camps were "polluted and filthy and the sanitary conditions deplorable."⁴³ The orders for Maine's First Infantry were rescinded in August because so many had fallen ill.⁴⁴

Despite urgent efforts to save their lives, many of Maine's young volunteers succumbed to the ravages of tropical fever. Townspeople and local officials, who only a few months earlier had so proudly sent them off to war, worried that the soldiers' contagion could spread in their communities. They insisted that the National Guard enforce strict sanitary precautions by isolating the soldiers, carefully burying their excrement outside city

MAINE REMEMBERED

limits, sterilizing their blankets and sheets, and burning their mattresses. Those who survived were promised pensions, but the war had clearly not provided them with the opportunity for heroic adventure that they had so eagerly anticipated.⁴⁵ In all, the United States suffered only 347 battle deaths, while 5,462 died from illness.⁴⁶

Only members of Maine's Signal Corps, seventeen civilian volunteer telegraph operators, linemen, and electricians who were assigned as the 8th U.S. Volunteer Signal Corps, saw military action during the war. In the campaign to seize Santiago, they provided key communications support to the Army regulars in the midst of heavy fighting. Three of the men later succumbed to diseases contracted in Cuba. But their courage in battle had been noted, and the Corps was singled out for citation by General Greeley, the chief signal officer in the Army: Maine's were the "first to report for duty in Washington, [and]...the best equipped of any detachment...during the war."⁴⁷ After the war, the First Maine Heavy Artillery served briefly in Cuba from January to March 1899, as part of the occupying force stationed in Havana prior to the establishment of a Cuban government there. But they too returned home unheralded and received none of the attention that had accompanied their departure eleven months earlier. The focus of the country had shifted.

A defeated Spain sued for peace, and on August 13, 1898, agreed to the terms proposed by the McKinley administration: independence for Cuba, U.S. annexation of Puerto Rico, and U.S. military occupation of Manila. The Philippine archipelago, with its strategic location and valuable harbors, became the chief prize of the Spanish war, but its final disposition remained an open question at the war's end. Most Americans agreed that under no circumstances should the Philippines be returned to Spain. There was no consensus, however, about who would govern the former colony. Under the leadership of Emilio Aguinaldo, Philippine nationalists, who had long hoped for independence, were adamant that the Philippines be granted their autonomy. They had not fought the Spanish only to have independence snatched from them by

another imperial power, Aguinaldo said, and his forces pledged to resist any effort to recolonize their nation.⁴⁸

Americans who opposed overseas expansion supported the Filipino nationalists' claim, arguing the U.S. had no legal or moral right to deny Filipinos their independence. The expansionists, on the other hand, argued for the immediate annexation of the entire archipelago. They dismissed the claims of the Filipino people, arguing that were not ready for self rule. As one leading imperialist put it, "there are not a hundred men among them who comprehend what Anglo-Saxon self-government even means."⁴⁹ They also maintained that the Philippines, without U.S. protection, would fall prey to European imperial powers. A final decision awaited formal peace treaty negotiations scheduled for the fall in Paris.

To conduct these negotiations, McKinley selected a five person committee, three of whose members, namely Frye, *New York Tribune* editor Whitelaw Reid, and Chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee Cushman Davis, were well-known ardent expansionists. Only one, Senator George Gray of Delaware, opposed annexation.⁵⁰ The commissioners heard testimony from the War Department assessing threats from European rival powers and the defensibility of the islands in the event of attack. They also heard assurances from U.S. commanders that the Filipino nationalists were badly divided, poorly equipped, and could be easily subdued with 30,000 American soldiers.⁵¹ On October 25, 1898, President McKinley instructed the Commission to demand full possession of all the islands. In return, the United States offered Spain \$20 million.

The final treaty agreed to by Spain in Paris had to be formally ratified by the Senate; again, there were sharp differences over the Philippines. The debate in Maine was passionate. Frye championed the treaty and insisted that the United States would annex the Philippines with the very best of intentions. "They have been acquired honestly," he said: "We will hold them as our own, for the good of the peoples who inhabit them and for the immense advantage, commercially, they promise us....We will build highways, construct railroads, erect school houses and

MAINE REMEMBERED

churches, [and] allow them to participate in government so far and so fast as we may find them capable.”⁵²

