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JOHN GREGORY SMITH
GOVERNOR OF VERMONT
1863-1865



John Gregory Smith

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JOHN GREGORY SMITH was perhaps no more than a product of his time, place, and circumstance; but if he does not transcend these, he is at least a moving force combining the best they had to offer. As a businessman he was centrally instrumental in the development of the railroad industry in Vermont, and it has been said that he was probably more closely connected with Vermont's material interest than any other man in the state's history. In his home town of St. Albans he was a leader in almost every phase of community life. Where he is to be most remembered, however, is as war governor. As Senator Edmunds was later to write, "I can say that he was a man of most genial and courtly address, of extraordinary and sagacious administrative ability, so conspicuously shown in his career as Governor in the very difficult times of the rebellion. He also possessed the qualities and accomplishments of a first-class diplomat. The state has had few stronger than he."¹

John Gregory Smith was born at St. Albans, Vermont, on July 22, 1818, the eldest son of John and Maria Curtis Smith.² Unlike the majority of his generation born to the Green Mountains, his family had commanded position and affluence for nearly two centuries.³ His father, John, had been born and raised in Barre, Massachusetts, but had left his home there at the turn of the century to settle in what was then, and what is to some people still today, the wilderness of Vermont.⁴ The senior Smith attained no small measure of prominence in his new town and his new state, primarily through his success as a lawyer, as a politician, and as businessman. Following his admission to the practice of law in 1810, John senior had entered politics, an interest which engaged the greater part of his attention until 1841.⁵ In that year, having

1. Samuel Williams, "Our War Governors, J. Gregory Smith," *The Vermonter*, II, No. 1, (August 1896), 9.

2. Dumas Malone, ed., *Dictionary of American Biography*, IX, (New York, 1936), 302.

3. *Ibid.*

4. Walter Hill Crockett, *Vermont, The Green Mountain State*, (Century History Company, New York, 1921), III, 299.

5. D. B. E. Kent, *Biographical Sketches of Vermonters*, (Vermont Historical Society, Montpelier, 1947), 145.

been defeated in his bid for reelection to the United States House of Representatives, he turned his energies to railroading, a new interest and an enterprise of growing importance in the United States of the 1840s.⁶

As a railroad builder John Smith was a moving force behind the construction of the Vermont and Canada Railroad and a connecting link between northern New England and the rapidly developing Great Lakes region.⁷ As one Vermont historian has observed: "John Smith was one of the leading Vermonters of his time and his family . . . one of the most prominent in the history of the Commonwealth."⁸

With such a background it is neither strange nor surprising to find in the son a high regard for public service as well as a shrewd business sense, and these were, in fact, two qualities which were to motivate John Gregory Smith throughout the course of his lifetime. The interests and successes of the father foretold almost exactly those of the son, who was also to make his mark in the same areas of endeavor as had his father, perhaps to an even greater degree.

John Gregory Smith was one of the few Vermont men of his generation to receive what might today be considered a reasonably full education. While his father was successfully establishing the family socially and economically, the younger Smith attended the local Franklin County Grammar School⁹ and St. Albans Academy.¹⁰ Following his graduation from the academy in 1834 he entered the University of Vermont, pursued a regular classical course and was graduated four years later in 1838.¹¹ After receiving his A.B., Smith decided that he would like to join his father in the practice of law. In preparation he read law in the elder Smith's office for approximately a year,¹² following which he journeyed to New Haven, Connecticut, and the Yale Law School, leaving there in 1841,¹³ at which time he was successful in gaining admission to the Franklin County Bar during its September term.¹⁴

Until 1858 John Gregory seemed content, having joined his father's law practice and established himself in St. Albans. On December 27, 1843 he took Ann Eliza Brainerd, the daughter of one of the town's leading citizens, as his wife, a marriage lasting until his death in 1891.¹⁵

6. *Ibid.*, 146.

7. Crockett, *op. cit.*, 299.

8. *Ibid.*

9. William H. Jeffrey, *Successful Vermonters*, (East Burke, Vermont, 1907), 726.

10. *Ibid.*, 310.

11. *Ibid.*, 234.

12. *Ibid.*

13. *Yale Law School Alumni Record*, 1824-1894 (New Haven, 1894), 23.

14. Abby Maria Hemenway, *Vermont Historical Gazetteer*, (Montpelier, 1882), II, 94.

15. Record of Vital Statistics, St. Albans, I, 113.

The event which apparently reshaped Smith's thinking, or at least gave his latent intentions a free rein, was the death of his father late in November of 1858.¹⁶ As of this year he relinquished the active practice of law and instead entered fully into his late father's extensive railroad enterprises.¹⁷ He was quickly appointed as trustee of the Vermont Central and the Vermont and Canada Railroads, and was, in fact, to continue to guide these roads until his death.¹⁸ Once established in the railroad world, thanks in no small part to the reputation of his father, he joined with Frederick Billings of Woodstock and Thomas Canfield of Burlington to project the remarkable Northern Pacific Railroad as far as Puget Sound. He subsequently served as President of the Northern Pacific, which he hoped he could someday join to the Vermont lines, thus forming a portion of a great transcontinental road.¹⁹

The changes of the 1840s and 1850s were being felt in Vermont as they were throughout the United States. "As industrialization moved in and changed the economic, social, and political habits of the people the leaders of industry and transportation made swift inroads on [the] lawyers' domination of state politics." As the economy "changed from production for use to 'purchase and sale' . . . the power of the new railroads was soon manifest in the election of their Presidents as Governors."²⁰ This political change can be seen even in so limited a microcosm as one family, for while John Smith had entered law and from there gone into politics and then into business, his son John Gregory was to enter politics more a businessman than a lawyer.

