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## Richard D. Dunphy: To Him, a War Goes On

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# Richard D. Dunphy: To Him, a War Goes On

## **Abstract**

Although I have so far treated Richard Dunphy as a man who achieved heroism through valor and suffered greatly for it, there is another side to his character that I have not yet explored. In 1899, his wife, Catherine, accused Richard of being too irresponsible to handle his own pension money. Furthermore, she accused him of abusing his family and failing to pay his bills. To resolve this conflict, the Bureau of Pensions sent Special Examiner E. G. Hursh to Vallejo to investigate. He collected about a dozen depositions in order to evaluate the validity of these claims. Richard Dunphy may have overcome this adversity – as I wrote in my first piece about him – but the question remains of whether he should have been allowed to, given the evidence against him.

[*excerpt*]

## **Keywords**

The Gettysburg Compiler, Civil War, Richard Dunphy, pensions, Union veterans

## **Disciplines**

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## **Comments**

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# THE GETTYSBURG COMPILER

## ON THE FRONT LINES OF HISTORY

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### Richard D. Dunphy: To Him, a War Goes On

DECEMBER 6, 2013

By: Kevin Lavery, '16

Although I have so far treated Richard Dunphy as a man who achieved heroism through valor and suffered greatly for it, there is another side to his character that I have not yet explored. In 1899, his wife, Catherine, accused Richard of being too irresponsible to handle his own pension money. Furthermore, she accused him of abusing his family and failing to pay his bills. To resolve this conflict, the Bureau of Pensions sent Special Examiner E. G. Hursh to Vallejo to investigate. He collected about a dozen depositions in order to evaluate the validity of these claims. Richard Dunphy may have overcome this adversity – as I wrote in my first piece about him – but the question remains of whether he should have been allowed to, given the evidence against him.

#### *Did Richard fail to pay his debts?*

Catherine explains that “as a rule he pays his saloon bills first, leaving his grocery and other family bills unpaid for some future time.” The other depositions confirm this fact, although Hursh believes it to be exaggerated considering how nice a home he owned, “even with the luxury of a piano.” A review of the investigation after Richard’s death, however, indicates that the house was overvalued and “must have been made while either drunk or otherwise irresponsible.”

#### *Did he abuse his family?*

The depositions speak only of rumors that claim he is “ugly to his family when in liquor.” However, his daughter Mary accused him of once trying to push her against a fence when she would not help him pay his saloon debts. Furthermore, “he was considered quite a scrapper when drunk” and once lost “about a gallon of blood” in a bar fight just a year before his death. It seems unlikely that such pervasive accusations of violence would be mere rumors.

### *Should a guardian have been appointed?*

Even though there is uncertainty among the witnesses as to the degree of Richard's irresponsibility, they concur that a guardian would be in the interest of the family. Even at his best, Richard was unable to transact his business without help from others. Sometimes, he even asked strangers to take money from his pockets and pay his debts.

Hursh ultimately rejected Catherine's request, explaining she and her lawyers had "exaggerated" their case. Legally, the only way for a guardian to be appointed was for a judge to declare the pensioner insane. Hursh was a friend of Judge Buckles and attacked Catherine's lawyers for suggesting that the judge was not totally unbiased in refusing to declare Richard unbalanced. However, as Hurst himself points out, Judge Buckles was also a Civil War amputee who would have had blinding sympathy toward Dunphy.

Hursh was right to identify much of the evidence as hearsay; however, this was not a criminal trial and therefore did not require proof beyond reasonable doubt. Enough witnesses testified to Richard's behavior or rumors of his behavior to make it plain that Richard was hurting his family and himself through his pursuits. Richard may have seemed mentally stable, but something – perhaps PTSD – was preventing him from acting prudently. I agree with the majority of the witnesses that a guardian should have been appointed for the sake of both Richard and his family. Hursh acted irresponsibly when he refused to "humiliate an old veteran" whose family plainly needed help.

With this article, I conclude my work with Richard Dunphy. His life is difficult to understand given the complexities of his nature and experiences. He has far more documents about his life than I would have expected, but even these can take his story only so far. It is paramount to remember that he is not simply a character whose life exists only on the dusty paper of archives. Although history is now the only way to reach out and touch Dunphy's life, it should never be forgotten that he was a unique individual with as many or more challenges and passions as any one of us alive today, and therefore is so much more than anything I express in writing.

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