Although Reed, perhaps embittered over his failure block the war and the annexation of Hawaii, did not exercise his leadership in the debate, he remained an adamant opponent of the treaty and of the annexation of the Philippines. In October 1898, he wrote, “at the beginning of this year we were most admirably situated. We had no standing army which could overrun our people. We were at peace within our borders and with all the world.” The year ended in “bloody degeneracy” in the Philippines and the nation’s leaders, he feared, had forsaken the principles of democracy.⁵³ Hale joined with two New England Republican stalwarts, Massachusetts Senator George Hoar and Vermont Senator Justin Morrill, and with several prominent Democrats to oppose to the treaty’s ratification. The Anti-Imperialist League included an odd assortment of men and women who shared few commonalties save their aversion to territorial expansion; steel tycoon Andrew Carnegie, labor leader Samuel Gompers, reformer Jane Addams, author Mark Twain, and philosopher William James were among them. In Maine, the Portland *Eastern Argus* threw its weight behind the anti-imperialists: “We derive our authority to govern, not from the assent of the governed, but from our right as a conqueror...If the Filipinos resist, this free republic will crush them precisely as any ‘effete monarchy’ would do.”⁵⁴ Likewise, The *Maine Farmer* scorned the claim that the United States would provide freedom and justice to the people of the Philippines. The imposition of Jim Crow laws throughout the South and the repeated failure to enact federal civil rights and anti-lynching laws to protect African-Americans provided the context for a scathing criticism of expansionist pretensions:

It seems strange to the average American that while the United States has ample authority to protect the half civilized Filipinos or Cubans it is powerless to protect American citizens at home....Can we give the Filipinos stronger guarantees of protection than the Negroes of the South? ...We promised the Negro political rights, but he has none. We promised him the protection of the courts of justice. He

has none whatever. He is entirely at the mercy of the whites of the State in which he lives. If he makes himself obnoxious, whites can shoot and hang him and the national government cannot interfere. If he attempts to vote, the whites can force him to desist without fear of punishment. Isn't it about time for home protection?⁵⁵

The final Senate vote for treaty ratification was close; it carried, with only one vote to spare. Hale voted “nay,” remaining steadfastly against annexation to the end, convinced that a majority of his Maine constituents supported his decision: “in all the letters that I have received from Maine,...only two have urged me to vote for the treaty.”⁵⁶ On February 5, rebel forces attacked U.S. soldiers in Manila, igniting a war that would commit the United States to a costly three-year struggle, the first of many counterrevolutionary wars that it would fight in the twentieth century.

When the Treaty of Paris was finally signed, Reed quipped that the U.S. had acquired “about 10,000,000 Malays at \$2 a head unpicked, and nobody knows what it will cost to pick them.”⁵⁷ Sarcasm notwithstanding, Reed’s remark contained a prescient sense of the costs that lay ahead. The war against the Philippine insurrection did not repeat the easy fight with Spain; rather it was a gruesome, hard-fought, and undeclared war far from home for which few had any real enthusiasm. U.S. officers, who originally maintained that they could subdue the barefoot insurgents with just 30,000 men, were requesting 40,000 troops, and by June, 65,000.⁵⁸ In all, 120,000 U.S. troops served in the Philippines; nearly 4,200 were killed and 2,800 wounded. They, in turn, killed approximately 15,000 Filipino rebels; over 200,000 Filipino civilians died as victims of disease, gunfire, starvation, and the effects of a U.S. concentration camp policy.⁵⁹

Although the War Department limited press coverage of the fighting in the Philippines, local papers throughout the country kept the war on the front pages. The anti-imperialist press in Maine — the *Eastern Argus*, the *Maine Farmer*, and the *Whig and Courier* — promoted peace negotiations and emphasized the strength of the resistance and the terrible costs of the



When the Treaty of Paris was signed on December 10, 1898, Thomas Brackett Reed was near the end of his brilliant career as Speaker of the House. Strenuously opposed to overseas expansion, Reed remarked that the U. S. had acquired "about 10,000,000 Malays at \$2 a head unpicked, and nobody knows what it will cost to pick them." *Samuel W. McCall, THE LIFE OF THOMAS BRACKETT REED (1914).*

war for the United States¹⁰ The *Argus* published letters from Maine soldiers fighting with the regular army in the Philippines, describing the feelings and experiences of dispirited and homesick soldiers and providing lurid first-hand accounts of the war. A letter from a Biddeford man described a growing aversion among soldiers to war in the Philippines: "The out and out truth

with us is that most of us are in sympathy with the insurgents to a certain extent. All American boys have been brought up in the air of freedom and to fight a people who are seeking what we ourselves value so highly goes against our grain. We did not enlist to fight these people, but the Spanish.”⁶¹ A woman from Brunswick provided the *Argus* with a letter from a soldier explaining that his regiment had “burned the big church near us and killed over one hundred insurgents in it....Some of the boys made good hauls of jewelry and clothing.” Another letter from a Red Cross volunteer described “great piles of Filipino dead,” with bodies decapitated and riddled with bullets, “showing the determination of our soldiers to kill every native in sight.”⁶²