The younger Smith's first foray into politics came with his election to the State Legislature as Senator from Franklin County in 1858, a position he was reelected to in the following year.²¹ He subsequently served as a town representative from St. Albans in the House of Representatives during the years 1860, 1861, and 1862, holding the position of Speaker during the latter two years.²²

When the Civil War broke out Vermont was as unprepared for the conflict psychologically as she was materially. Vermonters found it terribly difficult to grasp the concept of an American civil war or to realize that one had begun. Apparently the ideological conflict which had preceded the break was considered as a type of family quarrel, to be fought vigorously but never to result in actual alienation. After Vermonters realized that they were actually engaged in a real and very

16. Crockett, *op. cit.*, 299.

17. Jeffrey, *op. cit.*, 726.

18. Williams, *loc. cit.*, 1.

19. Earle Newton, *The Vermont Story, 1749-1949* (Montpelier, 1949), 145.

20. *Ibid.*, 149.

21. Williams, *loc. cit.*, 1.

22. Crockett, *op. cit.*, 569.

serious struggle the moral sentiments implanted years before in the Green Mountains quickly yielded a harvest of sentiment in favor of crushing the rebellion, and turned the minds of those who must organize the effort in the direction of material contributions to the war.

In 1860 Vermont's problems were legion and varied, some the product of the sectional conflict, but most at least bearing on Vermont's ability to wage war and intensified by the necessity to do so. All were properly problems of the war.

While many states had viewed the early decades of the Nineteenth Century as ones of promise, Vermont had watched her population lag and her economy deteriorate.²³ It was only with the coming of the railroads that the state had even been given the opportunity of becoming any kind of unified economic unit, prior to that time her commerce being seriously hindered by geographical obstacles which only the railroads were finally able to overcome.²⁴ As the year 1860 began Vermont could show a population increase of only 0.3 per cent over the year 1850.²⁵ Business was still feeling the severe panic of 1857.²⁶ The state's military posture was equally unimpressive, for by 1844 the state had ceased military appropriations altogether. When Sumter fell, of the theoretical effective force of twenty-two companies of militia the state had, by optimistic estimates, barely five such units.²⁷ As one contemporary viewed the situation in Vermont, it was "far from satisfactory."²⁸

As the war progressed the state government was faced with increasingly taxing problems. The human and material resources of the state were running out, and the fever pitch of idealistic enthusiasm which had greeted the original war effort became either prefaced by a demand for reenlistment bounty or cooled by the realities of war on the home front. Yet, when it was all over Vermonters could point with pride to their accomplishments during these grueling years. In providing for the needs of a state at war a large portion of the work was naturally borne by John Gregory Smith in his position as Speaker of the House and later as Governor. As much as any man in Vermont he faced the problems of the war from its inception. As the *Burlington Free Press* was later to comment: "Vermont's splendid war record was due in no small measure to Governor Smith's indefatigable efforts, and he has often since been referred to as the 'war governor.'"²⁹

23. *Ibid.*, 477.

24. *Ibid.*

25. *Ibid.*, 473.

26. *Ibid.*

27. G. G. Benedict, *The Service of the Vermont Troops*, (Montpelier, 1882), 6.

28. Crockett, *op. cit.*, 473.

29. *Burlington Free Press*, November 12, 1891, 1.

By 1863 Vermont was emotionally committed to the cause of abolition of slavery, and the thought of someone considering a plan for perpetuating the Union which did not include both praise for President Lincoln and plans for the bloody destruction of the seceding states was hardly considered as polite conversation. Nevertheless the call went out in 1863 for a Democratic State Convention, inviting all those who felt that the return of the Democratic Party to national power was a prerequisite to the reestablishment of the "union of Peace and Liberty and Law in this country."³⁰ At this convention Timothy Redfield of Montpelier was nominated for Governor.³¹ In a calm article in the *Argus*, a pro-Redfield newspaper, the Democratic Party was upheld as the party of respect for the Constitution and Constitutional liberties, whereas the Republicans, it was held, felt that they could justify any means by the ends.³² In 1863, however, the people of Vermont were in no mood to accept the Copperhead approach to a problem whose solution they had already decided upon when they sent their young men to battle. There could be little doubt that for a majority of Vermonters there was thought to be a definite and inalienable link between being a Democrat and being a Copperhead. That the Copperheads were unpopular may be illustrated by one item carried by both the *St. Albans Daily Messenger* and the *Vermont Watchman and State Journal* (Montpelier) during the month of October 1863: "A copperhead school-ma'am in Iowa whipped five of her scholars for singing at recess 'Rally round the flag, boys.' She was prosecuted and fined. Served her right!"³³

In opposition to the Democrats the Republican Party in Vermont called a Union Convention which met at Burlington on July 8, 1863, and was attended by approximately 2,000 Vermonters.³⁴ The names of two prominent men were placed in nomination for the office of Governor, but with Paul Dillingham's withdrawal in favor of John Gregory Smith the latter was nominated by acclamation.³⁵ The Union platform was in actuality composed of one plank, but for the purposes of election it was a strong one. Bedecked in its patriotic trimming this plank stated in part that:

Vermont, with all her men and means, will stand by and uphold, our National Government against all opposers, and through all vicissitudes,

30. Crockett, *op. cit.*, 568.

31. *Ibid.*

32. *Vermont Watchman and State Journal* (Montpelier) August 28, 1863, 2.

