

The St. Lawrence County Historical Association

# QUARTERLY

Volume LV

Number 1

2010



The American Civil War Sesquicentennial

The Irish Zouaves of St. Lawrence County

Rensselaer Falls and the New York 14th "Heavies"

# The St. Lawrence County Historical Association at the Silas Wright Museum

The St. Lawrence County Historical Association is a private, not-for-profit, membership organization based at the Silas Wright House in Canton, New York. Founded in 1947, the Association is governed by a constitution, by-laws, and Board of Trustees. The Historical Association's membership meets annually to elect its trustees.

## **2011 Officers**

President: Carl Stickney, Stockholm  
Vice-President: Jane Subramanian, Potsdam  
Treasurer: Terry Niles, Brushton  
Secretary: Susan Smeby, Madrid

## **2011 Staff**

Trent Trulock, Executive Director  
Sue Longshore, Collections Manager  
Jean Marie Martello, Archives Manager

## **2011 Trustees**

Roger Bailey, Canton  
James Barnes, Potsdam  
Kip Blanchard, Potsdam  
Patricia Carson, Canton  
William Flynn, Ogdensburg  
Rita Goldberg, Canton  
Stanley Maine, Pierrepont  
Anne Mazzotta, Canton  
Lowell McAllister, Heuvelton  
Cathleen O'Horo, Canton  
Ron Semple, Canton  
Shirley Wisner, Morristown

## **Our Mission**

The St. Lawrence County Historical Association is a not-for-profit membership organization and museum which serves as an educational resource for the use and benefit of the citizens of St. Lawrence County and others interested in the County's history and traditions. The Association collects and preserves archival material and artifacts pertinent to the County's history. In cooperation and collaboration with other local organizations, the Association promotes an understanding of and appreciation for the County's rich history through publications, exhibits, and programs. The St. Lawrence County Historical Association operates within museum standards established by the American Association of Museums.

## **SLCHA Membership**

Membership in the St. Lawrence County Historical Association is open to all interested parties. Annual membership dues are: Individual \$30; Senior/Student \$25; Family \$40; Contributor \$55; Supporter, \$100; Patron \$250. Members receive the SLCHA Quarterly, the Historical Association's bi-monthly newsletter, and various discounts on publications, programs and events.

St. Lawrence County Historical Association  
at the Silas Wright House  
3 East Main Street, P. O. Box 8  
Canton, New York 13617  
(315) 386-8133  
fax (315) 386-8134  
e-mail: [info@slcha.org](mailto:info@slcha.org)  
[www.slcha.org](http://www.slcha.org)

*The Quarterly* is endowed in memory of Albert Priest Newell and Ella Waterman Newell.

Publication of *The Quarterly* is also made possible with public funds from the New York State Council on the Arts, a State agency.



*Publications Committee*  
**Cathleen O'Horo (chair)**

**Roger Bailey**

**James D. Carl**

**Rita Goldberg**

**Paul Loucks**

**Susan Omohundro**

**Ron Semple**

*Editor-in-Chief*

**John Omohundro**

*Production Editor*

**Sue Dresye**

Copyright ©2011 by the  
St. Lawrence County Historical  
Association. All rights reserved.

Except for brief excerpts, no part of this publication may be copied or reproduced without the express written permission of the author and the Historical Association. The St. Lawrence County Historical Association is not responsible for the statements, interpretations, and opinions of contributors to *The SLCHA Quarterly*.

*The SLCHA Quarterly* is published Winter, Spring, Summer, and Fall each year by the St. Lawrence County Historical Association for its members and friends.

Additional copies may be obtained from the St. Lawrence County Historical Association, P.O. Box 8, Canton, NY 13617 at \$4.00 each (\$2.00 for members), plus \$2.00 for postage.

**Contributions:**

*The SLCHA Quarterly* welcomes contributions. To submit a manuscript, or for further information, please contact the editor through the St. Lawrence County Historical Association. Please address communications to: Managing Editor, *The SLCHA Quarterly*, P.O. Box 8, Canton, NY 13617.



Volume LV Number 1 2010

ISSN: 0558-1931

## Contents

From the County Historian <i>Trent Trulock</i>	2
Letters to the Editor	4
The Civil War Sesquicentennial	4
St. Lawrence County's Irish Zouaves <i>Ron Semple</i>	5
The 14th New York Heavy Artillery <i>Schuyler Alverson</i>	19
Mystery Photo	23

Issue Editor

*Ron Semple*

## On the Cover

The Zouaves of New York's 164th Infantry hold still for the camera in Northern Virginia in 1863. Company "A" was raised in St. Lawrence County. (Owens Archives photo)



# From the County Historian

by Trent Trulock

It seems to me that in the United States we like to mark anniversaries that end in zero. So I'm not surprised that in 2011 there is a lot of activity centered on the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the beginning of the Civil War (that's 1861 for anyone, who like me, is math-impaired). This war had a huge impact on St. Lawrence County. No battles were fought this far north during the war, and no homes, farms or public buildings were destroyed in battle or siege. And while the abolitionist movement and the Underground Railroad were active in St. Lawrence County, as they were in many places in New York State, I'm not sure how much they impacted the lives of the general population of the county. So why do I think this war had a big impact on the 83,689 people who were living in the county in 1860?(1) To me the big impact of the war, beyond what happened nationally, was the fact that around 7,000 men from St. Lawrence County joined the Union's military.

This means that 8% of the county's total population served as soldiers or sailors over the course of about four years. During the Civil War, New York State sent around 360,000 men to serve the Union cause, more soldiers than any other state (2). Out of this state-wide number, almost 2% came from St. Lawrence County. All of these men were sons, brothers, cousins, husbands, friends and coworkers who left wives, children, families, homes and businesses to fight for the Union. And since this was war, some of these men never came home.

Because of the enormous impact the war had on the population and social fabric of St. Lawrence County, and because the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary comes only once, the SLCHA will be commemorating this difficult period in our nation's history beginning this year. (Yes, I know that the cover says 2010 on it, but I'm really writing this in February of 2011, as we



*The Silas Wright House, home of the St. Lawrence County Historical Association.*

are slightly behind in publication).

Activities to commemorate the 150<sup>th</sup>, as it is known around the museum, actually began last year at the SLCHA's 63<sup>rd</sup> annual membership meeting on November 6<sup>th</sup>, 2010, at the Madrid Community Center. Local Lincoln expert Terry Niles spoke on the "Election of 1860."(3) Also in 2010 the St. Lawrence County Board of Legislators passed a resolution recognizing the SLCHA as the official Civil War Sesquicentennial Commission for St. Lawrence County. And the SLCHA's Civil War Sesquicentennial Commission has been actively planning commemorative events for the next four years. So far in 2011, the SLCHA has had presentations on the 164<sup>th</sup> NYS Volunteers - Corcoran's Irish Zouaves, on women soldiers in the Civil War, and children's programs on the roles of women in the Civil War and on President's Day. A program on Lincoln's first inauguration is coming up in March. And even though I look nothing like our 16<sup>th</sup> president (and might even be a few inches shorter than him), I'll be reading Lincoln's inaugural address at that program. Of course a highlight of this year's commemoration will be our annual Civil War Weekend at Robert Moses State Park on August 27<sup>th</sup>-28<sup>th</sup>, where part of the battle of Manassas will be reenacted.

Later this year an exhibit about the Civil War will open at the museum, which will give us a great opportunity to bring some Civil War artifacts out of storage for display. As I looked through our collection records I saw many of the types of artifacts

that I expected to see, such as: blankets, a saddle, canteens, knapsacks, a flag, rifles, a GAR medal, and a surgical kit. But I also saw some artifacts that I didn't expect, including a trombone & flute, a stencil for marking equipment, a ring, and a towel woven from the last flax from the William Noble farm, grown at the close of the Civil War.

I'm certain that the 12 boxes of the Civil War Collection in the archives will get used even more during this anniversary than they are normally. Some of the archival materials include service, discharge, and pension papers, newspaper clippings, photographs, and letters. In addition to this material we have regimental histories, books on the war, and the Adjutant General's Reports for most New York State regiments.

Interns and volunteers are working on projects about St. Lawrence County during the war years (1861-1865), such as rearranging the Civil War archival collection, researching background material on our Civil War artifacts and transcribing Civil War letters. Jon Austin, a very active researcher, has spent several years researching the residents of St. Lawrence County who enlisted during the Civil War. He plans on completing his four-year project in 2012, and his publication will list not only the soldier's name but also what Jon could find on his war record and burial place.

All of this commemoration for the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Civil War does not mean to me that we are commemorating the act of war itself. Rather, this important anniversary is a time to reflect on the people who lived and died during that time, the 7,000 county residents who enlisted in the Union cause, and how residents of St. Lawrence County made it through those very trying times.

#### Footnotes

1. The 1860 federal census was the closest census done before the war began, National Historical Geographic Information System, [www.NHGIS.org](http://www.NHGIS.org).

2. <http://www.cyndislist.com/ny.htm#Military>

3. Niles' presentation took place on the 150th anniversary of Lincoln's actual election, November 6, 1860.

# Letters to the Editor

Tuesday, November 23, 2010

Have looked at your “Mystery Photo” in the “Quarterly” (2009 LIV:4). I’m inclined to think that group is not SLU, and is maybe even a high school team. Compare the photos in my book (with David Hornung) “St. Lawrence University, pp. 69-70. The college students [in the book] look older—and tougher!—than those in the “Mystery Photo.” Also, see the SLU football team on p. 70. This is the 1894 team and the ball is inscribed “St. Lawrence ‘94”. Had the MAC team from ‘95 been St. Lawrence U., they would have said so.

Peter Van De Water, Canton

## Introduction to Issue

# St. Lawrence County and the Civil War

## Ron Semple

Seven score and ten years ago, Americans fought each other in a bloody civil war that took more lives than all our nation’s other wars combined. Six hundred thousand men died, half in combat and half felled by diseases just as lethal as a Minnie ball.

