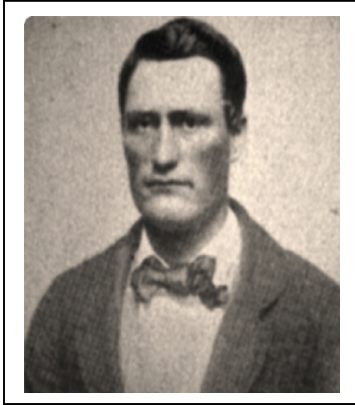


WITNESSES TO GETTYSBURG

Amos Humiston



Amos Humiston was a sergeant in the 154th New York infantry regiment who died at Gettysburg on the battle's first day. But his story has been preserved because his body was found after the fight with no identification at all except for an ambrotype (or early type of photograph) of his three young children apparently still clutched within his hand. A Philadelphia physician then publicized the story and on October 19, 1863 the *Philadelphia Inquirer* published a story under the headline: "Whose Father Was He?" that galvanized northern newspapers to promote the dramatic tale of "The Unknown Soldier." Before long, residents of Portville, NY, Philinda Humiston and her three children,

Franklin, Frederick, and Alice, identified themselves as the sergeant's surviving family. After the war, they lived briefly in an orphan's homestead established in Gettysburg for them and others like them who lost husbands and fathers in the great battle. Today, Humiston is the only enlisted soldier at Gettysburg to have his own monument, which features a relief of the photograph of the famous, "Children of the Battle-Field," on a sculpture outside of a fire station on Stratton Street.



Additional Material

Amos Humiston (b. April 26, 1830 in Oswego, NY – d. July 1, 1863 in Gettysburg, PA)

Excerpt from an untitled poem by Amos Humiston, March 25, 1863:

I am very sad to night dear wife
My thoughts are dwelling on home and thee
As I keep the lone night watch
Beneath the holley tree

Excerpt from a letter from Humiston to his wife Philinda, dated May 9, 1863:

I got the likeness of the children and it pleased me more than anything you could have sent me. How I want to see them and their mother is more than I can tell. I hope that we may live to see each other again if this war does not last to[o] long.

Further Reading

Mark H. Dunkelman, *Gettysburg's Unknown Soldier: The Life, Death and Celebrity of Amos Humiston* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1999).

Errol Morris's five-part blog post at the New York Times, "Whose Father Was He?", March 29 – April 2, 2009, <http://morris.blogs.nytimes.com/>