33. *Saint Albans Daily Messenger*, October 5, 1863, 2; *Vermont Watchman and State Journal*, October 16, 1863, 1.

34. *Burlington Free Press*, July 17, 1863, 1.

35. Williams, *loc. cit.*, 1.

in weal and woe, now and forever, as the organized embodiment, truly administered, of the universal, rightful freedom of man.³⁶

In its report of the convention proceedings, the *Burlington Free Press* somewhat less than objectively commented that "the ticket put in nomination is a strong one and its election by an immense majority is just as sure as the coming of election day."³⁷ Perhaps the whole issue as seen from the general Vermont point of view was expressed by the *Vermont Watchman and State Journal* when it wrote editorially:

The issue to be passed upon by the Freemen of Vermont on the first Tuesday of September 1863, is so plain that a wayfaring man need not mistake it. Are we in such favor of sustaining the government under which we live, and the free institutions which we enjoy, or will we allow our birthright to be bartered away by designing demagogues. The leaders of the present rebellion undertook to overthrow the government of our fathers and substitute therefore one whose chief cornerstone shall be American Slavery. The issue is the same now as then, *life or death* to our Republican government. The standard bearer of the government in the present campaign is JOHN GREGORY SMITH of St. Albans. The standard bearer of . . . [the Copperheads and their] traitorous clan is TIMOTHY P. REDFIELD of Montpelier. Let every voter on the first Tuesday of September decide under which banner he will serve."³⁸

One might almost venture the guess that the outcome of the election was not too much in doubt, and indeed Smith triumphed capturing 29,228 votes to Redfield's 11,917.³⁹ It might perhaps be mentioned in passing that Redfield seems to have done rather well, all things considered.

John Gregory Smith took the oath of office on Friday, October 9, 1863, and on that same day transmitted the Annual Executive Message to the General Assembly. His message was, logically enough, to forecast much of what was to come.

Governor Smith approached his position with the optimism, the enthusiasm, the energy, and the tact so vital to successful leadership. In his annual message he was to point out that:

The progress of events within the past year, in the struggle which now involves the country, has been such as to call forth our devout gratitude to Him who controls the affairs and destinies of nations. . . .⁴⁰

True as this may have been as far as it went, there was always apparent the realization that there was much still to come and much which must

36. *Vermont Watchman and State Journal*, July 17, 1863, 1.

37. *Burlington Free Press*, July 17, 1863, 1.

38. *Vermont Watchman and State Journal*, August 28, 1863, 2.

39. Archives of the Secretary of State of Vermont, Canvass of Votes for State Officers, 1863.

40. *Message of the Governor, 1863*, (Walton's Steam Printing Establishment, Montpelier, 1863), 1.

be done to realize the ideals which Vermonters had nourished throughout the war years. Besides adding new problems the war greatly intensified and recast the ones which had long plagued the state. In his first message to the legislature the new chief executive had attacked some of these problems.⁴¹ He had begun with an examination of Vermont's military contribution, and continued with an exhortation that the state continue to provide promptly her share of able bodied fighting men, so that the Vermont regiments might stand proudly. He continued by discussing the abysmal state of the militia, suggesting a reorganization of the enabling laws and a realistic regard for some of the problems inherent in the actual operation of such a system. Smith grasped and exemplified one of the primary virtues of Vermonters in the Civil War, and this was the high regard paid to the individual soldier. Nowhere had this concern been better shown than in the attempts to help the sick and wounded, and here he pledged himself to continue the tradition, and to spare no effort in the caring for the soldiers from Vermont. The Governor continued, noting that Vermont had but three years in which to establish a college in accordance with the provisions of the Morrill Land Grant Act of July 2, 1862, if she wished to receive the benefits which would accrue to the state. All these problems Smith pledged to attack during his first term.

During the first year in office the exigencies of war demanded the greatest portion of the Governor's time, leaving little for the application of his constructive energies and talents towards the material improvement of the state. Nonetheless he encouraged as best he could such enterprises as the Woodstock Railroad which was incorporated on October 30, 1863.⁴² In the field of agriculture as well he encouraged his state's development. In his first message he had referred to Vermont as "an agricultural State," and credited this fact as a major reason for her characteristic love of freedom.⁴³

Smith had earlier alluded to Vermont's material and industrial condition as being "prosperous," but it would take enterprise and initiative to render this more than merely an assertion.⁴⁴ One way in which he hoped to maintain and develop the state and virtually all her interests was through the acceptance of the provisions of the Morrill Act. Under the terms of this Act each state was to receive 30,000 acres of land for each member in Congress. The proceeds from the sale of this land were to be invested and used as an inviolable endowment for

41. *Ibid.*, *passim*.

