

Excerpt:

In April 1861, the American Civil War erupted, instantly transforming national markets and triggering an unprecedented demand for military supplies, including Flint, Bixby & Co. wool. It was the deadliest war in United States history, with an estimated 620,000-750,000 losing their lives.

The contributions of California's Civil War volunteers are largely forgotten today. Fueled by the Gold Rush, the state's non-native population had soared from 20,000 before 1849 to 107,057 by 1850, reaching nearly 380,000 by decade's end. Though many settlers initially intended to return East after securing fortunes, the outbreak of war reshaped their decisions.

For young men like Lewellyn Bixby's brothers - twenty-two-year-old Solomon Bixby and twenty-five-year-old Henry, the cause was personal—both their grandfathers had been born in New England, and their family heritage wound back to the earliest days of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. As prosperous, unmarried young abolitionists, Solomon and Henry possessed the wealth and conviction to serve—and perhaps harbored a quiet hope that their journey back to New England might lead them to compatible wives who shared their zeal for the cause.

Bound by both kinship and shared duty, Henry and Solomon laid plans to head back east to Maine and join the fight. However, Solomon never got to Maine. He couldn't. He had been murdered.

It was something the family rarely talked about. When youngsters asked how their Uncle Solomon died, they were told that “While reading poetry in a lonely sheep camp he was shot to death by some unknown hand,” according to

Sarah Bixby Smith. A copy of Macaulay's *History of England*, a large dictionary and a burned down candle were found open on his table. But there was more to the story...