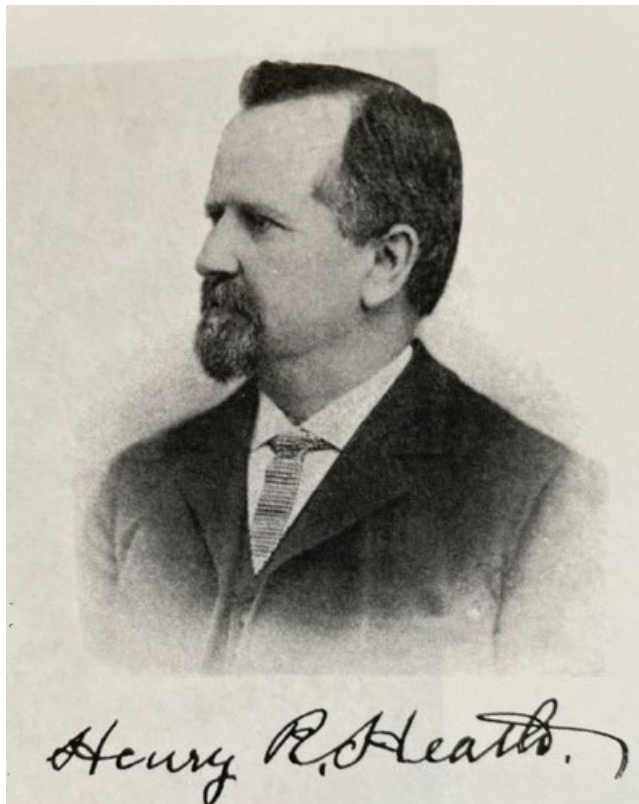


Who was Henry Heath?

09/28/22

Henry Heath brought numerous people to the Thousand Islands and encouraged the building of summer homes and purchasing of islands and property. His influence established Millionaires Row. He may have been the first to discover that "River water cures poor health". He was the second owner of Nobby Island and owned Devils Oven at one point and may have started the first boat tours. He began his life as a poor, motherless only son and became one of the states most successful men. Here is how he did that.



Henry was born on April first, 1845, the only son of a Berkshire farmer with three older sisters and no mother. His mother died when he was four months old. His grandparents helped with raising the children. He hired out on local farms and attended local schools. In 1861, after the confederate army fired upon Fort Sumter in Charleston, at the start of the Civil War, Henry followed Abraham Lincoln's call to arms and enlisted in the Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry. Henry was only 16 at the time but declared himself to be 18 and was accepted as a private. For three years he was in Company A of the 20th Regiment. The 20th Regiment was nicknamed the "Harvard Regiment" due to many college graduates serving as officers. These graduates included Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr, who became an Associate Justice of the United States Supreme court, and many pedigreed family names such as Revere and Paine.

Immediately after enlisting, Henry and the 20th Regiment were sent to Maryland along the Potomac River across from confederate Virginia. On October 21st, Colonel Edward D Baker, Oregon's sitting US Senator and close friend of President Lincoln took command of the unit and crossed the Potomac into Virginia. This brought about heavy artillery fire which would last into the evening hours. As darkness fell,

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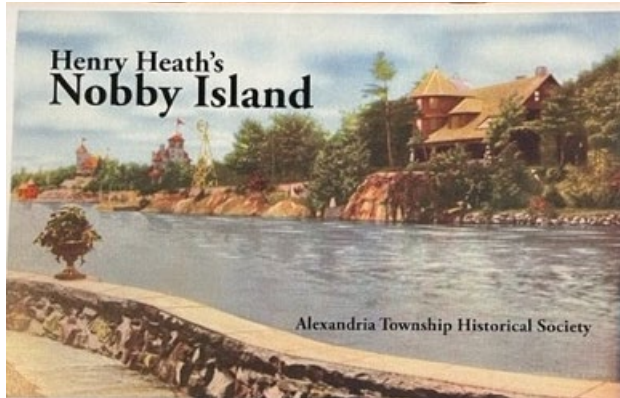
Henry Heath and Company A of the 20th Massachusetts were in the very center of the bloody fight with union troops drowning in the river or falling off Balls Bluff where they were trapped. Colonel Baker died of multiple gunshot wounds and Lieutenant Oliver Wendell Holmes suffered a nearly fatal chest wound. Heath was positioned near the horse-drawn artillery and received a crushing blow to the left side of his body after being run over by a cannon wheel after the horses were frightened. Later during the war, Herman Melville, author of Moby Dick penned a dirge to those men lost at Balls Bluff.

