

Looking at final resting place of and doll-

(Whit Pearson of Pelham, N.H. and George A. Parkhurst of Westford, historians par excellence, are both descendants of the far-flung Hildreth family which settled in Greater Lowell over 300 years ago.)

By WHIT PEARSON & GEORGE A. PARKHURST

LOWELL — When Dr. Israel Hildreth Jr. donated a plot of land off Aiken Street in Dracut for use as a cemetery, he reserved a small back plot for his family and descendants.

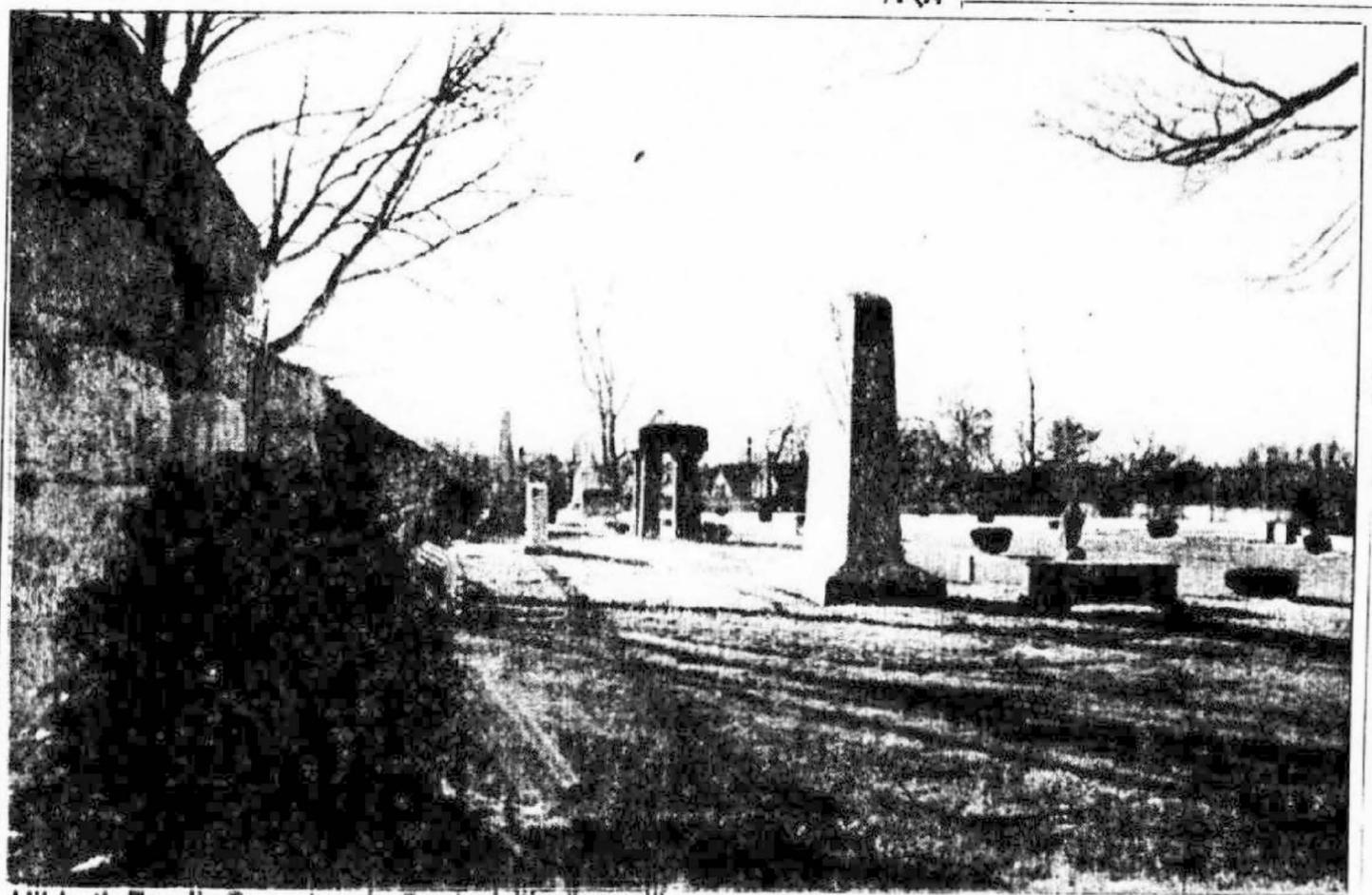
He had no way of knowing that this small parcel would become the final resting place for six high-ranking military figures, including five generals and an admiral.

The Hildreths of Dracut once owned huge acreage in what is now the Centralville section of Lowell, including Hovey Square. In addition, they had purchased fishing rights in the Merrimack River from the Indians and opposed the early development of the city.

