

**RECOLLECTIONS
, 1828-1911**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649238163

Recollections, 1828-1911 by Edwin A. Merritt

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

www.triestepublishing.com

EDWIN A. MERRITT

**RECOLLECTIONS
, 1828-1911**



GEN. E. A. MERRITT

RECOLLECTIONS

1828-1911

EDWIN A. MERRITT

ALBANY
J. B. LYON COMPANY, PRINTERS

1911

517

Copyright, 1911
By EDWIN A. MERRITT



INTRODUCTION

The career of General E. A. Merritt is a signal illustration of the best features of American social and political life.

Descended from old New England stock, his immediate ancestors were soldiers in the Revolutionary struggle and eminent in laying the foundations of civil polity and of social frame work in Vermont, that sturdy and vigorous first representative of the great commonwealths that have clustered about the original thirteen colonies. Largely self-educated and earning as a teacher the means to obtain his own further academic culture, General Merritt began practical life as a surveyor in the fertile region between the St. Lawrence river and the Adirondack wilderness, and like the great Washington found in that occupation an expansion of sentiment and sympathy often lost in those who pursue their tasks within narrow walls. He took an interest in all public matters and was of those who aided in the organization of the Republican party in 1854 and was one of the most earnest workers in that cause of free soil and free speech that finally triumphed in the election of President Lincoln.

Having become a resident of St. Lawrence county in this State in 1841, it was as a member of the Board of Supervisors of that county and as clerk of the same body, that he first rendered public service from 1854 to 1859. In the latter year he was elected a member of the Legislature and was re-elected to that notable body which, convening on January 1, 1861, by its patriotic endeavor and wise legislation placed New York foremost of the loyal states in the tribute of men and money to save the Union.

Disregarding the favorable political prospects opened to him by his good services in the Assembly, General Merritt determined to go into the field and render there such aid as he was qualified to give.

As Regimental Quartermaster and Commissary of Subsistence, he served over three years in the armies of the Potomac, the Cumberland and the Tennessee, resigning in December, 1864, to accept the position of Quartermaster-General on the staff of Governor Fenton and remaining in that place to the end of the Governor's second term on December 31, 1868.

His vigorous and economical business principles were conspicuously displayed in the important affairs connected with the closing months of the war, the final return of our war-worn veterans and the reorganization of the National Guard of the State. In the conduct of the soldier's homes at New York and Albany and in providing gratuitous means for the collection of back pay and other dues for needy soldiers and their dependent families, his philanthropic sentiments found the means of earnest and practical exercise.

During this period he served as a member of the Constitutional Convention of 1867 to which he had been elected from his senatorial district. In this body of conspicuously able and representative men, General Merritt took an active part and was Chairman of the Committee on the Organization of the Legislature.

President Grant appointed General Merritt Naval Officer of the port of New York on March 29, 1869, where he rendered excellent service in the economical administration of the custom laws until displaced in July, 1870, by one of those factional contests that have too often weakened the Republican party in this State. Many of his admirable official suggestions were, however, subsequently carried into effect by the Secretaries of the Treasury.

For several succeeding years General Merritt devoted himself to private concerns, while retaining a strong interest in political matters. In 1875 he was unanimously nominated by the Republican State Convention for State Treasurer on a ticket that also comprised the names of Frederick W. Seward, Francis L. Spinner and George E. Danforth and which received the enthusiastic support of the party. This ticket was defeated by the extraordinary efforts of the Democrats in preparing for the presidential candidacy of Governor Tilden in the next year.

In December, 1877, General Merritt was nominated by President Hayes to be Surveyor of the Port of New York, his name was favorably reported by Senator Conkling, Chairman of the Committee on Commerce and his confirmation was without opposition. His previous experience in the Naval office enabled him to promptly put in force the reforms recommended in the recent reports of the Jay Commission and to further extend them by reorganization of the force at his disposal and by a rigid system of official responsibility.

The marked success of his efforts in these directions induced President Hayes to promote him, in July, 1878, to the office of Collector of the Port. In this prominent place his trained ability found a large and favorable field and his administration received the cordial support and applause not only of the Treasury Department, the importers and others directly interested, but of the general public who recognized the first successful attempt to rescue this great business office from the domination of partisan influences. Certain political considerations led President Garfield in the early days of his term to appoint General Merritt to the position of Consul-General at London.

This action aroused a general expression of regret that an

officer so efficient in customs administration should be displaced from the principal position where such qualifications were of value. The business men of New York united in a petition to the President praying for his retention as collector, while the press, secular and religious, without regard to party affiliations spoke in the highest terms of Collector Merritt's administration and regretted the imminence of his transfer to another field of duty.

General Merritt was Consul-General from August, 1881, to May, 1885. For the first time the Consulate-General at London was thoroughly and efficiently organized and all branches of its business supervised by citizens of the United States.

During this period General Merritt's reports to the State Department were marked by his characteristic breadth of observation and accuracy of treatment. He investigated the industrial, social and commercial conditions of the British Empire and commented upon them in a clear and unambitious style. It had been his unique opportunity to have occupied those custom places at the great port of New York that best fitted him to appreciate and administer the significant consular work connected with the proper valuation of imported goods. In this field of official duty he rendered great and constant service to our government.

SILAS W. BURT