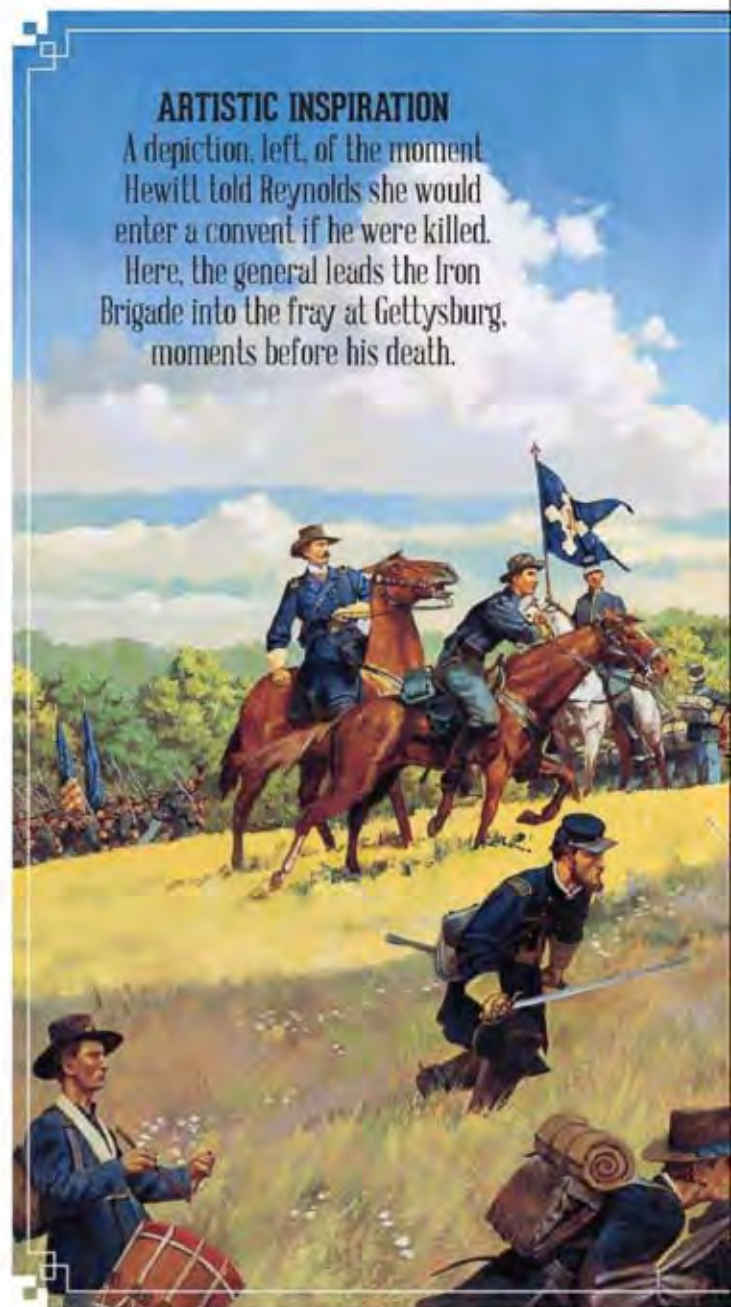




ARTISTIC INSPIRATION

A depiction, left, of the moment Hewitt told Reynolds she would enter a convent if he were killed. Here, the general leads the Iron Brigade into the fray at Gettysburg, moments before his death.



ONE OF THE MORE ENDURING MYSTERIES

surrounding the Battle of Gettysburg is the ultimate fate of Union Maj. Gen. John F. Reynolds' fiancée, Catherine "Kate" Mary Hewitt. The main story is well known. It was revealed after his death on July 1, 1863, that Reynolds had secretly been engaged to Kate and that she had vowed to join a convent if he were to die during the war. After the Battle of Gettysburg, as promised, Kate joined the Daughters of Charity in Emmitsburg, Md. She left that community on September 3, 1868, however, and little is known of her life thereafter. Indeed, the question of what eventually happened to Kate has puzzled historians for more than 152 years, with extensive research conducted by various groups and individuals repeatedly falling short of an answer.

Then in 2005, a seemingly viable alternative story surfaced indicating that a woman named Catherine Hewitt, who had lived in Stillwater, N.Y., had been Reynolds' fiancée. Recently discovered records and documents, as well as a closer analysis of previously existing documentation show, however, that the woman once engaged to General Reynolds was not the Catherine Hewitt of Stillwater. Instead, our research reveals that John Reynolds' fiancée was another New York woman named Catherine Hewitt. That Kate Hewitt married an Albany, N.Y., florist named Joseph B. Pfordt in 1874, six years after leaving the Daughters of Charity order, and tragically died of consumption just two years later.