More than 5,000 men from St. Lawrence County enlisted during the course of the war serving in at least 29 different Union infantry, cavalry, artillery and engineering regiments. Hundreds more served in the Navy and, perhaps, some joined the Marine Corps. Their records are incomplete, fragmentary and in many instances forever lost. But they saved the Union, ended slavery and laid the foundations for the great, unified nation that emerged. Not bad for farmers, storekeepers and clerks.

The cost was great. It is likely that at least one out of five died in uniform. Thousands more were wounded, captured or disabled. Virtually all took sick at some point. Conditions, even when not in combat, were brutal. Of the ten men from Rensselaer Falls who fought as infantry with the 14th New York Heavy Artillery, only one emerged unscathed. Only six of the 86 St. Lawrence County Irishmen in the 164th New York Infantry were as lucky.

Two of my great-great grandfathers served in NY infantry regiments during the Civil War. I served as a Marine sergeant during the Korean War. These facts contributed to my interest in the civil war.

This issue will focus on local participation in the Civil War. The 16th, 60th, 106th and 142nd NY Infantry Regiments were raised mainly in St. Lawrence County. Records of those and other Union Army New York regiments can be found at [http://dmna.state.ny.us/historic/reghist/civil\\_index.htm](http://dmna.state.ny.us/historic/reghist/civil_index.htm)

The records of individual soldiers can be found in the 49 volumes of the New York Adjutant General’s report kept in the reference room of the St. Lawrence County Historical Society at the Silas Wright House in Canton. If you know a soldier’s regiment, his record is easily found.

Five regiments with roots in the county are in Fox’s “300 Fighting Regiments.” They are the 100th, 106th, 142nd and 164th Infantry and the 14th Heavy Artillery. Their entries can be accessed at [http://www.civilwarreference.com/regiments/fox300\\_intro](http://www.civilwarreference.com/regiments/fox300_intro).

# St. Lawrence County's Irish Zouaves: The 164th New York Volunteer Infantry in the Civil War

Ron Semple

Colonel Michael Corcoran was a popular hero to New York's Irish for what he didn't do: Corcoran refused to muster his Irish regiment, the 69th New York State Militia, to honor the 19 year-old Prince of Wales on the prince's visit to New York City in the fall of 1860.

The Irish had recent bitter memories of the horrendous famine in which a million souls perished in Ireland. Two more million emigrated in the 1840s and 1850s. They were in no mood to honor the son and heir of Queen Victoria. In fact, what the Irish really wanted was to wrest control of their country from the English, who had occupied it for hundreds of years. The bold Irish-born colonel was military leader of the Fenian Brotherhood in the United States as well as prominent in Tammany Hall's political machine.

Meanwhile, many New Yorkers were infatuated with the prince. St. Lawrence County's anglophiles, including a number of bedazzled, young, single women, boarded the steamer Jenny Lind on Aug. 6, 1860, and sailed from Ogdensburg to Quebec City just to catch a glimpse of the British prince. A front page article in the St. Lawrence County Republican breathlessly reported:

Suddenly the Prince appeared on deck, a slight rather pale young man with a mild and pleasing countenance, wearing a simple, blue sack jacket, drab pants and a round, felt hat. Edward Albert [the future King Edward VII], heir apparent to the English throne stepped to the taffrail and raised his hat as three hearty cheers were given.

The American military authorities were not pleased about Col. Corcoran's failure to parade the 69th that October. The 34-year-old Corcoran was awaiting court martial for his disobedience when the Confederates fired on Fort Sumter in 1861.

These militia units were not composed of trained soldiers, but often were used as an arm of law enforcement. Corcoran's rise in the militia was meteoric. He was 23 when he enlisted in the 69th in 1851 as a private and rose steadily through the ranks. He was a captain in September, 1858, when the regiment was sent to Staten Island to help deal with the Quarantine Riots. Captain Corcoran and his men performed well. He was described by the division commander as "one of the best officers in the militia." Partially as a result of the Quarantine Riots, eleven months later he was colonel of the 69th.

After the Confederate states seceded and hostilities began, the Union was desperate for troops to be rushed to Washington, DC. New York State dropped the court martial and Col. Corcoran led the 69th to the capital where he strengthened its defenses by constructing what the 69th called Fort Corcoran—an impressive earthen fort that became a lynchpin in the defenses of the nation's capitol.

Col. Corcoran capably and gallantly commanded the 69th New York Volunteers at the First Battle of Bull Run on July 21, 1861 near Manassas, Virginia. The 69th was hotly engaged for two hours on or near Henry Hill House (today the site of the Manassas National Battlefield Park visitors' center) and lost nearly 200 men, the third highest





*Colonel Michael Corcoran, 69th New York Volunteers, photo courtesy wikipedia.org*

casualty rate of any Union regiment in the battle.

During the chaotic Union withdrawal from the bloodiest part of the battlefield, Col. Corcoran was wounded and captured with several of his men. The rebels had dealt a startling blow to the Union Army, which had confidently expected a quick victory. So confident was the Union that it offered 90-day enlistments.

Meanwhile, Confederate privateers also were annoying Yankee shipping in the

Atlantic. The Federal Navy had captured a privateer, the *Enchantress*, and was threatening to execute its crew as pirates.

The Confederate response was simple. A group of Federal prisoners, including the famous Corcoran, was selected by lot. The rebels announced these men would be executed if the privateers were hanged. Washington backed off.

Col. Corcoran then was offered parole, the 1860s equivalent of a get-out-of-jail-free pass as long as he promised not to take up arms against the Confederacy until properly “exchanged” for a Confederate prisoner held by the Union. He refused.

He was promoted in absentia to brigadier general of volunteers in July, 1862, and was finally exchanged and freed early in August. On his release, General Corcoran journeyed to Washington, DC, where he dined with President Abraham Lincoln.

### **Corcoran’s Irish Legion**

In August, 1862, General Corcoran’s reputation among the Irish of the nation, particularly in New York, could not have been higher. But he was in no position to join the now-famous Irish Brigade (at the time comprised of the 69th, 88th, and 63rd New York Volunteers and the non-Irish 29th Massachusetts), which was now commanded by his acquaintance, Brigadier General Thomas F. Meagher.

The charismatic Corcoran immediately set about recruiting a new Irish brigade for the Union Army. The brigade was soon dubbed the Irish Legion but today is better known by its commander’s name: the Corcoran Legion. Not surprisingly, many of the Legion’s officers and men were members of the Fenian Brotherhood. Others enlisted because of Corcoran’s reputation and for the promised enlistment bonuses. Some were in it for the adventure.

They knew what they were in for. By the end of August, 1862, the Union had suffered horrendous casualties in Virginia at the first and second battles of Bull Run and the



bloodbath of the Seven Days battles north and east of Richmond. Blood had flowed west of the Appalachian Mountains too at places like Wilson's Creek and Belmont, Missouri, and Pea Ridge, Arkansas, and Shiloh/Pittsburg Landing, Tennessee.

While the Irish Legion's regiments were forming in New York on September 17, 1862, Meagher's Irish Brigade suffered 540 casualties at the battle of Antietam in Maryland. A Catholic chaplain had ridden on horseback in front of their ranks before the battle giving the men general absolution.

The Irish Legion's attitude may have been summed up by the words painted on the flag of one of its regiments: "We Strike for the Union and the Constitution." This credo belied the Irish nationalist aims of some of the Legion's men. This was a motive for enlisting that set the Legion apart from other Irish regiments serving on both sides during the Civil War. The Irish were not interested in freeing the slaves since they considered African Americans as unwelcome competitors for their low-paying jobs. The Emancipation Proclamation promulgated on Sept 29, 1862, probably brought no celebration within the Legion.

Other men, unquestionably, enlisted for the \$100 bonus which was sometimes augmented by local municipalities. Madrid, for example, added an extra \$25 to the bonus. That was a lot of money then. In 1860, the average factory worker earned \$1.19 a day and his counterpart in the building trades, who worked only in good weather, got \$1.42 a day. Farmers and farm laborers got less cash than either. An Army private was paid \$13 a month. Most soldiers lived very frugally and sent much of their pay home to their families.

When the promised bounties were not paid in full immediately, many of 1862 recruits deserted before their new units left their hometowns. The men of the Legion were no different. One of Corcoran's regiments recruited approximately 600 men in Buffalo but arrived at the Legion's organizational camp on Staten Island with only 400. The

rest had deserted, 75 on the day the regiment left Buffalo. Such behavior was not unique in this regiment or any other in the summer and autumn of 1862.

In the Civil War, states were responsible for recruiting soldiers and organizing new regiments to be "handed over" to and mustered into the United States Army. New York planned to organize the Legion into full-sized regiments of 750 to 1,000 men, about the size of a modern battalion. The problem with the Legion was that its initial 4,000 men were recruited into eight undersized regiments and compressing these small units into five "full-sized" regiments would cause political consternation within the Legion and at home.

The idea was to federalize the Irish Legion as soon as possible so Washington would pay their salaries instead of New York. When the Irish Legion's men were sorted, shuffled and finally federalized they formed the 155th, 164th, 170th, 175th and the 182nd infantry regiments. The 175th, recruited in the areas of Albany and Troy, was detached in January, 1863, to serve in Louisiana, suffering horrible casualties assaulting Port Hudson four months later. It never rejoined the Irish Legion. The Legion's other four regiments served together until the end of the war.

When the Legion's reorganization was completed in November, 1863, the 164th New York consisted of Company A from St. Lawrence County and Malone, Company B from Niagara County, Companies C and D from Buffalo and other communities in Erie County, and Companies E through I and K from New York City, Brooklyn and Long Island. Civil War regiments did not have a "Company J."

Irish in uniform were everywhere. It is estimated that more than 144,000 Irish-born Americans served with the Union Army during the Civil War. Twenty thousand Irishmen fought against them in the Rebel ranks.