42. Crockett, *op. cit.*, 572.

43. *Journal of the House of Representatives of the State of Vermont, Annual Session 1863*, (Montpelier, 1863), 39.

44. *Ibid.*, 34.

the " 'support and maintenance of at least one College in each State, where the leading object shall be . . . to promote the liberal and practical education of the industrial classes in the several pursuits and professions in life. . . . ' "45 The method as well as the plan appealed to the Governor, for it was both democratic and utilitarian, favoring all classes and "affording them access, not only to the higher branches of a scientific and classical education, but superadding to this a . . . training in the everyday, practical, and hitherto almost untaught science of agriculture and the mechanical arts."46 What the Governor proposed was that as Vermont already possessed two colleges and one military academy, that these institutions be united in some manner to form one State University. This, he felt, would at once increase the general educational strength and resources of each, while at the same time providing a fruitful outlet for the Morrill funds which could turn out to be as high as \$375,000. If this money were invested in bonds representing a portion of the funded debt of the State, the plan could provide the State with money while at the same time yielding six per cent interest to the newly formed institution.⁴⁷ Up until this time little attention had been paid to the Morrill Act, and, in fact, when it was first passed one of the leading Vermont newspapers, the *Burlington Free Press*, referred to it only once, and then only briefly.⁴⁸ One month after the Governor announced his plan the legislature acted making possible the merger of Middlebury College, the University of Vermont, and Norwich University, or any one of these institutions with the corporation created by the Assembly.⁴⁹ In recognition of the Governor's role he was named to the Board of Trustees along with his Lieutenant Governor Paul Dillingham and such notable Vermonters as Justin Morrill, Hiland Hall, and Frederick Holbrook.⁵⁰ As the situation eventually reconciled itself, Middlebury and Norwich declined the offer of merger, while the University of Vermont accepted, turning all her property over to the new State University.⁵¹

Probably the greatest single endeavor which Vermont undertook during the war years consisted of the recruiting of troops. When the first call had come Vermont had responded admirably, amassing a

45. *Ibid.*, 40.

46. *Ibid.*

47. *Ibid.*, 43-44.

48. Edwin C. Rozwenc, "Agricultural Education and Politics in Vermont," *Vermont History*, XXVI, No. 2, (April 1958), 75.

49. *Journal of the House*, 1863, 252. (Hereafter the *Journals of the House* will be referred to as *House*, 18—.)

50. Crockett, *op. cit.*, 572.

51. *Ibid.*

surplus which was then credited against the next call. But as the war dragged on fewer and fewer of the young men felt inclined to enlist. Indeed, few could really be spared from the work at home. On October 14, 1863 the President had issued a call for 300,000 men, of which the Vermont quota was reported to be 3,330.⁵² A week later Governor Smith issued a proclamation calling for the rapid fulfillment of the obligation.⁵³ Added problems had begun to plague recruitment. In the first place Vermont had already sent 20,000 of her young men into the field.⁵⁴ Further, the quota system as the government was choosing to apply it against the state grated against Vermont's traditional town orientation. As the Governor reported, "The work was at first very greatly retarded from the difficulty of properly adjusting the credits due and belonging to the several towns, from the fact that towns, as sub-districts, were not recognized by the government."⁵⁵ To a town having already contributed its share of men the fact that it might under a state draft be called upon to supplement another town which had not, violated the town conscious Vermonters' well developed sense of fairness, and slowed recruitment. To some, in fact, even the draft itself violated principles in which they professed to believe. The draft law had been passed as an act of Congress early in 1863,⁵⁶ and when it began to threaten Vermont its acceptance was due in large part to Smith's strong stand on a potentially explosive issue. In fact, when draft riots did occur in New York, Vermont troops were among those sent to restore order.⁵⁷ Governor Smith's sentiments on the subject of the draft became apparent in his first message to the legislature in which he said:

The Constitutional right of the government to adopt this method of raising troops, has been called in question . . . to deter citizens from yielding that cheerful compliance to the demands of the law, which, more than ever, in this terrible crisis, it was their duty to do. . . . There can be no doubt, under any fair and reasonable interpretation of the Constitution, but that Congress had the clear and obvious power to resort to this mode of raising men to replenish the wasted army. . . . Independently, however, of all questions of constitutional authority, it is the law of the land, and as such, is entitled to the obedience and respect of the citizens of the government, until, in the proper and legitimate method, it is judicially determined to be unconstitutional, and therefore void. . . .⁵⁸

As one commentator was later to phrase it: "He was a very remarkable

52. *Message of the Governor, 1864*, (Walton's Steam Press, Montpelier, 1864), 7.

53. *Vermont Watchman and State Journal*, November 6, 1863, 1.

54. Williams, *loc. cit.*, 2.

55. *House, 1864*, 29.

56. *Message of the Governor, 1863*, 7-8.

57. *Ibid.*, 8.