Today, Reynolds' unlucky fiancée rests as Catherine M. Pfordt in the historic St. Agnes Catholic Cemetery, in Menands, N.Y., only a few miles from where she once taught school in Albany. Before detailing the documentation supporting our findings, a bit of background is in order.



In 1958, author Edward Nichols introduced General Reynolds and his fiancée to the world in his seminal biography *Toward Gettysburg: A Biography of John F. Reynolds*. Some may have been aware of John and Kate's story from various original source documents and contemporary accounts in the press, but Nichols' book really put the story on the map.

And it was a tragic love story: a prominent Union officer head over heels in love and clandestinely engaged to a beautiful young woman; the engagement supposedly kept secret due to familial religious differences and then ending unexpectedly with the death of the officer at Gettysburg, just days before the two intended to announce their engagement. After Reynolds' death, the crestfallen fiancée introduces herself to the family as she grieves over her beloved's remains and the family welcomes her with open arms. All of this is capped by Kate's so-called "Last Promise"—a commitment she made to enter into religious life if her beloved were to be killed during the war. True to her word, she begins that process shortly after his death but then leaves the community suddenly in September 1868 and seemingly disappears from public view.

Since Nichols' book, numerous historians and researchers have opined on Kate's fate. Investigative works have graced the pages of numerous newspapers, magazines, historical essays, books, and a plethora of internet sites. One such effort made the case that Kate Hewitt may actually have

**WE SET OUT
TO START FROM
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SEEKING PRIMARY
SOURCE DOCUMENTS**

been from Stillwater and had lived out her life quietly in the town 20 miles or so from Albany, finally passing away in 1902.

Much of the research conducted on this subject reflects sound analysis of documents extant at the time of the respective publications. Yet when seeking to compose a fresh analysis of the story of John and Kate, we discovered that the authenticity of information for various portions of the story was difficult to determine. Thus, we set out to start from "the ground up," seeking primary source documents that would confirm or contest what had been previously written. That is what led us to discovering who we believe was the *real* Kate Hewitt. Details of her entire life story are still unfolding, and we hope to bring those all to light as soon as possible.

and one in Stillwater, and that it was the Kate Hewitt of Albany who was engaged to General John Reynolds when he died.

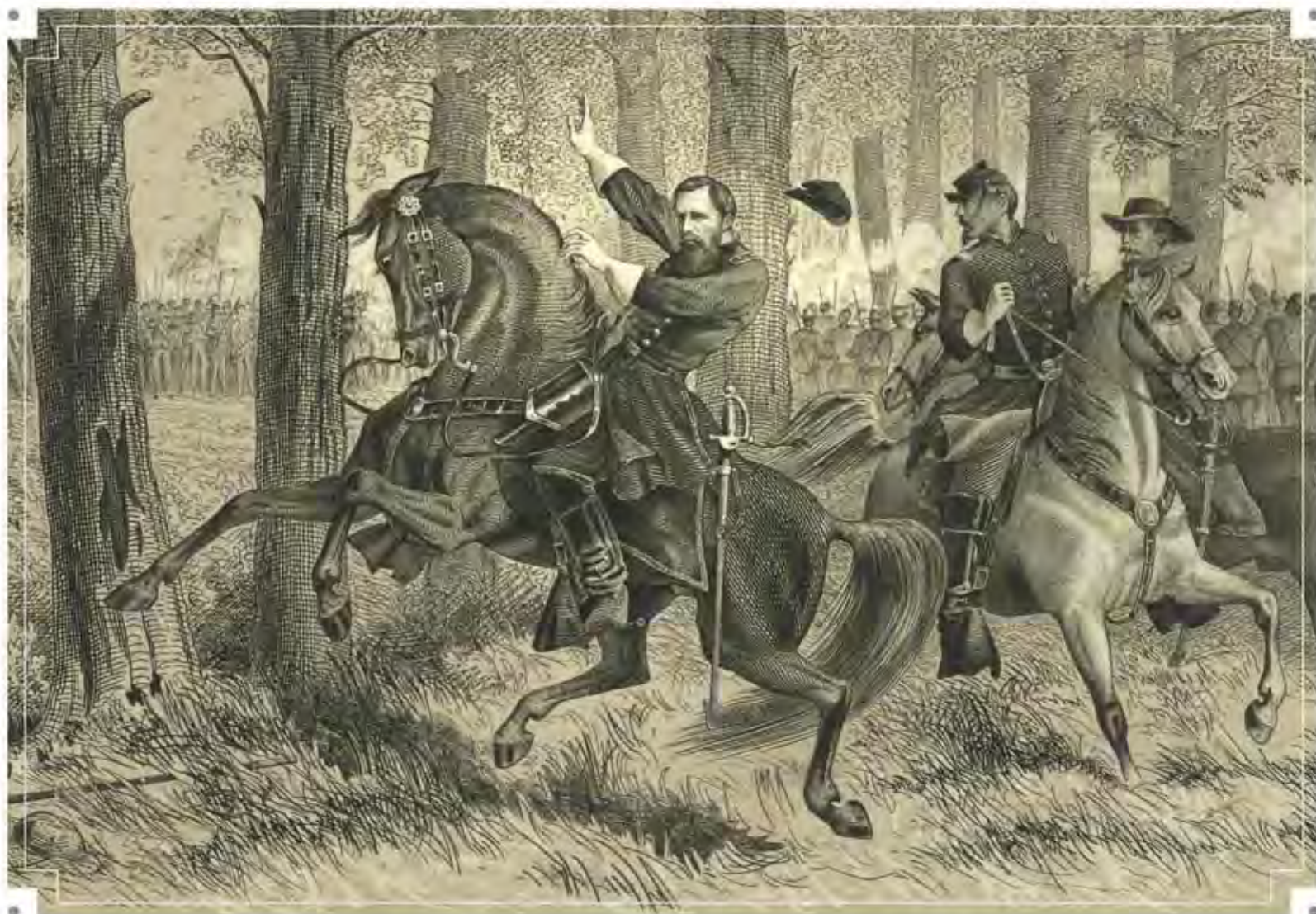
Other pertinent information can be found on the passenger lists of the SS *Golden Age* and the SS *North Star*, commercial ships that sailed from San Francisco to New York, by way of Panama, in the summer of 1860. John and Kate reportedly sailed together on that voyage, and the passenger lists for *Golden Age* and *North Star* do show both a "Miss C. Hewitt" and a "Major Reynolds" as passengers.