## Early Days

Upstate enlistees in the Irish Legion made their way to Buffalo to form up. St. Lawrence County men probably got there by a lake steamer from Ogdensburg to Lewistown, not far from Buffalo. There was no rail connection yet between Watertown and Buffalo.

They had a brief introduction to military life in Buffalo. Some St. Lawrence County recruits didn't like what they saw and since they hadn't been paid their \$100 bonus yet, they took off for home. Three Potsdam men deserted as did one from Pierrepont. None had served more than a month. One other didn't go south with Company A. Private James McGuoy, 23, of Oswegatchie, who enlisted on September 27, 1862, was transferred to recruiting duty on October 7.

The upstate recruits left by train on October 10. When they reached Albany, they boarded a steamboat for the trip downriver to Staten Island where the New York and Brooklyn companies that would round out the 164th were waiting for them. A 30 year-old Potsdam man deserted on October 9 five weeks after enlisting. But the record for short service in Company A goes to a 44-year-old Potsdam man who deserted on November 4, five days after he enlisted and 2 days before his unit left for Newport News, Virginia.

The enlistees in Corcoran's Irish Legion started training at Camp Scott on Staten Island.

## Equipment

Ironically, the men were issued 1853 model Enfield rifle-muskets—made in England. Like the majority of other long arms used on both sides in the Civil War, the Enfield was a black powder weapon fired by a large external hammer striking a percussion cap which ignited the powder in the weapon's breech. The Enfield weighed about 9.5 pounds unloaded and was 55 inches long over all. Highly accurate, the long range rifle fired a .577 caliber conical shaped Minnie ball which inflicted devastating wounds. More than 900,000 Enfields were imported

and used by both sides in the Civil War.

The troops much preferred the model 1861 Springfield. This American-made weapon was almost identical to the Enfield but it had a slimmer stock and interchangeable parts.

Like other soldiers of the time, the Legion's rifle-muskets were issued with a long socket bayonet with a triangular cross section. But bayonets were rarely employed as weapons and were of more use around the camp serving as candleholders and for grinding coffee beans.

Soldiers were also issued a haversack painted with lamp black and linseed oil, which made it semi-waterproof when new; a wool-covered 42-ounce canteen; a leather cartridge belt holding 40 rounds; a leather pouch for percussion caps; tools for maintaining the rifle-musket; a leather bayonet scabbard, and a leather belt. They also received half of a lightweight canvas shelter ("pup tent") that could be buttoned to another man's shelter half; a 5-pound wool blanket about 7 feet long and 3.5 feet wide; a vulcanized rubber sheet about 6 by 3 feet, and a canvas knapsack, coated similar to the haversack, with leather straps. While the Army issued a tin plate and a tin cup, it did not generally issue flatware or other eating utensils.

The quality of the leather and canvas goods varied. They were made of material that was surprisingly lightweight but not durable.

## Uniforms

In "The Business of Civil War: Military Mobilization and the State," Mark R. Wilson wrote of the basic clothing issued to recruits: "Every Union soldier got one or two caps, one hat, two coats or jackets, three flannel shirts, three pairs of trousers, three pairs of drawers, four pairs of stockings and four pairs of shoes." This was the ideal. Wartime variations in supply were common and the men of the Legion were not exempt from this.

The 164th was initially issued a comical hodgepodge of uniforms making them a

mismatched bunch in the first few months of their service. It is possible that the other Legion regiments wore similarly mismatched uniforms in their first months. Some men were issued frock coats, others fatigue blouses (a “sack coat” with a four button front, a narrow lay-down collar and a thin flannel liner). Some got sky-blue trousers, others dark blue trousers. Head gear was similarly mixed with a variety of forage caps and kepis and, perhaps, other headgear as well. Footwear was the square-toed, ankle-high leather bootee, often called “gunboats” by the troops.

The 164th’s poor appearance was natively remedied in February, 1863, when the regiment was outfitted as Zouaves. Zouaves were originally the rakish, recklessly brave, native colonial troops who fought in French North Africa in the 1830s and who won worldwide fame for their exploits in the Crimean War of 1854. A craze for Zouave-styled uniforms reached American militia units in 1860 with the result that numerous Union regiments and a few Confederate regiments wore uniforms loosely based on the French Zouave style.

The 164th Zouave attire was closely modeled on the uniforms of the 9th New York “Hawkins’ Zouaves.” The uniform jacket was collarless, dark blue wool adorned with red trim and two red trefoil designs called tombeaux on the chest. The jacket was more ornamental than functional with a single fastener at the throat, exposing the lower rib cage area. The jacket was short, extending only to the bottom of the rib cage. Under the jacket was worn a side-fastened vest with a front of dark blue wool with red trim and a back of muslin cotton.

Trousers were somewhat baggy, dark blue wool with red trim at the side pockets. A nine-foot sash, probably red, was wrapped around the center of the stomach at the top of the trousers. Often, white canvas leggings, called “gaiters,” were worn at the trouser cuffs.

The 164th’s Zouave headgear was a fez. Its exact colors are still debated. It’s known

that the fez was blue with a green tassel but because there are no known surviving specimens, the shades of blue and green and the exact construction of the tassel are uncertain.

While the 164th’s Zouave uniforms were flashy and they certainly contributed to the regiment’s esprit de corps, for nearly a year and a half the Zouave attire was reserved for formal occasions such as guard duty, provost duty and dress parades. In camp or on fatigue, the regiment wore its old mismatched uniforms until it joined the Army of the Potomac in May, 1864.

### **Service in Virginia**

The Irish Legion left Staten Island for Virginia on November 6, 1862. The regiment encamped 12 miles from Fortress Monroe near the eastern tip of the peninsula formed by the York and James Rivers. It was mustered into Federal service on November 19, 1862, for three years or the “duration of the war,” whichever came first. Col. John McMahon of Buffalo commanded the regiment. The first regimental roster contained 766 men but ultimately 928 men would serve. Many of those who survived had 33 months of Federal service when they were mustered out on July 15, 1865.

The 164th also was known as the Corcoran Guard or as the Corcoran Zouaves. It was to see hard fighting and lose its colors to the enemy twice, once in glory and once in ignominy. Yet another regimental flag was lost when temporarily in the care of another regiment. One fourth of the 164th would die in the Civil War. The regiment would lose 10 officers and 106 enlisted men in combat and another 10 officers and 126 enlisted men would die of disease, for a total of 245 deaths from all causes. In addition, the regiment, like others in the Irish Legion, would lose hundreds more wounded and missing. Most of the “missing” were captured.

The New York Adjutant General’s Report contains the records of 79 of the 86 men who enlisted in Company A in 1862 in Potsdam,



Canton, Oswegatchie, Madrid, Pierrepont and Malone. Half of them enlisted in Potsdam and about half of them were born in Ireland.

These records show where the soldier enlisted, not necessarily where he resided. Enlistment took place where the officers set up recruiting stations and not every town or hamlet in St. Lawrence County had one. Many other regiments were also recruiting in the state and county at the same time as the 164th, so enlistments were also influenced by that.

Eighteen, or 23 percent of Company A, died during the war. Two Company A men were killed in action; 7 died of their wounds; 23 were wounded; 9 were captured; 9 died of disease and 10 were discharged for disability. Only 6 men, 5 of them privates, served from beginning to end without being wounded, disabled, captured, hospitalized or without deserting.

Two young Oswegatchie privates deserted on December 4, two weeks after the regiment was federalized. How or if they got home from Virginia is not in the record. Although tales of men deserting and enlisting in another regiment collecting bounty are rife, "bounty jumping" as it was called was not terribly common until 1864. There is little, if any, evidence that 164th New York soldiers engaged in this practice to any extent after being federalized.

### **Camp Life**

The regiment would get about a month of serious training before it was deployed to southern Virginia. The regiment's camp was laid out in a grid pattern to facilitate quickly forming the unit into the classic, two-rank battle line characteristic of the Civil War-era heavy infantry tactics. Each company was organized into its own street of tents or—in winter—huts; the ten company streets were parallel to each other. Privates and non-commissioned officers were quartered there. The commissioned officers' tents were near the head of their company street and the regiment's field and staff officers

were quartered further behind the line officers. Regulations also dictated where other regimental facilities would be located. Campgrounds could become quagmires, especially in the winter, when heavy rain produced thick mud. In dry spells, the mud gave way to dust (see cover photo).

When the unit was not in combat, which was most of the time, the soldier's day began at the hour appointed by their brigade commander, Corcoran, typically between 5 and 6 a.m., when the regiments' fifers and drummers sounded "musician's call." "Reveille" came ten minutes or so later and was the signal to be in line and ready for roll call. Roll call being taken, the men policed the camp and ate breakfast.

Command and control was extremely difficult during the Civil War. Officers maneuvered their men both on parade and in battle using formal drill with a combination of voice and bugle commands. Regiments such as the 164th needed to be experienced with both close-order heavy infantry drill in two-rank battle lines and open-order light infantry (skirmish) drill. The men had to master a large array of music calls, the manual of arms, battalion drill and brigade drill. Thus the need for frequent daily drills except in winter, when there were none.

The core of an infantry company was four rifle sections, each with about 20 riflemen. A lieutenant led two sections. A captain commanded the company.

The sections practiced shooting at targets. Their Enfield or Springfield rifles were accurate up to 600 yards. Regiments usually attacked in two lines, shoulder to shoulder. Only the fact that these rifles were muzzleloaders kept casualties, which were higher than anticipated, from being catastrophic. A trained man could only fire about twice a minute. Three times a minute was ideal but was practically impossible to attain because the first two shots fouled the bore with powder residue.

In between drills, soldiers cleaned themselves, their clothes and the camp, dug latrines, built roads, and fetched wood for

cooking and heating.

Still, daily life in camp dragged on endlessly and boredom was the norm. The men's ingenuity in obtaining or even making alcohol was remarkable. Sometimes officers also provided it or it could be bought from sutlers. If there was nothing to drink, the soldiers spent their free time writing letters, reading, playing cards, gambling or organizing teams for any sport they could think of. Furloughs for men many hundreds of miles from home were rare. The end result was endemic homesickness.