Anti-imperialists stepped up their campaign for a negotiated peace, using these stories as evidence of the brutalizing effects of the war, not only on the Filipino victims but on the young Americans, who were turning into savage killers. Bailey, writing for the Peace and Arbitration Department of the WCTU, urged the government to treat the Filipinos honorably, abandon its insistence on unconditional surrender, and negotiate in good faith with the Philippine leadership.⁶³ On reading the stories of military atrocities, Reed drafted a mock resolution for Congress to grant amnesty to the Spanish General Valeriano Weyler (despised by Americans for his brutal treatment of Cuban revolutionaries).⁶⁴ On another occasion, when asked by a friend which route he would take to visit the Philippines, the Speaker replied, “Well, if you travel westward you’d reach the Philippines by way of Hawaii, and if you travel eastward you’ll reach Hawaii by way of the Philippines. The whole question is whether you prefer to take your plague before your leprosy or take your leprosy before your plague.”⁶⁵

The Maine newspapers that supported the war effort in the Philippines, notably the *Kennebec Journal* and the *Lewiston Evening Journal*, quickly dismissed the letters from soldiers as inaccurate or mere anti-imperialist cant. Their editorials accused the war’s opponents of a lack of patriotism bordering on treason. Their headlines were characteristically bold and reflected the inflated predictions of the U.S. generals who maintained that the war



As the attempt to put down the Philippine insurrection dragged on, and the U.S. troop commitment mounted, even the war's strongest supporters grew worried. Senator William Frye, an expansionist, charged that American generals had willfully deceived the American peace commission in Paris. *Maine Historical Society photo.*

would soon be won by the courageous soldiers under their command.⁶⁶

Despite persistent reports of the defeat of the Philippine army, the war dragged on. Aguinaldo eluded capture, and his soldiers continued to retake areas that had surrendered to U.S. authority. Tropical diseases took their toll on American soldiers.

In late June, General Otis was forced to acknowledge that he needed more troops. His health officer in Manila, assessing losses from both the fierce fighting and the spread of disease, estimated that it could take as many as 150,000 American soldiers to suppress the insurrection.⁶⁷ With this news, even the war's strongest supporters began to grow worried. Frye was especially troubled by the high casualties; he charged that American generals in the Philippines had willfully deceived the Paris Peace Commission.⁶⁸

The costs of the war to the American taxpayer were also mounting, giving Reed further cause for resentment. He referred to McKinley's as a "syndicated administration" and wondered aloud why the American people seemed so quiescent, so willing to see the annual budget soar to \$700 million a year when only a few years earlier they had resisted even moderate tax hikes. But the Speaker had grown so disgusted with the nation's drift toward imperialism that he decided not to lend his political weight to the war's opponents.⁶⁹ To the dismay of anti-imperialists across the country, Reed announced on April 19, 1899 that he would relinquish the Speakership and retire from Congress the following September. It was a terrible blow to the anti-imperialist cause. Reed apparently understood that the exigencies of war and an expansionist foreign policy had enabled the president to concentrate the powers of state in the executive branch. His own influence and that of the legislative branch suffered as a consequence, and he was not interested in remaining in a position from which he could do little to effect the course of public policy. He explained his extraordinary decision to his friend, George Gifford: "If I went on the floor I knew all too well how few followers I could muster until the people changed their minds. Hence it seemed to me that the best good of the cause would be sub-served by doing what no man has yet done, resign a great place and then people would ask why and find out not by my direct outpourings but by their inferences."⁷⁰ E.L. Godkin, editor of the *New York Post*, compared Reed's retirement to "the departure from a ship of the one man on board who understands navigation."⁷¹

MAINE REMEMBERED

Anti-imperialists hoped that Reed would run as an independent candidate against McKinley and William Jennings Bryan in the presidential election in 1900, but Reed gave them no encouragement. He was tired.