It is crucial to note that the first leg of the voyage, from San Francisco to Panama, began on July 21. Upon arrival in Panama, the passengers disembarked from *Golden Star* and traveled across the isthmus to board *North Star* in the port of Colón (Aspinwall) for the second leg, arriving in New York on August 13. This is important because the 1860 U.S. census shows a "Cate Hewitt" living in Stillwater as of June 25, 1860. This cannot be the same "C. Hewitt" who traveled with Reynolds from San Francisco to New York, as it would have been virtually impossible in 1860 to be in Stillwater on June 25 and in San Francisco on July 21 (the ship actually boarded the previous evening, July 20).

MOMENT OF IMPACT

General Reynolds reels from his mortal wound. Next to him is orderly Charles Veil, who recalled that the killing bullet "entered the back of his neck, just over the coat collar, and passed downward in its course."

Both U.S. and state census data for 1860, 1865, 1870, and 1875 are at the heart of our argument. When viewed in their totality and combined with other primary source information, these data demonstrate unequivocally that two women named Catherine Mary Hewitt lived in New York in the second half of the 19th century, one in Albany





WELL REMEMBERED

There are four monuments to Reynolds at Gettysburg. One at the location of his wounding, one in the National Cemetery, one on the Pennsylvania Monument, and this massive equestrian statue along the Chambersburg Pike that was dedicated in 1899.

New York state census data from 1865 show a "Catherine Hewitt" living in Stillwater as of June 1, 1865—the census conducted three weeks later, on June 24. According to extant Daughters of Charity records and Reynolds family correspondence, however, that same year Catherine "Kate" Hewitt was a seminary sister with the Daughters of Charity in Emmitsburg, Md., and was known by the name Sister Hildgardis. The Daughters of Charity records indicate that "Kate" was living at the Daughters of Charity Central House as of March 18, 1864, and remained a resident until sent on a mission to teach at the St. Joseph's School in Albany, N.Y.

Although no records from the Daughters of Charity survive to confirm the date of Kate's departure from Emmitsburg, letters written by John Reynolds' sister, Ellie, to Charles Veil, Reynolds' former military orderly, note that Kate was in Emmitsburg as of August 1865, was likely still there in October 1865, and probably did not leave for Albany any sooner than early January 1866. A letter by Ellie Reynolds to Veil indicates that Kate had reached Albany by January 15, 1866.

Furthering our case are the 1870 U.S. census records that show a "Catherine Hewitt" residing in Stillwater as of June 14, 1870, and a "Kate Hewitt" living in Albany as of July 25, 1870. According to this census, the

**TWO WOMEN NAMED
CATHERINE MARY
HEWITT
LIVED IN NEW YORK**



ON DISPLAY IN PHILLY

Philadelphia's Centennial Exposition was a popular celebration of America's 100th birthday. Kate's embroidery was on exhibit.

