Introduction

Edwin N. Cotter Jr. was born in the Bronx on July 16, 1930 to Martha Fitzpatrick and Edwin Sr. He studied at Cobleskill Agricultural College and earned his associates degree. After college he joined the United States Navy and served in the Korean conflict. For 32 years (1964-1996) he served as superintendent of the John Brown Farm and State Historic Site in Lake Placid. He also served as president of various associations including the Lake Placid Historical Society and the John Brown Memorial Association. He raised three daughters with his wife Alice Jaeger and died on August 23, 2001, in Lake Placid, New York.

Cotter dedicated his life to the study of John Brown history, became a self-made scholar and redefined the significance of the historical grounds at North Elba beyond what of any the previous superintendents had done. During his tenure at the John Brown Farm and State Historic Site, Cotter amassed an extensive collection of materials relating to John Brown and others who made their mark at Harpers Ferry.

Some features of the collection include original correspondence between Mr. Cotter and his business partners and other John Brown historians (most notably with Dr. Gee) as well as letters written by John and Mary (2nd wife) Brown to their family, friends, neighbors and business partners. Other materials housed in the collection include genealogical records tracing the John Brown family into the 1990s and newspaper clippings concerning the visit of John Brown’s descendants to the farm in the 1990s.

Parts of John Brown’s life can be traced through the artifacts collected by Mr. Cotter. Brown experienced repeated failures in business--breeding and selling blooded sheep and horses (he stopped horse-trading as soon as he realized the horses were used for racing), working as a sales person and opening up several shops--each ending in disappointment until he was forced to file for bankruptcy.

The collection holds deeds and records pertaining to the land grants at Timbuctoo that were intended to be used to form a black community in the Lake Placid area, the impetus for Brown to settle in northern New York. John Brown wanted to be able to support the new settlers, teach them to farm and watch first-hand the formation of this experimental society. Unfortunately, the
settlers realized the mountainous and cool climate of the forested land was not suited for farming and the settlement failed.

John Brown continued to participate in abolitionist movements even into his elderly years. The two most famous and brutal were at Pottawatomie Creek, Kansas and Harpers Ferry, West Virginia. Kansas was an emerging state and had yet to proclaim itself slave or free. Brown and two of his sons went to Kansas to help persuade the people to vote against slavery and were involved in a bloody encounter with a group working for the South.

At Harpers Ferry, John, Owen, Watson, and Oliver Brown and sixteen of their followers overtook the Armory in order to arm southern slaves so they might be able to overcome their masters. Thirty-six hours later, with many of Brown’s men slain, the Marines from the south stormed and reclaimed the armory. Many historians believe this standoff and Browns’ subsequent execution were the events that moved the North and South from disagreement to civil war.

After being convicted of treason, murder and conspiring with slaves to rebel, John Brown was executed on December 2, 1859, and moved to his hometown in North Elba, New York, where he received a quiet burial with family and friends. Other participants of the raid of Harpers Ferry were buried in a mass grave in Shenandoah and their bodies were eventually relocated to North Elba. The surviving members of the Brown family remained in the Adirondacks, until Mary Brown’s health began to fail, which caused them to move to the California’s warmer climate.

Some of the photographs in the Cotter collection document the mass gravesite of Brown’s followers, Brown’s gravestone and memorial at North Elba, and the Brown family and home.

Special Appreciation goes to Lou DeCaro, Jr. for his illumination of historical facts.

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<td></td>
<td>service at John Brown’s Farm State Historic Site by U.S. Postal Service,</td>
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<td>August 8, 1998</td>
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Published Materials in the Collection

**Books** (Most of these have been added to Special Collections Book Collection)


Scott, John Anthony, & Robert Alan Scott. *John Brown of Harpers Ferry: With*


Toledo, Gregory J. A Rebel Reconsidered: John Brown and the Convergence of Crime and Virtue. (This is a rough draft which the author wished Edwin Cotter to read and critique.)


Manuscripts

Lifshitz, Leatrice. *And There Would Be No Wolves.*
(252 pages. Appears to be a draft of a novel told from the point of view of Mary Brown with a poem about Mary at the end, written by the author.)

(Census records and in depth description of black families. Also contains copies of letters from John Brown to Willis A. Hodges, Ruth Brown to her mother Mary Brown, and J.H. Henderson to Gerrit Smith, as well as a map of Thorn’s Survey of North Elba.)

**Bound Periodicals**


“The Great Abolitionist Crusade.” *American Heritage* 17.3 (April 1967): 8:

**Pamphlets**


Gee, Clarence S. *Notes on John Brown.* Lockport, NY. March 4, 1959. {Furnished for the Hudson Library and Historical Society of Hudson, Ohio.}


Hassler, Dr. William W. *John Brown: Saint or Madman?*

Hayes, Arthur W. *Lake Placid, its early history and developments; from the time of the Civil War to the present time as told by Arthur W. Hayes, a citizen, guide and building contractor of the Adirondack Mountains.* Lake George, NY: Adirondack Resorts Press, 1946.


Newsletters and Bulletins

(Lake Placid-North Elba Historical Society’s Seasonal Bulletin.)


Newspaper Clippings