58. *Ibid.*

man—shrewd, far-seeing, persuasive, and yet iron handed in his determination to carry out his purposes.⁵⁹

In an attempt to solve the problem of districting, the Governor procured a Joint Resolution from the legislature requesting from the War Department an order stating that it would “exempt the residents of any town in this State from the draft, when such town shall have furnished its quotas of soldiers, under the call of the President. . . .”⁶⁰ Smith, who was to enjoy an increasing power and influence with the Secretary of War managed, after some delay, to procure such a directive. Following this the state’s quota was filled within the period specified.⁶¹

One solution to the general recruitment difficulty turned out to be financial, and was one of the solutions which the Governor employed. A plan was adopted whereby towns, mindful of the potential draft, offered large bounties which were then added to the government bounty, and topped off with state pay, thus yielding the financial inducement necessary to complete several enlistment quotas.⁶²

Another example of Governor Smith’s fairness and determination to effect his purposes can be seen when on a later occasion the President issued another call for troops and there existed a discrepancy between the state and federal records, resulting in a failure of the federal demand to correspond to the state estimate. Failing to effect the desired adjustment by correspondence, the Governor himself travelled to the Capitol. When he arrived in Washington he visited the Vermont Congressional delegation and was received with discouraging apathy. Smith’s reaction to the attempts to discourage him was decidedly hostile, and his secretary reports him as saying:

Very well, gentlemen, I will go and see the President alone, and if I fail the responsibility will not rest upon me. After seeing the President I shall leave immediately for home, and will then tell the people of Vermont . . . what interest their representatives take in them, and how little trouble they are willing to take to protect their interests.⁶³

Smith did go to see the President, but he was not alone. There were to be several times yet to come when the Governor would seek the support of the Vermont delegation, and at these times they seemed eager and ready, for they no longer underestimated the Governor. When

59. Jacob G. Ullery, *Men of Vermont*, (Brattleboro, 1894), 96.

60. *House*, 1863, 172.

61. *House*, 1864, 29.

62. *Report of the Adjutant and Inspector General of the State of Vermont from October 1, 1863 to October 1, 1864*, (Montpelier, 1864), 8.

63. Williams, *loc. cit.*, 3.

Smith returned to Vermont he merely reported that he had "proceeded to Washington, and procured such re-adjustment of the quotas as conformed to the records of the State. . . ."64

Despite the Governor's efforts it was inevitable that recruiting should become increasingly difficult as the war progressed. When the Seventeenth Vermont Regiment was ordered formed it was considered somewhat doubtful whether Vermont could raise another regiment. Due to the fact that many towns had withdrawn bounty payments and that the government bounty was one-third of its former amount,⁶⁵ the state experienced great difficulty "from persons procuring enlistments of recruits in this State [Vermont] to serve in other states . . ." where, presumably, more money would be offered.⁶⁶ On January 23, 1864 the Governor ordered the following to be posted by the Adjutant and Inspector General's office:

The Seventeenth Regiment *must be filled*. The men already enlisted are idle, waiting for the completion of the organization; large expense to the State has already been incurred, which must be lost unless the regiment is filled; and the honor of the State is involved, that the work be speedily completed. Every man in the State should feel . . . [filling the quota] to be a part of his duty. . . . The failure to complete the Seventeenth Regiment . . . will be a neglect of duty for which no excuse can be made, and which will admit of no apology.⁶⁷

How much effect the Governor's continuing aggressiveness actually had is impossible to calculate, but the Seventeenth Regiment was filled and sent into service, and in October of 1864 the Governor could report that "The State has . . . furnished during the past year more men than in any previous year since the commencement of the war."⁶⁸ Further, when the war was at last concluded the records showed that while more actual troops had been raised under previous war governors, the number raised under Smith was the greatest in proportion to the total number of able bodied citizens.⁶⁹

Another problem which Smith had to deal with came in the form of an order dated December 7, 1864, from the Provost Marshal General revoking the power of selectmen to enlist recruits, which henceforward could only be done by Provost Marshals.⁷⁰

64. *House, 1865*, 19.

65. *Message of the Governor, 1864*, 8.

66. *House, 1864*, 45.

67. *Report of the Adjutant, 1864*, 136.

68. *Message of the Governor, 1864*, 10.

69. Williams, *loc. cit.*, 2.

70. *Report of the Adjutant, and Inspector General of the State of Vermont from October 1, 1864 to October 1, 1865*, (Montpelier, 1865), 14.