SEWING UP ANOTHER CLUE

WHEN CATHERINE "KATE" MARY HEWITT was a seminarian at the Daughters of Charity in Emmitsburg, she was visited by Charles Veil and two of John Reynolds' sisters. During the visit, Kate gave Veil a handkerchief she had been embroidering for the general at the time of his death. Veil later wrote about the handkerchief, describing its beautiful U.S. coat of arms.

In 1871, Kate had prepared an especially ornate and detailed banner for the St. Jean Baptiste Society of Albany that was seven feet high and five feet wide. And interestingly she prepared a special banner of equal size to be displayed at the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia in 1875-76. Various press reports of the beautiful embroidery work on this banner are glowing, especially with regard to the Great Seal of the United States.

An article describing the banner opined in describing the work of "Mrs. C. Hewitt Pfordt" that "no description of the work can convey any approximate idea of the study and patient toil the lady must have undergone to bring it to perfection, or do adequate justice to its artistic beauty and elegant appearance." The banner was to be sold at the end of the exposition for an estimated \$2,000—a handsome sum in 1876.

Kate was rewarded for her stellar creation, as the banner received a special award from the Exposition. Sadly, the award was given the day Kate died. - J.H. and M.S.P.

Albany Hewitt lived with three other women, one of whom was also a former sister at St. Joseph's. At the time, these former sisters were listed as teachers who operated a "Select School" together. (They apparently later dissolved their partnership; each then taught at their own independent schools in Albany.)

In addition, information written in the extant Pfordt family bible includes documentation of the marriage of "Catherine Hewitt" of Albany to Joseph B. Pfordt of Albany on June 24, 1874. It is also interesting to note that a Pfordt family genealogy lists Catherine (Kate) as "Sister Catherine M. Hewitt" and the family genealogist and point of contact listed on Ancestry.com indicated that her grandmother, Joseph B. Pfordt's daughter, had informed her that Catherine (Kate) had been a "nun."

A marriage announcement that ran in a local paper two days after the wedding reported: "Miss C.M. Hewitt, the school teacher, was married to J.G. Pfordt [*sic*, "G" was actually the middle initial of Joseph's father], the florist, at St. Joseph's Church. A nuptial mass was celebrated." To our knowledge, this information has not yet been presented in any analysis of Kate Hewitt's fate once she left St. Joseph's and the Daughters of Charity community in September 1868.

Furthermore, the 1875 New York state census denotes a "Kate M. Hewitt" living in Stillwater as of June 1, 1875 (census taken June 3, 1875) and a "Catherine Pfordt" and Joseph B. Pfordt living as husband and wife in Albany as of June 1, 1875.

Other significant information is found in Albany County cemetery records and the obituary in a local newspaper of Catherine "Kate" Hewitt Pfordt, who died on October 6, 1876. That obituary refers to "Mrs. C. Hewitt Pfordt, wife of J. B. Pfordt" and mentions her as "a lady of high abilities, an earnest and consistent Christian and was well known and highly respected." There is also a probate record for Kate's death.

In addition, the interment book for St. Agnes Catholic Cemetery in Menands, Albany County, includes "Catherine Pfordt, age 39, died October 6, 1876." St. Agnes, it is interesting to note, is the final resting place for most of the sisters who had taught at St. Joseph's.

The cause of death listed for Kate is "consumption." John Reynolds' sisters had noted Kate's struggles with her health, especially a cough, since the mid-1860s. It is beyond the scope of this article and our expertise, but we can presume that if Kate Hewitt indeed suffered with consumption from the mid-1860s forward, it is highly unlikely she would have survived

until 1902, as did the Catherine Hewitt of Stillwater.

Thus, we are satisfied that after a century and a half the mystery of who Kate Hewitt actually was and what happened to her after she left the Daughters of Charity community has finally been resolved. And, in turn, the ending of one of Gettysburg's most enduring human interest stories is complete. There is more of Kate's story to be told, especially regarding her early years. But that is another story, for another day.

Jeff Harding's career as a Licensed Battlefield Guide at Gettysburg National Park spans 20 years. In 2018, he rediscovered copies of the original Gettysburg weather observation records created during the battle by Professor Michael Jacobs, records thought to be lost to history.

Mary Stanford Pitkin has been a genealogist for more than 40 years and maintains a personal genealogy website where she shares her findings and gives research tips. She also has a website dealing with Irish immigrants in New Haven, Conn., and she is currently a member of the Connecticut Irish-American Historical Society.



TILL DEATH DO US PART

Reynolds and his fiancée rest far apart. His grave, above, is in Lancaster, Pa., the general's hometown. Kate's grave is located in the Pfordt family plot in St. Agnes Catholic Cemetery in Menands, N.Y., seen here.