### **Christmas, 1862**

A majority of men in Corcoran's Irish Legion were Roman Catholic. There were no chaplains in the legion, but two Catholic priests assigned to other regiments effectively administered to the entire brigade. Father Paul Gillen was in his 50s in 1862 but he was said to be indefatigable. He served in the field with the 170th New York until the end of the war, Father James Dillon, who was in his 20s, served with the 69th New York Militia before joining the 182nd Regiment. He succumbed to disease in the autumn of 1864 after prolonged absences from the regiment.

Drill was suspended on Christmas Eve, 1862, so the men could decorate the camp. The men of the Irish Legion erected arches of greenery 30 feet high which drew many admiring visitors from other units. Father Dillon celebrated High Mass at midnight at General Corcoran's headquarters. A choir of officers sang carols. The general warmed up the unquestionably chilled choir with a glass of Irish whiskey in his quarters.

Christmas Day brought fine weather. The regiment formed at 10:30 a.m. and marched off to masses celebrated by Fathers Gillen and Father Dillon. The men then marked the day with horse-racing, gambling, games, races, and theatricals. The colonel of the 155th, William McEvily, treated all his men to a glass of Irish whiskey.

### **Assignment to Suffolk**

The 164th was assigned as part of Corcoran's Brigade in late December, 1862, to Peck's Division at the Union base at Suffolk, Virginia, located inland from Norfolk on the south side of Hampton Roads, between there and the North Carolina border. Suffolk was the center of a fertile coastal region and had been garrisoned on and off since the Union occupation of Norfolk in the spring of 1861. Starting in late 1862, the Union garrison at Suffolk was beefed up considerably, eventually numbering over 17,000 by mid-April, 1863.

St. Lawrence County's Company A got a new commanding officer. Captain James O'Connor, 32, Potsdam, the commanding officer of Company A, was discharged on December 19, 1862. He enlisted on August 26 and was named captain when the company was federalized in November. He was replaced by Captain Thomas Hickey, 24, of Potsdam.

Corcoran's Irish 164th arrived in the Suffolk area near the North Carolina line on December 29, 1862. Suffolk was a bit of a backwater with action confined mostly to slogging along on fatiguing reconnaissance marches between the Nansemond River at Suffolk and the Blackwater River twenty miles to the west. The Irish Zouaves also did picket duty outside of town and helped to construct an extensive array of earthen fortifications around Suffolk.

Corporal W. Jackson Fellows, 37, Malone, of Company A, was promoted to hospital steward on January 28, 1863 and transferred. Each regiment had a hospital steward who was essentially the Civil War-era equivalent of a modern medical assistant, working under the regimental surgeon and serving as regimental pharmacist.

### **The Battle of Deserted House**

Five thousand Union troops clashed in a skirmish with 1,800 rebels on January 30, 1863 at "The Deserted House," as the Union called it; it was "Kelly's Store" to the

Confederates. The battle was initiated when the Confederates crossed the Blackwater River into Union-controlled territory on a foraging expedition. After a lot of hard marching, some pre-dawn fighting and a day of pursuit, the Confederates, under the command of the incompetent Brigadier General Roger Pryor, retreated back across the Blackwater. Casualties on both sides were relatively light. The Irish Legion did well in its first action, losing about 20 men including a few from the 164th. Many of the Legion's casualties were suffered in a pre-dawn two-hour artillery duel. At the Battle of the Deserted House, the 164th had one soldier killed in action, one wounded in action, and two missing. Private William Davis, 18, Potsdam, died of disease on February 11, 1863.

Company A was to have another change in its officers. A 30 year-old Madrid man enlisted as a private in 1862. He was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant when Company A was federalized but was dismissed from the company on March 1, 1863. There are no further details in the record as to why this happened. He was replaced as second lieutenant by Edward McCaffrey, 21, of Potsdam.

### **St. Patrick's Day**

The Legion had a raucous celebration in Virginia on St. Patrick's Day March 17, 1863. Alcohol flowed freely. Accounts from the 155th New York, including a detailed letter from a Buffalo sergeant, tell of factions fighting with fists; even revolvers fired in the camp of the 155th Infantry. Fortunately no one was hurt. The 155th appears to have been considered the 164th's brother regiment, because companies of men from Buffalo and Western New York served in both regiments. The 164th and the 155th fought side-by-side in all the campaigns to come.

When the Irish weren't slugging each other, they were likely to be engaged in various forms of vivacious entertainment. There were plenty of contemporary songs about their famous leader, Michael Corcoran.

Here is a sampling of Irish-American song lyrics during the war years.

#### **"The Irish Volunteer"**

When the Prince of Wales came over here  
and made a hullaboo  
Oh, everyone turned out, you know, in  
gold and tinsel too.  
But the good old 69th didn't like these  
lords or peers  
They wouldn't give a damn for kings, the  
Irish volunteers.  
We love the land of liberty, its laws we will  
revere  
'But the devil take nobility' says the Irish  
volunteer.

#### **"Boys That Wore the Green"**

Colonel Corcoran led the 69th on that  
eventful day  
I wish the Prince of Wales was there to  
see him in the fray.  
His charge upon the batteries was a most  
glorious scene  
With gallant New York firemen and the  
boys that wore the green.

#### **"Song of the Regiments"**

We have volunteers to fight who have  
pride and brave and darin'  
Thomas Francis Meagher and his gallant  
Sons of Erin,  
The Massachusetts Ninth, Michael  
Corcoran's Irish Legion  
With all the rank and file from every state  
and region.

By all accounts, St. Patrick's Day was a success, and the Irish Legion was back in fighting trim in a reasonably short time. A few weeks later these men would meet the troops of a famous Confederate general.



## **The Siege of Suffolk**

Confederate General James Longstreet's First Corps, 15,000 men strong, was detached from General Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia in April, 1863, and sent to the Suffolk area on a giant foraging expedition. Lee's army, camped that winter west of Fredericksburg, was suffering acute shortages. Detaching Longstreet and his men removed a large number of mouths to feed and, simultaneously, added considerable amounts of food and fodder to the larders of the Confederate army. The Suffolk area was fertile and had been out of the reach of the Confederate commissary department for a year.

With three divisions, General Longstreet crossed the Blackwater and drove panicky Unionists inside their earthworks at Suffolk. Thus Peck's Union soldiers were bottled up inside Suffolk. Longstreet's foraging wagons ranged from the Blackwater to Suffolk and from Hampton Roads to the North Carolina line gathering up badly-needed rations.

His "Siege of Suffolk" lasted from April 10 to May 3, 1863. During the siege, the rebel besiegers had short rations while the besieged were well-fed. The Union maintained open navigation on the Nansemond River through most of the siege and the rebels never closed the ring more than half-way around Suffolk. During the siege, particularly in its early days, panicky, mostly inexperienced Union troops endured constant alerts and manned the trenches and fortifications. The Irish Legion helped defend the post as part of General Peck's Corps.

## **A Deadly Encounter**

Commanding the 1st division in VII Corps, General Corcoran heard on April 12 that Longstreet was on the attack. Around 3 a.m. he rushed to the front on horseback through the damp, foggy night along with a fellow Fenian leader, John O'Mahony, a civilian, and a small contingent of staff officers and other hangers-on.

Near a field hospital filled with patients and medical staff, they were stopped by a sentry demanding the counter sign.

A Zouave officer from another recently-arrived regiment jumped in, backing the sentry. He was Lt. Col. Edgar Allison Kimball, the commander of Hawkins' Zouaves, the 9th NY Infantry. Corcoran claimed later he couldn't determine the officer's rank. It's obvious the general didn't like Kimball's attitude. In any event, Corcoran and his party did not know the countersign.

Col. Kimball was fond of the bottle and the Hawkins' Zouaves Historical Association in 1999 contended that he was in a stupor when he confronted Gen. Corcoran. The anecdotal evidence from many accounts of Corcoran's encounter with Kimball belie that Kimball was in a "stupor." The man was, after all, on his feet and miles away from his regiment but he was certainly inebriated and acting fatally overaggressive.

Gen. Corcoran later maintained that Kimball had a sword in one hand and a pistol in the other. Whether Kimball had drawn his sidearm is questionable.

The verbal confrontation escalated until Kimball waved his sword at Corcoran and hurled some exceedingly foul, insubordinate and ethnically insulting language at the general.

For his part, Corcoran repeatedly identified who he was and what his business was. He was obviously a general accompanied by many staff officers. The belligerent Kimball refused to budge and Corcoran, frantic to get to the front, finally drew his pistol and ordered Kimball to the side. When Kimball refused to move and again insulted Corcoran, the general pulled the trigger. His single shot in the foggy darkness hit Kimball in the neck. Kimball yelled "Shoot again, damn you!" and slumped to the ground.

Corcoran rode off with his retinue, telling a staff officer to, "See who the officer was." Kimball soon expired. Corcoran himself requested a court of inquiry, which found his conduct worthy of a reprimand but not of any more severe penalty.

The 9th New York came close to attacking the Irish Legion over the incident. For the balance of the siege, Hawkins' Zouaves were assigned to another division on the opposite side of the Suffolk fortifications from the Irish Legion.

The 164th had lost three men killed in action and seven wounded in combat during Longstreet's siege. Company B of the 164th, on reconnaissance with a few other companies from other regiments of the Legion, bumped into George Pickett's 17th Virginia on April 15. One man of the 164th was killed in this fracas just south of Suffolk. Several days later the 164th lost nine men during a furious artillery bombardment.

At the urgent request of General Lee, who was under attack by the Federal Army of the Potomac, General Longstreet withdrew from Suffolk on May 3 but did not get back in time to help Lee at the Battle of Chancellorsville.

### **Blackwater then Back to Norfolk**

The Zoauve regiment made forays to the Blackwater River on May 12 and June 17. This latter thrust at Franklin ended with one man killed and 11 wounded.