Israel, a sixth-generation family member, was a town official and father of six girls and a son. He was a proponent of women's equality and all six of his daughters married prominently, perhaps competing among themselves. His son served as Lowell's postmaster. A second son died when he was a year old. Among his children were:

— **Rowena (1814-1913)**, who married Henry Reade. Among their children was **General Philip Reade**, who served during the Philippine Insurrection.

— **Sarah Jones (1816-1876)**, a talented New York actress in the 1830s. She married Civil War **General Ben-**



Hildreth Family Cemetery in Centralville (Lowell)

jamin F. Butler who served as a U.S. Congressman and Massachusetts governor.

It was while teaching at the 10th Street School in Dracut that Butler met Sarah's brother, Fisher Ames Hildreth. At a Thanksgiving dinner in 1839, young Ben, then 21, met Sarah, 23, who had been on stage since the age of 16. On Nov. 28, he accompanied Sarah to a cotillion at Merrimack House (opposite City Hall).

But it was not until May 16, 1844 that Sarah agreed to wedding vows at St. Anne's Church, with Dr. Theodore Edson presiding.

Their beautiful daughter, Blanche, married **General Adelbert Ames** in 1870, who had been badly injured in the Battle of Bull Run. He was one

of the first to receive the Congressional Medal of Honor. Later, he commanded a regiment of volunteer Negro troops.

At the conclusion of the Civil War, Ames served as governor and U.S. Senator from Mississippi. In later years, he was a golf partner of John D. Rockefeller's.

His son, **General Butler Ames**, served in the Spanish-American War with Gardner W. Pearson. While in Puerto Rico, Ames and Pearson ran their own cigar company for a short while.

Returning to the Bay State, Butler Ames resided on a hill overlooking Ames Pond in Tewksbury and ran Heinz Electric Company in Lowell. He invented the early windshield wipers and electric

horns that Henry Ford used on his Model T's and Model A's.

Butler Ames also served as a U.S. Congressman and sponsored the road races that were held years ago on a dirt track that's now Pawtucket Boulevard.

The families' acting talents live on in the great-great grandson of Ben and Sarah Butler — actor and writer **George Plimpton**.

— **Fisher Ames (1818-1873)** married **Lauretta Coburn**. Their daughter, **Rowena Hildreth**, married **Charles Dana Palmer**. Rowena and Charles Palmer had two sons, **Jackson**, a famous canoeist; and **Dana**, the father of **Peggy Costello**, Hildreth Aldrich and **Eleanor Lynch**.

In 1846, Fisher and Ben

Butler bought the 1st Free Will Baptist Church in Kearney Square and remodeled it as the Hildreth Building, where Fisher ran a small newspaper and Butler had a law office. It also included a small theatre, probably because of Sarah's influence, which drew ire from former church-goers.

A fire destroyed the building in 1856, and it was rebuilt as it now stands opposite the Lowell Sun offices.

It was Fisher who encouraged Butler to become involved in politics — Ben was active in the 1844 Democratic National Convention — the year James K. Polk defeated Henry Clay.

In 1864, Butler turned down

an offer to be Abraham Lincoln's vice president and was considered for the Secretary of War post. Butler later ran for President himself as a Greenback Party candidate.

During the time General Butler commanded New Orleans as military governor, his brother-in-law, Fisher, was active in shipping southern cotton to New England textile mills. When Fisher Ames died at an early age, Butler became the legal guardian of his daughters, Rowena and Florence.

— **Susan Hale (1819-1874)** married **William Prentiss Webster**, a law partner of Ben Butler and his chief financial adviser. Webster later served as a U.S. Consul in Heidelberg, Germany. Another finan-

cial adviser to Butler was **James G. Carney**, for whom Lowell High School's Carney Medals are named.

— **Harriet (1821-1866)** married **Franklin Fiske Heard**. Her daughter, **Hattie**, married **Lanier Dunn**. In 1885, Hattie went to Washington, D.C. and kept house for Ben Butler until his death in 1893.

— **Dolly Maria (1824-1903)** married **Capt. John Milton Grosvenor Parker**, who served as postmaster of New Orleans, La. and ran a private investigation firm.

One of their daughters married **Dr. Joseph V. Meigs**, whose father had been a ballistics engineer in the Civil War and who helped Butler start the U.S. Cartridge Company in Lowell, once the city's biggest

employer.

— **Laura Wright (1826-1891)** married **George Howard Pearson**. They had two sons, **General Gardner W. Pearson**, patent lawyer and leader of the Massachusetts Militia (father of Whit, John and Sarah); and **Fisher Hildreth Pearson**, whose son, **Admiral Meade Pearson**, served during World War II in the U.S. Navy.

Family talk has it that Meade commanded the vessel on which General Eisenhower and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill met. Meade's sister, **Laura**, wed **Blanchard Pratt**; while a brother, **Fisher Jr.**, was active as New England manager for U.S. News and World Report.