At the conclusion of the Balls Bluff battle, Heath and hundreds of Union prisoners were lined up and forced to march, four abreast, for two days through mud and rain with little food or rest to Manassas Junction. There they were loaded onto railcars and sent to Richmond. Heath was held in tobacco warehouses and factories near the James River that had been converted into prisons. Heath, not even 17 years of age, spent the winter months confined in these prisons with little to eat, wearing filthy rags and jostling for space with his comrades. His wounds were now made worse by these conditions and he developed ailments to his lungs and other vital organs and lost fifty pounds. Finally on February 19, 1862, President Lincoln and Confederate President Jefferson Davis negotiated a prisoner exchange and Henry and his comrades were sent north. Henry would tell his friends and family that upon return to Washington, he was the first prisoner to shake President Lincoln's hand.

Henry was furloughed home to recover, suffering from pleurisy, measles, and chronic diarrhea, and was discharged from the army on April 14, 1862. The following year he applied for an invalid's pension and received the pension from the federal government well into the twentieth century.

Upon returning to Massachusetts, Henry's former employer and his physician deemed that no one could live long with so many ailments. Henry's sister Huldah and her husband took Henry in and helped him through a long recuperation. Eventually he was strong enough to resume his education and enrolled in Claverack Academy along the Hudson River. Here he established a warm relationship with the school and his classmates that would endure a lifetime. After graduating from Eastman's Business College in Poughkeepsie, he set off for New York City. Here he held several positions selling hats and other dry goods while still suffering from his wartime experience. His genial demeanor, as well as his family ties gained him a wide circle of friends and acquaintances. One was George M. Pullman, the Chicago railroad-car magnate. Pullman's mother had visited the Thousand Islands during the Civil War and at her urging, encouraged her son George to purchase land. George purchased two islands, Sweet Island, later renamed Pullman Island, and nearby Nobby Island, named for a rock resembling a doorknob at the head of the waters edge. Pullman invited Heath to camp in the tents on Pullman Island in the summer of 1870 thinking a few weeks might restore Henry's health. Henry accepted and he too became smitten with the islands in the St Lawrence.

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Shortly after this visit, Heath and his friend Charles S Goodwin purchased Nobby island from the Pullman family for a price somewhere between \$25 and \$100 dollars. On July 18th 1871 the two owners took possession of their newly erected house on the three acre island. The Gothic style home would soon be called the first 'modern' summer cottage in the area.

Two events during the summer of 1872 secured interest in the Thousand Islands. In June, Watertown was hosting a large convention of newspaper editors and they were invited to an excursion to Pullman Island where they were grandly entertained. In August, President Ulysses S Grant with his family and General Phil Sheridan enjoyed a visit to "Camp Charming" on Pullman Island. This was covered by the press and the presidential party likely also visited Nobby Island. As a result of these two events, many around the country would read that summer about the unique charms of the Thousand Islands. In New York City, illustrated excursion guides about the Thousand Islands were written and distributed by Heath's close friend Wallace Bruce. Bruce graduated from Yale and spent several days in the summer of 1873 at Nobby Island, writing the tourist guidebooks and some romantic poetry.

At this time, Henry was employed in New York City by a hat maker, and he commuted from Cranford, New Jersey via railroad. During this period, he purchased land in Cranford and became one of the largest landowners and developers in the town. Henry's father died in Massachusetts about the same time and left his estate to Henry. Heath also helped found the Westcott Huck Company in Oneida New York where his friend Charles Goodwin had been raised.

