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EDITORS' NOTE

Links to America's Past—and Ours

When a new trove of early American letters, some signed by General George Washington, came to light in upstate New York some time ago, it seemed the natural thing to assign Roger Butterfield to write the story. Not only is Roger a well-known historian, but he has been associated with us for a long time. He helped put together stories for the pre-publication dummies of LIFE when he was writing for TIME in the '30s, and was our national affairs editor from 1941 until 1945.

It was then that History trapped him. Working to condense Charles A. Beard's book *The Republic*, and to find contemporary pictures to illustrate it for a 10-part series in LIFE, he was impressed and excited by the way a lively journalistic sense combined with good picture sense could make history vivid and alive. So he left LIFE to write a book of his own. Called *The American Past* (Simon and Schuster, 1947), it was a picture history of America, one of the few of its kind at the time. It is now in its third edition. Since he wrote it he has often come back to do general articles and work on historical LIFE series such as "The Adams Papers," which his brother Lyman is editing for the Massachusetts Historical Society.



ROGER BUTTERFIELD

Roger is also a student of American murders—he used to sell stories about them to *True Detective Mysteries* and *Master Detective* in the late '20s—and is cofounder of the Society of Connoisseurs in Murder, which meets to discuss famous crimes. He is particularly interested in one such episode, the Chester Gillette-Grace Brown murder, a celebrated case of 1906. "It was the basis of Dreiser's *An American Tragedy*," he says, "and I guess you could say I inherited it. My father covered it when he was a newspaperman in upstate New York and helped the police pin it on Chester."

He also likes to poke around secondhand bookstores and, over the years, has put together a remarkable collection of examples of pictorial journalism. "It covers more than a century of output of major American newspapers and periodicals," he says, "*Harper's Weekly*, *Gleason's*, Barnum's old *New York Illustrated News*—about 200,000 items in all." This collection has been turned over to the New York State Historical Association in Cooperstown.

Butterfield's own links to the American past are much like those of the family whose papers he writes about this week. The Butterfield home, "White House," near Hartwick, N.Y., has wide pine flooring and beams held together by hickory pegs. It was built by Roger's great-great-great-grandfather, Major James Butterfield, in 1792 when James settled down after serving in the Continental Army (he was stationed at Ticonderoga, fought at Saratoga) and surviving torture by marauding Indians. His own family papers have also survived strenuous vicissitudes. "One day quite a few years ago," he recalls, "a big, torn brown paper packet came in the mail—third class, 8¢ postage. It was full of old family papers, records, letters, even the original deed to the house. Some cousin of mine had just dumped them in, wrapped them up and shipped them. Some of them were signed by George Washington."

LEE

KHE SANH

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