In the early days of July, 1863, as the battle of Gettysburg was raging in far-off Pennsylvania, the Irish Legion was the last Union unit withdrawn from Suffolk as part of a larger consolidation of Union forces. The 164th and the rest of the Legion accomplished the final demolition of items of military use before withdrawing to Norfolk and, eventually, the York-James Peninsula.

The 164th suffered 26 casualties all told while deployed in southern Virginia. Private Bartholomew Sheehan, 23, Potsdam, was hospitalized on July 9.

Now, as part of an effort to thrust at Richmond while Lee's army was retreating from Pennsylvania, the 164th and the Legion joined the expedition from White Hall to the South Anna River (north of Richmond) until July 7. The expedition was uneventful and produced no positive result.

Later in July, the Legion was ordered

to the Manassas area in northern Virginia, initially to help augment the Army of the Potomac's pursuit of Lee marching westward near Manassas.

The Legion bivouacked for the night on the old battlefield, noting the many washed-open graves of men who fell in earlier battles and hearing the distant thunder of artillery as Lee fought to stave off the Army of the Potomac at the Falling Waters crossing of the Potomac River.

The Irish Legion never got into action against Lee that summer. Eventually the brigade wound up spending from the summer of 1863 until the spring of 1864 in the region, guarding the Orange & Alexandria Railroad, the Army's supply line.

### **Desertion**

Combat may have been too much for three St. Lawrence County men. A pair of Potsdam men in their 20's with the same last name and who enlisted on the same day deserted on June 19. The military caught up to them in Baltimore, Maryland, on October 28. What happened to them is not recorded. A 22 year-old Canton private also deserted on June 25. His would be the last desertion from Company A for 20 months. During the entire war, a dozen St. Lawrence County men deserted Company A— six before the regiment was federalized and two almost immediately thereafter.

Desertions were a huge problem for both the Confederates and the Union army. It is estimated that well over 200,000 soldiers deserted from the blue ranks, 44,913 from New York units alone. Roughly 80,000 deserters—including the two from Company A—were caught but only 147 were executed. That is less than 2/10ths of one percent. Those were much better odds at staying alive than remaining in the ranks. Fourteen percent of the Union Army died during the war as did more than 25 percent of the 164th. However, a number of Union deserters eventually returned to the ranks and not all desertions were permanent.

The reasons men deserted were almost limitless. Think of the numbing monotony of the daily drills and the arduous, daily routine when the unit was not in combat. Consider the suffocating heat, thirst and aching limbs of the forced marches. Ponder the possibility of panic on the eve of combat and the thought of serving under regimental and line officers who were largely amateurs. Conclude with war weariness, questionable generalship and frequent defeat. Then add family troubles at home, long delays in getting paid and the likelihood that one could get away with deserting.

The wonder is that only a tenth of the Union Army deserted.

### **Guarding the Railroad**

The Irish Legion moved to Northern Virginia on July 12, 1863. The 164th would perform provost duty in Washington, DC and, with the rest of the brigade, would help guard the Orange and Alexandria Railroad from cavalry raids and attacks by partisans such as Major John S. Mosby's guerillas. "Mosby's Rangers" were kept well informed by a seemingly ubiquitous band of female spies who kept tabs on most Federal troop movements and dispositions.

The sutler's wagon was a favorite target of Mosby's men. During the Legion's stay along the railroad, more than once its sutlers were the victims of plundering by Mosby's men when moving their goods between Alexandria and the regimental camps strung out from there to Manassas.

The sutlers were private merchants who contracted with the Army to have exclusive rights to peddle wares to a regiment. They carried tobacco, candy, patent medicine, canned meats, shoelaces, fried pies, games, writing materials, newspapers, and many other items. The sutlers seemed to sell almost everything the Army didn't issue. Their prices were considered by the men to be outrageous, but when one considers the costs of transporting their wares to the army and the risks they undertook, including

occasional assaults at the hands of their own customers, it is surprising that so many sutlers did business with the army.

Railroads quickly became vital to both sides once war had broken out. They swiftly moved troops, ammunition, material, food and all the impedimenta of war over great distances. This had never been possible before. Both sides understood the strategic and tactical value of railroads and went to great pains to defend or destroy the railroads.

On December 17, 1863, General Thomas Rosser of the Army of Northern Virginia's Cavalry Corps led 1,000 rebel cavalymen to raid the railroad bridge at Pope's Run near Sangster Station, which was guarded by a company of the 155th New York. Although the 164th was not present, the resulting fight would affect the regiment.

The defenders beat off Rosser's cavalymen but not before foraging troopers managed to snatch the 164th's new battle flag, which was still in its shipping crate. The battle flag had been discovered in a railroad station by Captain Jack McAnally of the 155th's Company I; he intended to keep the flag in his quarters until Colonel James McMahan, commander of the 164th, could retrieve it.

The rebels got to the flag first. They took it from the quarters the captain shared with his lieutenants and their wives. General Rosser gave it to the Corps of Cadets at the Virginia Military Institute.

Company I of the 155th had several men wounded and nine captured in this raid, most of whom died in Andersonville prison, but its 65 men kept Rosser's troopers from destroying the bridge. Corcoran attempted to mount a pursuit of Rosser but the fast-moving cavalymen could not be caught.

Guarding the railroad was tedious and dangerous work. By mid-May 1864 the four regiments of the Irish Legion numbered fewer than 1600 men present for duty. While losses to enemy action until the start of May, 1864, were relatively light, many men were lost to sickness, discharges due to disability



and desertions. As astounding as this rate of attrition may appear, it was fairly typical among Union regiments.

The Irish Legion never engaged in serious mid-war recruiting to fill its steadily depleting ranks. Private Henry Guilis, 25, Ogdensburg, died of disease on August 8, 1863, in Washington, D.C. Private John Angus, 25, Potsdam, died of disease on Dec. 16, 1863, in Scranton, Pennsylvania. Private Michael Clarkin, 22, Malone, died of disease on Dec. 27 at a hospital in Fairfax Court House, Virginia.

### **Gen. Corcoran Dies**

A singular tragedy befell the Irish Legion on December 23, 1863. Its popular leader, Brigadier General Michael Corcoran, died in Fairfax, Virginia. He was 36.

The day before, the general, not feeling well, had attended mass celebrated by the Legion's chaplain. Then in the company of other officers, General Corcoran went off to escort his old friend, Brigadier General Thomas F. Meagher—who left the much diminished Irish Brigade that May following the battle of Chancellorsville—to the Fairfax railroad station. General Meagher was returning to New York after a brief visit.

General Corcoran, a capable horseman, borrowed a spirited horse from General Meagher and had pulled ahead of his accompanying officers. Suddenly the general pulled his horse up, dismounted, held on to the bridle and then fell to the ground. General Corcoran was unconscious when his companions reached him. Carried to his quarters, he lay, comatose, and breathing heavily.

For the last time, the Irish Legion rallied round him. Grief-stricken officers and men filed through his sickroom praying and saying goodbye to their chieftain. Brigadier General Michael Corcoran died a few hours later. The cause of death has been debated for more than 140 years, but appears to have been a stroke brought on by the privations suffered during his year of Confederate captivity.

A funeral service was held in the Irish Legion's chapel tent and then, on Christmas Eve, Gen. Corcoran's embalmed body was sent on its way to New York City. On Christmas Day, his remains were met by General Meagher, a brace of Irish colonels, and the city's Committee of the Common Council. He lay in state in the Governor's Room at City Hall and the city's flags were lowered to half-staff.

The general was then moved to old St. Patrick's Cathedral in the old Five Points neighborhood of Irish slums where thousands filed by to pay their respects. The archbishop was out of town but the vicar general, Bishop William Starrs, officiated at a solemn high requiem mass and delivered the eulogy. Thousands joined the funeral procession to Calvary Cemetery in Queens where Brigadier General Michael Corcoran was buried alongside his mother and his first wife. There he rests today.

With Corcoran's passing, 23 year-old Colonel Matthew Murphy of the 182nd New York succeeded to the command of the Irish Legion. Murphy was wounded in May, 1864, at the battle of Spotsylvania Court House. He returned to the command of the Legion that autumn and was mortally wounded in the knee in February, 1865 at the battle of Dabney's Mills/ Second Hatcher's Run, southwest of Petersburg, Virginia.

### **Chasing Mosby**

Protecting the railroad was important but the duty, most days, was marked by mind-numbing boredom.

In his diary Captain Hickey recorded playing countless chess games to pass the time away. Once, he vowed to use the time to catch up on his knowledge of tactics but he never mentioned that again.

Picket duty was a constant necessity. Paperwork plagued the officers. Inspections were frequent and the squared-away Zouaves were impressive at guard mounts. Some men, including Capt. Hickey and Lt. McCaffrey got furloughs. At least one man came back late and was court-martialed.

An officer of the 164th writing to the Utica Evening Telegram said that chases after the guerilla leader, Lt. Col. John S. Mosby, who led the 43rd Virginia Partisan Ranger Battalion, “relieve the monotony of camp life.”

Capt. Hickey wrote 10 times of alarms and excursions touched off by Mosby early in 1864. His references to “General Mosby” were those of respect. The guerilla leader never attained that rank.