In 1875 Henry married Jane Maria Bush Williams, the daughter of the sheriff of Kings County, Brooklyn. Sheriff Williams often summered on Nobby Island with his daughter and son-in-law and when he passed in 1880, he was said to have left a 'handsome fortune' to Henry and 'Jennie'. Jennie was a descendent of Roger Williams, the founder of Rhode Islands and had been raised in Utica by her grandfather, Abijah H Williams. AJ Williams was the richest man in Utica owning controlling interests in cotton and woolen mills, as well as manufacturing of machinery for the mills. He was a director and major shareholder of the only railroad line providing an all-rail route to the Thousand Islands, with connections at Clayton and Alexandria Bay. Excursion booklets for the railroad included alluring portraits of Nobby Island and travel to the area after Jennies marriage.

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In 1876, Henry left the dry-goods business to become the New York agent for the Empire Transportation Company of New Haven. This company had been founded by George B Martin, another college classmate and close friend of Henry's. Heath diversified his interests the next five years. He became the New York agent for the Empire Woolen Company of Utica, he was elected president of the People's District Telegraph Company and later became a director the Brooklyn District Telegraph Company. By the 1890s he had amassed a large amount of real estate and was president and director of the Cranford (NJ) Realty Company. Henry Heath had become a model of those who would follow him to the St Lawrence River. Henry and Jennie purchased Devils Oven and land on Wells Island where they erected a large hothouse. Jennie acquired 100 acres called 'Lakeside'. She also established an Adirondack camp with a log cabin, open bark shanty and six tents which she named 'Lalarama' (beautiful view in Greek). Photo Island was variously reported to be owned either by Heath or A.C. McIntyre, the St Lawrence photographer.

Whether testimony to the restorative power of the River or not, Henry was much improved in health after several seasons on Nobby Island having regained his weight and strength. He did not miss a single summer on his island for thirty years. Each season he regularly entertained numerous guests worthy of mention in the society pages and never missed a chance to promote the Thousand Islands to others. It was reported that Henry, directly or indirectly influenced between twenty and forty families to take up residence along the St Lawrence. Among those were Edward W. Dewey (Friendly Island), William C. Browning (Hopewell Hall), Nathaniel W. Hunt (St. Elmo Island), Michael Chauncey (Cuba Island), George C. Boldt (Heart Island), Rev. Abel G. Hopkins (Felsneck on Wells Island) and James H. Oliphant (Nemah-Bin).

Henry also was active in creating social institutions such as The Thousand Island Club (eventually renamed to The Thousand Islands Yacht Club) and facilitated the purchase of Friendly Island for the move of the clubhouse from Bethune Street in Alexandria Bay to Friendly Island. The Thousand Islands Yacht Club was established in New York City at the Union League Club for the elite of the Thousand Islands to promote cultivation of social events and protection and advancements of their mutual interests as summer residents. In 1895 he became president of the newly formed Thousand Islands Transit Company and bought the yacht *Crescent* to provide transportation on the river. He was president of the Anglers' Association of the St Lawrence River created in 1883 to promote fish conservation. He also was instrumental in establishing the State and International Parks in the Thousand Islands.

In 1889 the Heaths hired Seth G. Pope of Ogdensburg to construct an elegant new cottage on the waters edge of Nobby Island. The Heaths named their handsome new summer residence "Norman de Lodge" after their only child Norman Abijah Heath.

The Heaths traveled extensively in Europe and the Middle East and Henry took ill in 1906 during a trip to the Holy Land. He never fully recovered from this illness. He died two years later at age 63 at his Washington Avenue home but he had spent his last summer of his life on his beloved Nobby Island. Just before he died, he received his final monthly pension check for his Civil War service. The amount was \$12. Henry was buried at Maple Grove Cemetery in Kew Gardens, New York. In his will, he left Nobby Island to Jennie with the wish that she would later convey it "by deed or will" to their son Norman. Jennie passed away in 1916 and Norman was given Nobby Island, per Henry's wishes.

Who was Henry Heath? He was so many things and more, but always was in love with the Thousand Islands and the St Lawrence River.