The effect was, that selectmen, instead of having their entire time for labor in their several towns, and being enabled there to secure their recruits to service . . . were obliged, when they found men who professed to be willing to enlist . . . to take them, in many cases . . . more than one-hundred miles, to the office of the Provost Marshal, without power to control them, running the gauntlet of substitute brokers and rival selectmen, and liable to have their men seduced from them at any time by the offer of a higher bounty than they had agreed to receive.⁷¹

Smith attempted to have this situation altered and to reestablish conditions as they had previously existed. On December 29, 1864 the order was reasserted.⁷² Following this Governor Smith made another personal visit to Washington.⁷³ On February 9, 1865 the reestablishment of the former system was authorized.⁷⁴

In general it is difficult to measure what it is which raises one man above another in the opinion of those who follow, but one commentator seems to have approached the essential quality which appears to have set John Gregory Smith apart, when he says:

It was this personal interest and care, not only for the soldiers as a body but as individuals, that . . . made Governor Smith's name the one most loved and respected by veterans of the war and their families, though others may have done as much officially for their comfort and well-being.⁷⁵

The Governor for example not only travelled to the Capitol to serve those who were in turn serving their country and their state, but on several occasions actually paid visits to the troops in the field. In one instance, during the winter of 1863-1864, he visited the First Vermont Brigade in camp at Brandy Station, Virginia.⁷⁶ In his *History of the Tenth Regiment*, Chaplain Haynes noted that the Governor had during February of 1864 "spent several days at the front, paying a visit to all the State troops."⁷⁷ It was not only in merely raising morale that the Governor earned the esteem of the Vermont regiments, for in other more material ways he was always ready to defend their interests. In one instance a group of Vermont prisoners at Camp Parole, Annapolis, Maryland, were at the Governor's request allowed to return to Vermont. One eyewitness, a sergeant in the First Vermont Cavalry, commented:

It was certainly a great achievement, and showed the kindness of the Governor towards the soldiers, and his influence with the great War Secretary.

71. *Ibid.*

72. *Ibid.*

73. *Ibid.*

74. *Ibid.*

75. Williams, *loc. cit.*, 1.

76. Crockett, *op. cit.*, 574.

77. E. M. Haynes, *A History of the Tenth Regiment, Vermont Volunteers*, (Rutland, Vt., 1894), 69.

Cheers went up that day for Vermont's Chief Executive and the paroled prisoners of other states, numbered by thousands, only wished that their own Governors might have been as successful in their behalf.⁷⁸

In many ways Smith helped the soldiers, but no where was this more true than as concerned the sick and wounded. They received great attention during his personal visits, and through his work on their behalf while he was at home. In his first message to the legislature in 1863 Smith had pledged himself to continuing the work of helping Vermont's wounded.⁷⁹ In this spirit, immediately after assuming the duties of Governor, he appointed Doctor Samuel W. Thayer of Burlington as acting Surgeon General of the state. This position was in itself an innovation, and as the Governor described the action:

Although there exists no law recognizing such an office, I felt that the interests of the State, and the welfare of the soldiers, would be greatly promoted if there were some distinct department of that kind established, whose duty it should be to look carefully after the sanitary conditions of the soldiers in the field and in the hospitals, and an officer appointed who, from his professional experience would be able to make from time to time such suggestion, and recommend such plans, as would conduce to their comfort and welfare.⁸⁰

He then went on to direct the Surgeon General to examine various locations within the state "as may be suitable for the erection of hospitals for such increased accommodations, and make such plans and estimates as may in your judgment be necessary, and report to me at the earliest practicable moment, giving your opinion of the best location, and such other suggestions as may occur to you on the subject."⁸¹ Slightly over a week later Dr. Thayer reported as instructed, recommending Montpelier and Burlington as the best sites for the proposed accommodations.⁸² Under the Governor's direction the hospital plans were carried forward, and by June of 1864 two hundred beds had been added to enlarge the hospital at Burlington, while a new hospital at Montpelier had been partially completed with accommodations for about three-hundred beds.⁸³ Smith then communicated with the legislature, congratulating the state on her position of leadership in the field of hospitals, but suggesting that even further efforts might be desirable. "The matter of expense, to any reasonable amount," he concluded, "is unworthy of consideration, in comparison with the welfare and comfort of the men

78. *Report of the Adjutant, 1864*, 7.

79. *House, 1863*, 39.

80. *House, 1864*, 44.

81. *Governor's Correspondence, House, 1864*, 360-361.

82. Williams, *loc. cit.*, 5.

83. *Ibid.*

who have thus nobly offered their lives to their country.”⁸⁴ As a tribute from the federal government the Surgeon General of the United States informed the head of the Brattleboro United States General Hospital that the hospital would “. . . hereafter be designated the ‘Governor Smith United States General Hospital,’ as a well-merited compliment to His Excellency, J. Gregory Smith, the present Governor of Vermont.”⁸⁵

The most outstanding example of the Governor’s care, planning, and personal involvement came in 1864, following the bloody fighting at the battles of the Wilderness and Spottsylvania. Dr. Thayer and many Vermont surgeons hurried south to aid the Vermont wounded,⁸⁶ and personally accompanying the corps of physicians was Governor John Gregory Smith. As one investigator has observed, “The thousand Vermonters taken thither [Fredericksburg] probably fared better than the majority of this army of unfortunates, owing to the extraordinary efforts put forth by the State authorities for their relief.”⁸⁷ The war correspondent for the *Boston Journal*, Carleton, wrote of the Governor at the front:

“[he spent his time] directing his assistants, laboring with his own hands, hunting up the sick and wounded, giving up his own cot, sleeping on the bare floor or not sleeping at all, cheering the despondent, writing sympathetic letters to fathers and mother whose sons were in the hospitals, or had given up their lives for their country!”⁸⁸

In another effort to aid the people who most needed it the Governor attempted to have a lessening of racial discrimination within the Union forces. He referred to unequal pay for negro soldiers as a wrong “which only Congress could repair,”⁸⁹ and bolstered his general objections with a Joint Resolution from the General Assembly stating:

That it is the just expectation of the people of Vermont that the General Government will, without hesitation, avail itself of the assistance of all suitable persons of whatever race or color, who are willing to enlist in the service of their country, and that no unjust or invidious distinctions will be tolerated among loyal soldiers or the loyal people of the land.⁹⁰

In another area of activity, it has been pointed out previously that agricultural Vermont could scarce afford even the temporary loss of

84. *Message of the Governor, 1864*, 21.