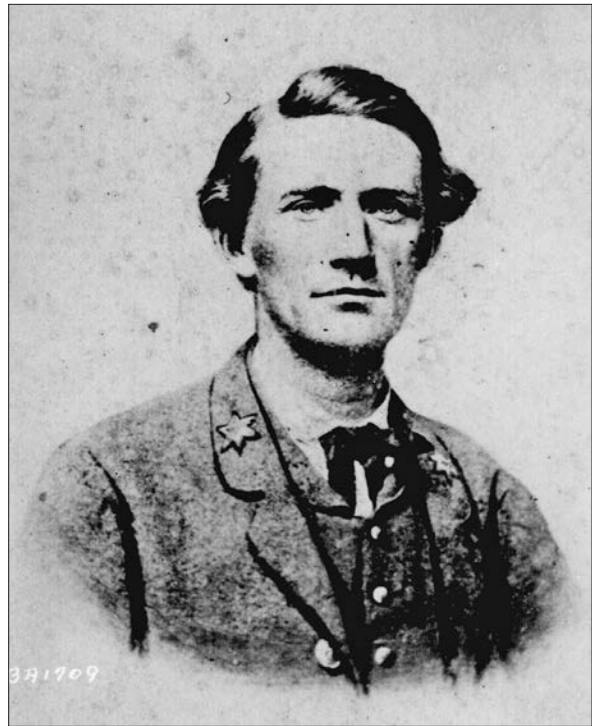
He wrote about one expedition in a letter to his wife:

On the morning of the 30th it was ascertained that Gen. Mosby with a considerable force was at Upperville, 4 miles from where we were encamped. It was determined to go out and offer him battle and for that purpose 24 men from each company with their captain was picked for the occasion. The balance of the regiment was left behind to guard the wagons and the prisoners, the latter numbering about 30, some belonging to Gen. Mosby and some to the regular Virginia cavalry... As we neared the village the enemy showed signs of disputing our advance further; we moved steadily forward and they fell back gradually, skirmishing as they went. When we marched to the village we had a few minutes to rest...Not a man could be seen. And the women, the lord deliver me from them.

Two companies were thrown forward as skirmishers before whom the enemy fell back to the Blue Ridge Mountains and took up a position and held the road through the mountain that is known as Ashby’s Gap. They being well mounted, it was impossible for us to follow them with effect.

Cavalry should fight cavalry, but our cavalry was a failure, even though they were 2 to 1 of the enemy...We lost 1 man killed and 1 taken prisoner. They must have lost more than we, as quite a few were seen to fall.

The Irish dropped back to their camp.



*John S. Mosby, the Confederate guerilla leader the 164th pursued without success. Photo is from the National Archives.*

The 164th and the rest of the Irish Legion pressed hard to find Mosby, especially after it was reported that he was wounded, but never managed to best him. Colonel Mosby never surrendered. His luck held out and he quietly disbanded Mosby’s Rangers after Appomattox.

In May, 1864, Corcoran’s Irish Legion would join General George Meade’s Army of the Potomac, operating under the overall direction of General-in-Chief Ulysses S. Grant.

And then the luck of the Irish would run out.

*A second article on the Irish Zouaves after they joined General Grant is forthcoming.*

*The author gratefully acknowledges the substantial contributions made by Kevin O’Beirne in preparing this article. O’Beirne of Buffalo is a leading authority on Corcoran’s Irish Legion. Formerly, he was a re-enactor with the 164th New York Infantry Regiment, Corcoran’s Irish Zouaves.*

## Sources

- "The Business of Civil War: Military Mobilization and the State," Mark R. Wilson FINISH
- "Christmas in the Union's Irish Brigades," Kevin O'Beirne, <http://thewildgeese.com/pages/civilwar2.html>
- "Corcoran's Irish Zouaves: The 164th New York State Volunteers," Kevin O'Beirne <http://www.ascu.buffalo.edu/-dbertuca/g/164thNYVols.htm>
- "A History of the 155th New York State Volunteers," Kevin O'Beirne
- "Corcoran's Irish Legion' 1862-1865," Kevin O'Beirne, <http://www.thewildgeese.com/pages/155thnyv.html>
- "St. Patrick's Day's Powerful Tug," Kevin O'Beirne <http://thewildgeese.com/pages/stday2.html>
- New York State Adjutant General's Report
- "The Diary of Captain Thomas Hickey," transcribed by Betsy L. Travis, Potsdam Public Museum, Potsdam, NY, 1999
- "The Soldier in Our Civil War," Volume II, edited by Paul F. Mottelay and T. Campbell Copeland, Stanley Bradley Publishing Company, NY, 1890
- "The Irish Brigade," Robert Mc Namara, <http://history1800s.about.com/od/civilwar/p/irishbrigade01.htm>
- "New Book Features the US Military Exploits of Sligo's Michael Corcoran," The Sligo (Ireland) Champion, January 14, 2010
- "Why the Irish Fought for the Union," <http://www.historynet.com/americas-civil-war-why-the-irish-fought-for-the-union.htm>
- "The Staten Island Riot: The Quarantine Conflagration, September 2, 1858," <http://www.thehistorybox.com/nycity/riots/sectionII/riotsarticle3a.htm>
- "Colorful and Gallant: General Michael Corcoran," John J. Concannon, <http://www.thewildgeese.com/pages/corcpt1.html>
- "Your Likes We Will Never See Again," John J. Concannon, <http://www.thewildgeesetoday.com/pages/corcpt5.html>
- "Michael Corcoran," [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michael\\_Corcoran](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michael_Corcoran)
- "Michael Corcoran: A Controversial Figure," <http://civilwar.bluegrass.net/OfficersAndEnlistedMen/michaelcorcoran.html>
- "Private James Allen, A Medal of Honor Citation," [http://aotw.org/moh.php?citation\\_id=91](http://aotw.org/moh.php?citation_id=91)
- <http://www.reamsstation.net/firms.com/Federal/history155th.htm>
- "Union New York Volunteers: 164th Regiment, New York Infantry," <http://www.itd.nps.gov/cwss/template.cfm>
- "Conscription (Military Draft) in the Civil War," Patricia L. Faustm editor, Historical Times Encyclopedia of the Civil War <http://www.civilwar.home/conscription.htm>
- "Chronology of the American Civil War," <http://civilwarhome.com/timeline.htm>
- "Gallantry in the Field: Potsdam and the Civil War," Potsdam Public Museum, Potsdam, New York, 1997
- "New York in the War of the Rebellion," 3rd edition, Frederick Phisterer.: Albany, B. Lyon Company, 1912 <http://www.dmna.state.ny.us/historic/reghist/civil/infantry/164thInf/164thInfMain.htm>
- "The Union Army," Madison, WI: Federal Publishing Company, 1908 <http://www.dmna.state.ny.us/historic/reghist/civil/infantry/164thInf/164thInfMain.htm>
- "164th Regiment History 'Corcoran Guard,'" <http://www.civilwararchive.com/Unreghist/usnyin10.htm>
- "Irish Military Service during the American Civil War: A Case Against Assimilation, - New York 1861-1865," Dr. Michelle L. Hartman [http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p\\_mla\\_apa\\_research\\_citation/1/4/3/6/1p143613\\_inde](http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p_mla_apa_research_citation/1/4/3/6/1p143613_inde)
- "Substitutes, Civil War," <http://www.answers.com/topic/substitutes-civil-war>
- "Military Pay" <http://civilwar.org/education/history/warfare-and-logistics/logistics/pay.html>
- "Zouave" <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zouave>
- "What is a Zouave?" <http://www.nps.gov/archive/gett/gettkidz/zouave.htm>
- "Uniform Guidelines of the New York Zouaves," [http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~scprnyz/Uniform\\_Guidelines.html](http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~scprnyz/Uniform_Guidelines.html)
- "Pattern 1853 Enfield" [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pattern\\_1853\\_Enfield](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pattern_1853_Enfield)
- "Common Guns in the Civil War: 577 Enfield Musket", Hackman-Adams <http://hackman-adams.com/guns/enfield.htm>
- "164th New York Infantry Regiment: One of Fox's 300 Fighting Regiments," <http://www.civilwarreference.com/regiments/detail.php?redID=2890>
- "Desertions in the Civil War Armies: Union Army," <http://www.civilwarhome.com/desertion.htm>
- "Life in a Civil War Army Camp," <http://www.civilwarhome.com/camplife.htm>
- "Camp Life: Existing Day-to-Day," <http://www.nps.gov/history/museum/exhibits/gettex/existing.html>
- "The Civil War Soldier," Bertram Barnett, Gettysburg National Military Park, <http://www.nps.gov/archive/gett/soldierlife/webguns.htm>
- "What Was Life as a Soldier Like in 1863," <http://www.nps.gov/archive/get/soldierlife/cwarmy.htm>
- "Civil War Rations," <http://www.civilwarhome.com/rations.htm>
- "Civil War Diseases: Civil War Medicine," <http://www.civilwaracademy.com/civil-war-diseases.htm>
- "Medical Care, Battle Wounds, and Disease" <http://www.civilwarhome.com/civilwarmedicine.htm>
- "John S. Mosby: Gray Ghost," <http://www.wtv-zone.com/civilwar/jmosby.htm>
- "Fenian Graves: General Michael Corcoran (1827-1863)," <http://irishfreedom.net/Fenian%20graves/M.Corcoran/Michael%20Corcoran.htm>
- "164th Regiment, NY Volunteer Infantry: Civil War Newspaper Clippings," <http://dmna.state.ny.us/historic/reghist/civil/infantry/164thInf/164thInfCWN.htm>
- "Military Rosters: 164th New York Infantry, Officers and Staff," Joy Fisher, <http://files.usgwararchives.net/ny/state/military/civilwar/service/164threg-officers.txt>
- "The United States Military Railroad System," [http://www.alicnolnlearning.us/Military\\_Railroad.html](http://www.alicnolnlearning.us/Military_Railroad.html)
- Interesting Railroad Record," Chicago (IL) Tribune, October 9, 1866, <http://www.catskillarchive.com/rrextra/Page0005.html>
- "Railroads in the Civil War," <http://www.gatewaynmra.org/articles/civil-war1.htm>
- "Major Edward Kimball" <http://www.fortunecity.com/bally/coalbrook/243/hawkinszouaves.html>
- "Lieutenant Colonel Edgar Allison Kimball," [http://aotw.org/officers.php?officer\\_id=445](http://aotw.org/officers.php?officer_id=445)



# Rensselaer Falls and the 14<sup>th</sup> New York Heavy Artillery in the Last Days of the War

Schuyler Alverson

The 14th NY Heavy Artillery Volunteer Regiment of the Civil War was a Rochester-based unit. Almost 400 young men from St. Lawrence County were recruited into the ranks, including ten men from Rensselaer Falls. They were mustered in between August and December, 1863.