Reed also sensed that Americans would remain loyal to the president and the course he had mapped for the country. In 1900 McKinley selected as his running mate, Theodore Roosevelt, the man most identified with the imperialist cause. That choice made the election a dramatic test of support for the president's foreign policy. Reed was sickened at the prospect and did not even cast his vote that year. Nonetheless, as he had foreseen, the Republican ticket easily carried Maine in a nationwide landslide that was read throughout the country as a ringing endorsement of the administration's war.

The war in the Philippines finally ended with the capture of Emilio Aguinaldo in 1901, the subsequent deterioration of his troops' morale, and the successful effort of U.S. policy makers to cultivate a wealthy Filipino elite sympathetic to American interests in their country. These elites were granted limited powers of self-government and the promise of eventual independence for the Philippines in exchange for their cooperation with U.S. military and civilian authorities in controlling any reoccurrence of civil unrest. Although sporadic fighting lasted until 1913 and periodic outbreaks occurred into the 1980s, the Filipino nationalist resistance never regained the strength of its early years.

In the end, the Spanish-American war and the war against the Philippine insurrection left a complex and controversial legacy for Americans. In a relatively short period of time, the U.S. had emerged as a global power with a greatly expanded military and strategic holdings across both hemispheres that allowed the nation to take its place among the great empires of the age. For many, the outcome more than justified any hardships incurred and seemed to have delivered the progress and national greatness that they had anticipated with such fanfare when it first began. The fact that the war also promoted economic recovery from a twenty-five year long depression,

leaving Americans to enjoy the fruits of victory in unprecedented prosperity, confirmed for many that it really had been a “Splendid Little War.”

For Maine, the financial costs incurred, estimated at approximately \$12,000, had not been unduly burdensome; the state’s economy emerged healthier than it had been for years.⁷² Most significantly, the war had provided an impetus to the State’s modern shipbuilding industry. Bath Iron Works remained a key industrial partner of the military establishment and a critical contributor to the Maine economy in the twentieth century. Even the deaths of so many of Maine’s young volunteers, from preventable diseases, provided important lessons to American military planners, who would be better prepared to safe-guard the health of soldiers in subsequent military campaigns in tropical regions.⁷³

The anti-imperialist cause, so ably articulated by a group of Maine men and women, was ultimately unable to prevent the United States from becoming an imperial power. Theodore Roosevelt, the arch-expansionist who became president after McKinley’s assassination, set in motion a string of military interventions in Central America and the Caribbean which would characterize America’s twentieth-century foreign policy in that region. But the opposition of Maine’s congressional representatives, peace activists, writers, and reformers to the war cannot be diminished. At a turning point in American history, they spoke out to remind Americans of their country’s political traditions, of its commitment to the ideals of republicanism and democratic rule that they believed best expressed America’s example for the world.

The willingness of Reed, Hale, and Boutelle to challenge the powerful consensus arrayed against them, and to risk, or sacrifice, their political careers for these principles, provided an important example for peace activists in subsequent years. Hannah Bailey’s insistence on the use of peaceful arbitration became part of a larger movement in support of the establishment of the World Court in 1901 and the League of Nations in the aftermath of World War I. Her writings, now part of the

MAINE REMEMBERED

Swarthmore College's Peace Library collection, represent a compelling contribution to peace studies in America. The Maine State Grange's opposition to war, as it diverted attention from unsolved racial problems at home and siphoned off resources that were needed by poor farmers to adjust to an increasingly competitive market was, by no means, a narrow, parochial response. Rather, it represents a thoughtful critique of Washington's decision to launch the nation in a new and risky venture that offered poor farmers little in return. That these people did not prevail in their own time in no way diminishes the importance of their efforts or their contributions to the heritage of the State of Maine and the nation.

NOTES

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- ³*Ibid.*
- ⁴R.G.94, Entry 182, Office of the Adjutant General Muster-In War With Spain, U.S. National Archives, Washington, D.C.
- ⁵*Maine Farmer*, May 1, 1898.
- ⁶*Lewiston Evening Journal*, May 2, 1898.
- ⁷*Kennebec Journal*, May 2, 1898.
- ⁸*Eastern Argus*, May 3, 1898.
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- ¹⁰*Lewiston Evening Journal*, March 16, 1898.
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- ¹⁵*Lewiston Evening Journal*, April 30, 1898.
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MAINE REMEMBERED

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⁶⁵*Ibid.*

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MAINE REMEMBERED

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