85. Williams, *loc. cit.*, 6.

86. Report of the Surgeon General, October 1, 1864, *House, 1864*, 368-369.

87. G. G. Benedict, *Vermont in the Civil War*, I, (Burlington, 1888), 457.

88. Williams, *loc. cit.*, 9.

89. *Ibid.*, 2.

90. *House, 1863*, 153.

such a large segment of her working force as was called into military service during the years of the war. The state government realized this at the outset, and it is said that Vermont was the first state to make provisions to help families thus put in need by the loss of manpower.⁹¹ On April 26, 1861 the legislature had approved "An act to provide for the families of the citizens of Vermont mustered into the service of the United States."⁹² During the administrations of Fairbanks and Holbrook the official agency designated to aid needy families, headed by John Howe, Jr., had spent many thousands of dollars in fulfillment of its mission. This practice was continued by Smith and, during his first term 2058 persons, or 471 families were helped to the extent of \$18,700.42. By the end of the war this office could account for expenditures in the amount of \$73,542.60.⁹³

As the annual gubernatorial election approached in the autumn of 1864 Governor Smith had amassed quite an impressive record of accomplishment under very trying conditions. It was, therefore, a surprise to no one that he was nominated for a second term on the Union ticket, and returned to office by an increased majority.⁹⁴

The one really imperative piece of business which still remained after the election of 1864 was the problem of organizing and equipping an effective militia. In his annual message on October 14, 1864 Smith re-introduced this problem saying: "Vermont stands today utterly destitute of any arm of defense or any efficient power to resist or prevent invasion. The dangers to our frontier are by no means inconsiderable."⁹⁵ During the legislative session of 1863 the legislature had admitted the existence of the problem, but the only action it had authorized was the request by the Governor to the War Department for five-thousand rifles.⁹⁶ Between the legislative sessions the Governor, with an eye to more comprehensive protection requested and received from the Secretary of War 15,000 rifles and the necessary ordinance stores to outfit an efficient militia.⁹⁷ The Governor became increasingly concerned, and advised the legislature on October 14, 1864 that,

in the light of the evidence now in my possession. . . . I cannot justify myself in withholding an urgent appeal to the Legislature to frame such a law as will place the State in that position of security, and afford those

91. Crockett, *op. cit.*, 507.

92. *Report of John Howe, Jr., September 1, 1862-September 1, 1863*, (Montpelier, 1863).

93. *Message of the Governor, 1864*, 5.

94. Archives of the Secretary of State, Canvass of Votes for State Officers, 1864.

95. *Message of the Governor, 1864*, 15.

96. *House, 1863*, 175.

97. Correspondence of the Governor, *House, 1864*, 359.

means of protection to her people, without which they are left exposed to the most wanton and high-handed predatory incursions.⁹⁸

These sentiments were almost prophetic of troubles to come. Less than one week later, on October 19, a group of about twenty-three Confederate soldiers crossed over from Canada and calmly robbed the banks of St. Albans of \$210,000, killing one person and injuring two others. The whole affair lasted for only about twenty or twenty-five minutes.⁹⁹ Apparently the sudden commotion so alarmed the local telegraph operator that he sent out a wire proclaiming that the town was being burned and sacked and the citizens indiscriminately massacred in the streets. Following this message the wires went dead.¹⁰⁰ As might be expected, this message caused a great deal of alarm wherever it was received. The Governor immediately responded to the danger by organizing a provisional force under the command of Colonel Redfield Proctor. By the time the force arrived in St. Albans the raiders had escaped to Canada, but the Governor's point had been made.¹⁰¹ There was naturally a great deal of excitement and anxiety following the raid, and it is quite probable that it was only the Governor's immediate and subsequent precautions which prevented further Canadian-based raids into the state. Two measures of consequence were then taken. The first was the request for a Frontier Cavalry, which was duly authorized by Washington;¹⁰² and the second was the action enabling the formation of an efficient militia.¹⁰³ Under the direction of the Governor an effective force was soon organized. The infantry complement was 6101 men,¹⁰⁴ and soon thereafter twelve companies of cavalry were authorized and quickly raised.¹⁰⁵ Next plans were initiated for the raising of light artillery, which was well under way when Governor Smith delivered his farewell message to the legislature on October 13, 1865.¹⁰⁶ Thus, where Smith had complained of not a single armed man there was now an effective force of 7,408 men with an enrolled militia of 28,721 men.¹⁰⁷

As the war drew to a close, as Grant hammered at Lee with a series of blows which would soon crystalize at Appomattox, the Congress passed and referred to the several states a proposed Thirteenth Amend-

98. *House, 1864.*

99. *House, 1865, 21-24.*

100. Hemenway, *op. cit.*, 308.

101. *Ibid.*

102. *House, 1865, 24.*

103. *The General Statutes of the State of Vermont*, (1863), 657 (Ch. 110).