The 14th NY Heavy Artillery was originally stationed in New York City to defend the harbor, and then served in the defenses of Washington, DC.

In April, 1864, Lt. General U.S. Grant was appointed commander-in-chief of all Union armies. He chose to direct personally the operations of the Army of the Potomac in Virginia. To increase the size of the army facing General Robert E. Lee's Confederate Army of Virginia, he transferred many regiments from inactive positions to fighting status. The 14th NY State Heavy Artillery was one of the regiments. Acting as infantry, they became known as the "Heavies," not so much because they were heavy artillery but because they had about twice as many men in a regiment as in the usual infantry regiment.

From May, 1864, to December, 1864, the 14th Heavies fought with considerable losses in the following battles: the Wilderness, Spotsylvania, North Anna, Cold Harbor, the Assault on Petersburg, the Crater, the Weldon Railroad, Poplar Grove Church, and Hatcher's Run.

After June 19, 1864, much time was spent in the trenches in the siege of Petersburg, Virginia.

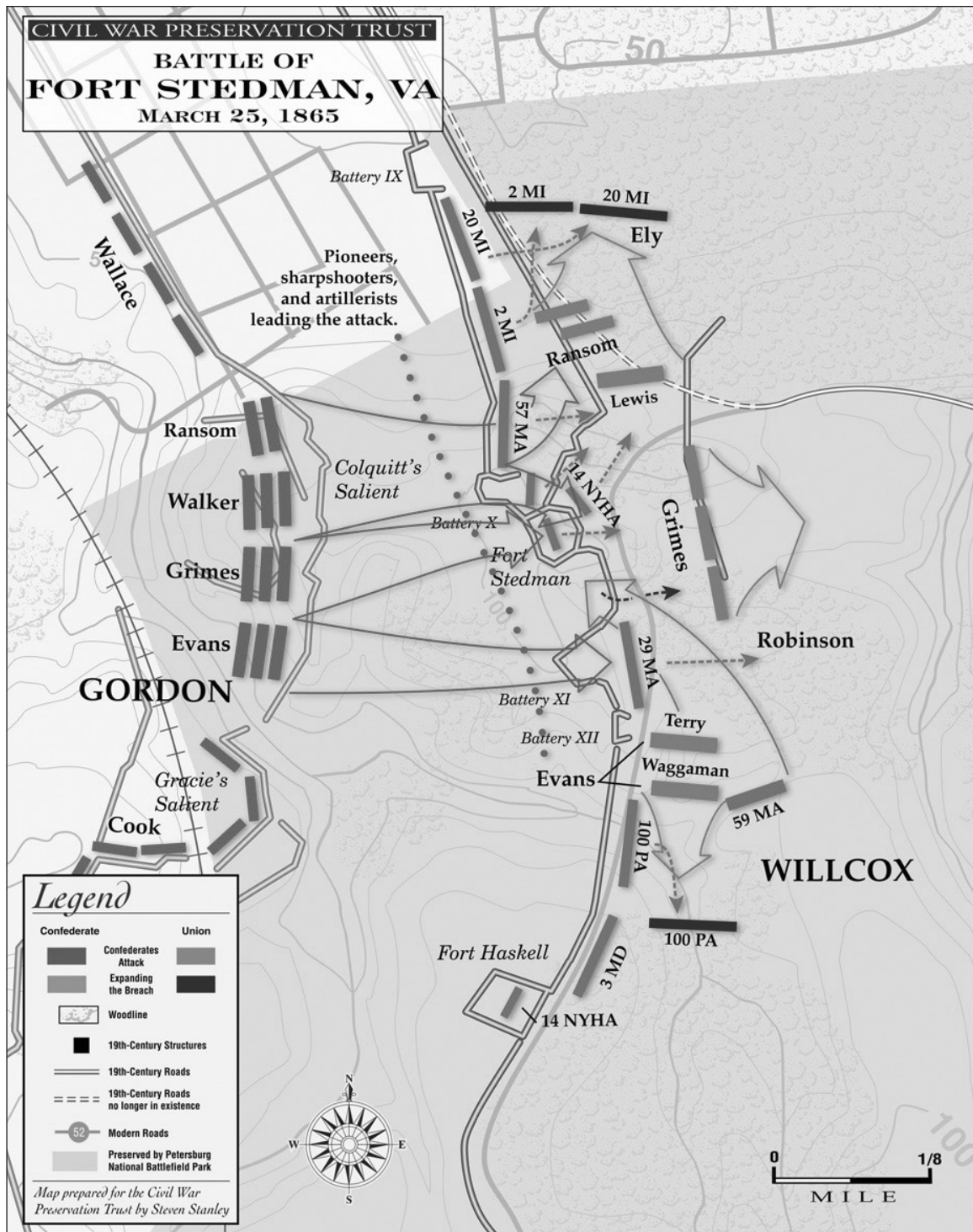
By December, almost 1,000 of the regiment's original 2,510 members were no longer on the roster. Of the Rensselaer Falls men, two were killed, two wounded, and three succumbed to illness.

## **Defending Fort Stedman**

On March 23, 1865, the Federal Army of General Sherman, moving north from Savannah, Georgia, made contact with Union General Scofield's Army moving northwest from Wilmington, North Carolina, at Goldsboro, North Carolina. General Joe Johnson's Confederate Army could not stop them, so eventually they linked up with the Army of the Potomac.

Confederate General Robert E. Lee wished to combine his beleaguered forces with those of General Johnson by retreating from Richmond and Petersburg, but General Grant had seized most of the roads and railroads to the south, General Lee's desired route. In desperation, he decided to attack Grant's entrenched troops east of Petersburg with the hope that General Grant would bring troops from the south side of Petersburg and thus open an escape route.

Confederate General John B. Gordon was assigned the task of selecting the site of the attack and of conducting the ensuing engagement. General Gordon selected Fort Stedman, a rather run-down earthen structure just east of Petersburg. It was only 150 yards from the rebel Colquitt salient, and afforded relatively level, open ground to the objective. Pickets or outposts in front of



Map with permission of Civil War Preservation Trust, [civilwar.org](http://civilwar.org).

the respective trenches were only 50 yards apart at this point.

Union Fort Stedman was close to the City Point Railroad, the Union military railroad,

constructed to supply the entrenched troops around Petersburg, from City Point Depot (now Hopewell, Virginia) on the James River. (see map). Not far behind Fort Stedman was

General Grant's Headquarters.

Confederate General Gordon reasoned that if he could breach the Union line, his troops could destroy part of the supply railroad, disrupt communications (the telegraph lines) to Grant's headquarters and possibly take a few high-ranking officers as prisoners.

For the attack, General Lee placed at General Gordon's disposal six brigades and a division of cavalry. Although there were four regiments to a brigade, battle losses, desertion and sickness had reduced the ranks to such an extent that the total force was between 10,000 and 12,000 men. Most of these soldiers were taken out of the trenches, thus reducing the already meager number of Confederates opposing the Union army, but General Lee, being an aggressive fighter, thought the gamble worthwhile.

The attack was scheduled for 4 a.m. on March 25, 1865. About 15 Confederates were to approach the Union pickets at 3 a.m. claiming to be deserters, but in fact their purpose was to dispose of the pickets when the attack began. Then 30 Confederate soldiers with axes were to chop down the *abatis* and *chevaux-de-frise* that protected the Union trenches and artillery batteries. This was to be followed by three companies of 100 men each that would make the initial assault. Stripes of white cloth were tied around men's chests so they could identify each other in the predawn attack.

Each of the assaulting companies was directed to seize a Union fort behind the primary defensive line and use the cannons obtained to aid the advance of the supporting troops. The Confederate cavalry was to move on through the breach and destroy the railroad and communications.

Unfortunately for them, the 14th "Heavies" were assigned to occupy Fort Stedman, the adjoining trenches and nearby Fort Haskell. The siege of Petersburg and Richmond had been going on for eight months. It was a monotonous, hazardous duty with sporadic small arms fire and occasional mortar and artillery shells. Living

conditions were primitive at best and time spent in the trenches and on picket duty was frequently cold, wet and miserable. Union and Confederate outposts were so close to each other that it was easy to carry on a conversation across the lines and soldiers often did just that. The men of the 14th were probably not alert for the assault about to fall on them.

The attack started as planned. The Confederates, with their deception, quickly overran portions of the 14th Heavy, many being taken prisoners, although a number escaped to Fort Haskell where they fought well.

As for the forts and weapons in the rear of the Union lines that were to be captured to support the main attacking body—they did not exist. Fort Haskell held and quickly other Union units joined in the battle. The last of the Confederate offensives were repulsed by 7:30 a.m. They retreated, but only after heavy casualties and the loss of many as prisoners.

Of the approximately 430 members of the 14th Heavy that were on duty at the time, 27 were killed or died of wounds, 30 were wounded but recovered, and 210 men were taken prisoner or were missing. One of the prisoners was Andrew Bennett of Rensselaer Falls.

### **Casualties**

General Grant had scheduled a review parade of the 5th Federal Corps for President Lincoln, directly behind Fort Stedman, at noon of that same day. The review was postponed until 3 p.m. Meanwhile, President Lincoln watched casualties return from the battlefield and commented on the horrors of war.

Within a month, General Lee had surrendered his army. For the boys of the 14th Heavy Artillery, New York State Volunteers, the fighting was over. President Lincoln was assassinated slightly more than a week later.

During the twenty months of service for



this regiment, 210 members were killed in action or died of wounds, 440 were wounded but recovered, and 423 were missing, many as prisoners and other causes.

The ten from Rensselaer Falls didn't fare well.

