

## PORTRAIT OF A CIVIL WAR NAVAL CAPTAIN

By Ellen Knight<sup>1</sup>

Among the artworks belonging in the collections of the Winchester Historical Society is a portrait of Capt. Jefferson Ford, an officer in the navy during the Civil War.

A native of New Hampshire, born in 1803, Ford lived in Woburn and Winchester for many years. He married Lydia Symmes, a daughter of Joseph Brown Symmes and a great-granddaughter of Hezekiah Wyman, known as “the White Horseman.”

Ford was a ship’s captain in the merchant service. “Already elderly at the outbreak of the war he patriotically offered his services to the government and was sailing master on several vessels attached to the North Atlantic Squadron—the *Ohio*, *Princeton* and *Monticello*.<sup>2</sup> It was believed that Ford contracted cholera. He was removed from the U.S. gunboat *Monticello*, of which he was the acting master, on June 16 and died two days later in the military hospital at Beaufort, North Carolina. There is a memorial stone for him at Wildwood Cemetery.



The oleograph portrait was done at the instigation of Count Schwab, who made efforts to establish a gallery of fallen heroes in Boston. Schwab came to Winchester and interested a

number of our citizens, and a portrait of Capt. Ford was painted and given to this gallery. Schwab's efforts to create the gallery, however, did not succeed, and the picture was lost sight of. A family member made several inquiries but failed to trace it. After the death of Count Schwab, Harrison Parker, an old friend of Capt. Ford, eventually located it and had it taken from its hiding place in a closet in the upper part of Faneuil Hall, the armory of the Ancient & Honorable Artillery Co., and sent to Winchester.

In Sept. 1889, the portrait was donated to the Winchester Historical & Genealogical Society by T. Parker and C. F. Lunt and hung in the Society's room in the upper floor of the library when it shared the Town Hall building. After some years in the Archival Center, at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century it was hung in the lobby of Town Hall, but with the Historical Society acquiring a lease to its own home at the Sanborn House it was removed there.

### **CAPT. FORD REMEMBERED**

"Capt. Ford entered into the navy as acting master son after the outbreak of the rebellion and was at the attack on port Royal and has continued in active service with but little intermission ever since. He as an experienced shipmaster and was highly esteemed by those in who interests he was concerned in the merchant service, and his appointment to a similar situation in the navy was one eminently fit to have been made and reflected great credit upon those making the selection. His inflexible firmness and honesty in the discharge of his official duties secured for him the respect of those under his command, and the confidence of his superior officers. He had no sympathy with traitors to the government and did not believe in affording them aid and succor in the least degree, and he faithfully acted upon this principle in the various stations which he was called upon to fill. He was deeply interest in the freed-people of the South, and in response to his appeal, a generous contribution of needed articles as furnished from our own and adjacent towns to a colony of these people upon one of the islands. He has fallen at his post like a hero, not by the bullet of the enemy, but stricken by the hand of diseases, another victim of the wicked rebellion."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This article © 2019 is a revision of an earlier article by the author, Ellen Knight, published in the *Daily Times Chronicle* on Jan. 2, 1998. This revision supersedes all previous articles.

<sup>2</sup> Henry S. Chapman, *History of Winchester*, p. 198

<sup>3</sup> Excelsior [Edwin A. Wadleigh], *The Middlesex Winchester*, p. 198

<sup>3</sup> Excelsior [Edwin A. Wadleigh *Journal*, July 2, 1864.