104. *Report of the Adjutant, 1865, 102.*

105. *Ibid.*, 104.

106. *Ibid.*, 106.

107. *Ibid.*, 107.

ment to the Constitution of the United States, prohibiting slavery. In response Smith immediately called a special session of the legislature, which duly convened on March 9, 1865.¹⁰⁸ Along with a copy of the proposed amendment the Governor presented to the legislature his own views, and, in fact, the views of the state:

It is not necessary that I should urge the measure upon your attention. Ever earnest and uniform in her adherence to the great principles of constitutional liberty, uncompromising in her opposition to slavery, the persistent advocate of emancipation, early in the field and foremost in the fight in support of the government, Vermont has written her history in characters too vivid and clear to admit of a doubt as to her action on a question so vital as this.¹⁰⁹

The next morning the Governor of Vermont wired the President of the United States: "Vermont, by her Legislature in special session yesterday evening, set her seal of ratification to the great principle of Constitutional liberty by an unanimous vote."¹¹⁰

Soon, on April 9, 1865, the long war drew up before Appomattox Court House and died of painful exhaustion. For Vermont and her Green Mountain boys the war was over, and the principles of freedom in which they had so firmly believed and which they had striven for a hundred years to uphold, seemed in their greatest trial to indeed have been upheld. Governor Smith undertook his last official journey South, and at Bailey's Cross Roads, Virginia, on the seventh day of June, 1865, he proudly reviewed the Vermont companies. The following afternoon he sent a message to the soldiers, expressing thanks for their sacrifices, and expressing the hope that they would "still labor for the grand consummation of the peace which Northern valor has won, and for the advancement of those great principles of liberty and equality which have been triumphantly vindicated in this great and terrible conflict."¹¹¹

As one of the most perceptive statesman of his day, John Gregory Smith realized that while the soldiers might be done fighting, there remained a great deal to be done. This is shown in part in his message to the soldiers at Bailey's Cross Roads. Smith was one of the rare individuals whose ability it was to express high principles convincingly, and yet see beneath them to the hard realities. His strength was in, and not in spite of, his ideals, which though handed him by his heritage, he honored in the practice.

The fighting was over just in time for spring planting, but under the

108. Journal of the House for the Special Session 1865, *House, 1864*, 450.

109. *Ibid.*

110. Williams, *loc. cit.*, 7.

111. *Ibid.*

original muster out orders there were detachments from nearly every Vermont field regiment left in service. The Governor made successful "personal application to the Secretary of War for such modification of the general orders as would permit all the regiments in the field, from this State, to be discharged."¹¹²

As the war closed Vermont could look back upon her war record with pride. She had furnished 34,555 men, or one in every four of her male population.¹¹³ She had, in the end, provided a surplus of 697 men above all quotas and calls.¹¹⁴ She had expended, apart from any direct taxes paid to the federal government by either the state or her residents, the sum of \$9,323,407.80.¹¹⁵

On October 12, 1865 John Gregory Smith submitted his farewell message to the Vermont legislature.¹¹⁶ He chose not to seek reelection and a third term, thus adhering to what appeared to be an unwritten rule of Vermont politics. Of the office he was leaving it could be said that future governors would find it more highly respected for his having held it.

While John Gregory Smith did not choose to advance as far as possible up the political ladder of elective office, he nevertheless remained master of Vermont politics for more than twenty years. He served as chairman of the Vermont delegation to three Republican National Conventions,¹¹⁷ and twice declined a seat in the United States Senate.¹¹⁸ He preferred to spend some time indulging in his other interests which the rigors of war had forced him to forgo for the most part during his two terms as governor. The Smith residence in St. Albans occupied the highest point of land in the town. This palatial residence was frequently the scene of many social gatherings of the most prominent Vermonters and New Englanders. Two hundred and fifteen feet below his home stood the depot, around which the better part of his business career had centered.¹¹⁹ For many years his business and political careers had been involved with each other, but following the war he had time to put his full energy into his railroad and other business enterprises, which were by this time greatly in need of his assistance.

John Gregory Smith died at St. Albans, Vermont, on November 6, 1891, following a month's illness.¹²⁰ As one commentator has tersely ob-

112. *House, 1865*, 20.

113. *Ibid.*, 21.

114. *Ibid.*, 19.

115. *Ibid.*, 18.

116. *Ibid.*

117. Crockett, *op. cit.*, 570.

118. Ullery, *op. cit.*, 96.

119. Hemenway, *op. cit.*, 310.

120. Ullery, *op. cit.*, 96.

served, he was for nearly thirty years the most “potent personality in Vermont affairs.”¹²¹ Perhaps Ullery has put it most simply in his almost Biblical observation:

And none are there to deny the high quality of his service to the state and nation in those days.¹²²

121. *Ibid.*

122. *Ibid.*



VERMONT STATE FLAG

1842