1. James P. Ingram died of disease on May 15, 1864.
2. Anthony Fletcher was wounded at Cold Harbor on June 2, 1864, but recovered.
3. John S. Beach died of disease on July 9, 1864.
4. Sterling Gray died of wounds in the assault on Petersburg on June 17, 1864.
5. Edwin Carlos was killed in action on July 30, 1864 at the Battle of the Crater.
6. George Cooper was wounded and captured at the Battle of the Crater. He survived.
7. John Vanderlinder was also captured at the Battle of the Crater. He was later paroled.
8. Francis Walker died of disease on November 22, 1864.
9. Andrew Bennett was captured at the battle of Fort Stedman on March 25, 1865.
10. Only Joseph Perry made it all through the war unscathed.

*Editor's note: for more details on the actions of the 14th NY Heavy Artillery, see Colonel William Freeman Fox's Regimental Losses in the Civil War 1861-1865 (Albany, 1889).*

# Mystery Photos

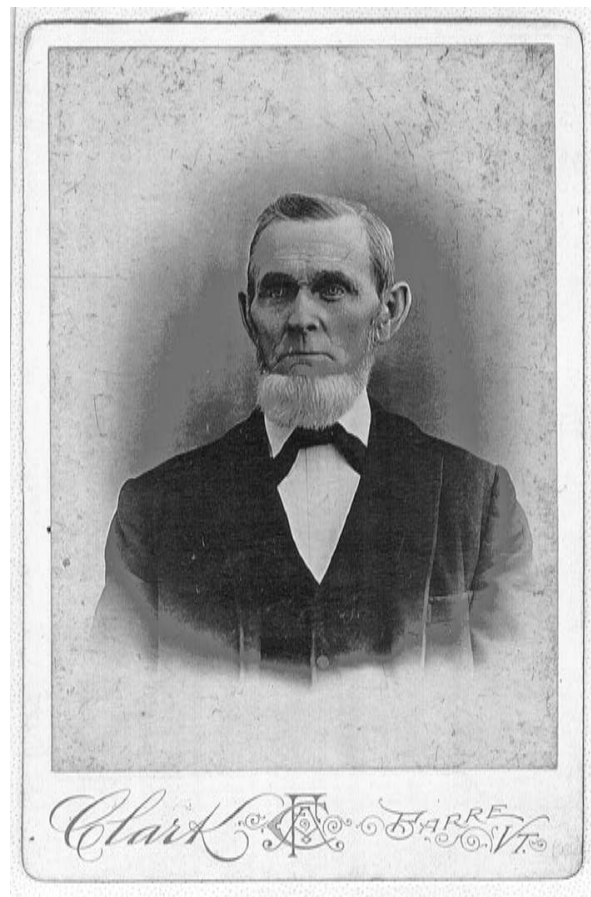
“These photos were found in the attic of the Morley home of Ruby and Frederick Rowen. Family members cannot determine if the photos are of Rowens or Normands, Ruby’s family.

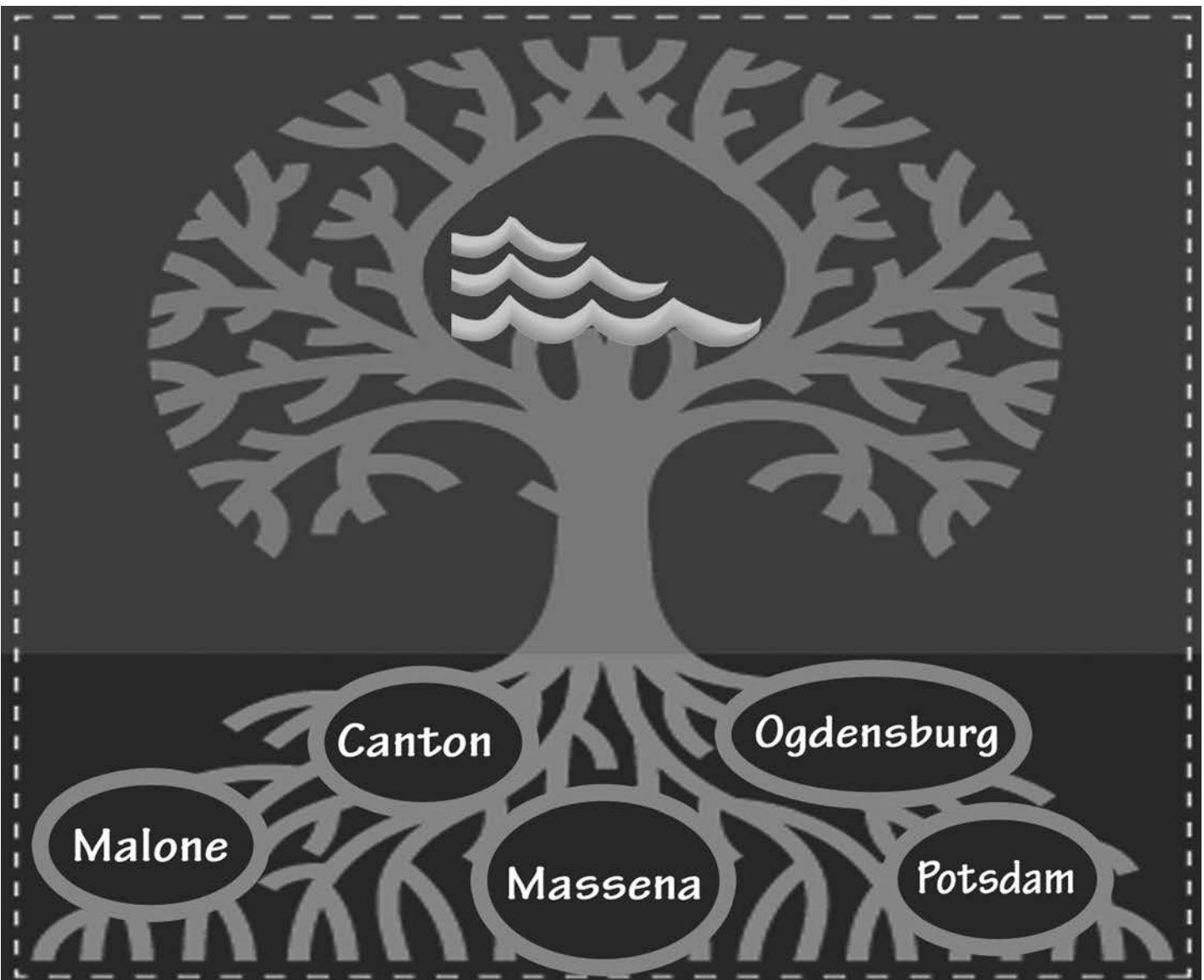
“I am doing genealogical research on the family and am interested in the identity of these two men.”

- mail from Nancy Normand Adams, Pompano, Florida

*The black-bordered portrait reads “J. Hitchcock, 1887, Canton, N.Y.”— the portrait studio, no doubt. The white-bordered photo reads “A. F. Clark, Barre, Vt.”*

*If you have a lead to help identify these portraits, please communicate with Executive Director Trent Trulock, [info@slcha.org](mailto:info@slcha.org) -the editors*





Rooted in years of quality service and membership dedication, SeaComm stands ready to serve your financial needs!



800-764-0566  
[www.seacomm.org](http://www.seacomm.org)



*“Discover the Power of Membership”*



# THE OLIVER LAW FIRM

Cathleen E. O'Horo  
Roger B. Linden  
Francis P. Cappello  
Michelle H. Ladouceur

117 Main Street  
Canton, NY 13617

Tel.: 315-386-4595  
Fax: 315-379-1240

# BARSTOW

AN AMERICAN REVOLUTION BUICK BEYOND PRECISION PONTIAC DESIGNED FOR ACTION GMC WE ARE PROFESSIONAL GRADE SUBARU



**Family Owned  
Dealership**

Serving the  
North Country  
for over 57 years!

- New & Used  
Vehicles
- Service • Parts

**Market St., Potsdam, NY • 315-265-8800**

**[www.barstowmotors.com](http://www.barstowmotors.com)**

**Your NNY Regional GM & Subaru Super Center**

**Thank you  
to our generous business  
and family sponsors**

## **Civil War Weekend 2010**

*Friends of SLCHA*

Gene & Connie Barto, Massena  
(affiliated with Marine Corps League, St.  
Lawrence County Detachment 408)

*Underwriters*

Niles Asset Management  
Canton VFW Post 1231  
Hannaford Supermarket, Massena  
Massena AMVETS Post 4  
Parishville AMVETS Post 265  
SeaComm Federal Credit Union  
Stewart's Shops

## **Antique & Artisan Show & Sale 2010**

*Friends of SLCHA*

Blanchard's Auction Services



Northern New York  
**Community  
Foundation, Inc.**

*In 2009 over \$100,000 in grants and scholarships  
were awarded in St. Lawrence county.*

The Foundation manages and administers a permanent endowment for the community, built and added to by gifts from individuals and organizations committed to meeting the changing needs of Northern New York.

Guided by a board of community leaders, the Foundation makes grants to support the work of non-profit organizations and provides scholarships to individuals in Jefferson, Lewis and St. Lawrence counties.

120 Washington St., Suite 400, Watertown, NY 13601  
(315) 782-7110 • [www.nnycf.org](http://www.nnycf.org)

Return Service Requested  
P. O. Box 8  
Canton, NY 13617

Bulk Rate  
U.S. Postage  
Paid  
Permit No. 21  
Canton, NY 13617

Non-Profit Organization

# SLOW AND STEADY THE WINS RACE!

## CONSISTENT GROWTH

It's interesting how the basic wisdom we learned as kids translates into sound banking practices. At North Country Savings Bank, we're constantly analyzing the opportunities and dangers in the market to protect our customers. Unlike the big banks that sometimes make risky investments with the false promise of big returns. Now, more than ever — slow and steady wins the race. Visit us at [northcountrysavings.com](http://northcountrysavings.com).

CANTON: 127 Main Street, 386-4533  
MASSENA: 22-24 Phillips Street, 769-3566  
OGDENSBURG: Corner of Greene & Caroline Streets, 393-1600  
POTSDAM: 31 Main Street, 265-2300  
ST. LAWRENCE UNIVERSITY: 1 Millennium Way, 229-7580



**NORTH COUNTRY  
SAVINGS BANK**

