

PERINTON GOES TO WAR ó THE CIVIL WAR

The Civil War, the bloodiest and most divisive of any of the nation's conflicts, began one hundred and fifty years ago, in 1861. The election of Abraham Lincoln on the Republican platform, which promised to restrict the expansion of slavery into new territory, led directly to the secession of seven southern states (later followed by four more) and the eventual establishment of the Confederate States of America. Lincoln's decision to provision the Federal garrison at Fort Sumter, South Carolina, and the subsequent surrender of the fort to Confederate forces provided the spark for war.



GAR marker found on gravesites of Civil War veterans

In April 1861 both sides mobilized for war, the north to preserve the union and the primacy of the federal (or central) government, and the south to organize its own form of government, a confederacy, which reserved more power to the states. However, the underlying issue and the one which aroused the most passion was, of course, slavery, an institution that the nation had wrestled with unsuccessfully since its inception. While the Union had the edge in manpower and industrial capacity, the Confederacy clearly had the superior leadership. Expecting an easy win, the Union was shocked by its defeat at the Battle of Bull Run, and the conflict raged for four bitter years, exacting an horrific toll in life and treasure. The end finally came in 1865 at Appomattox Courthouse with the defeat of the Confederacy. Slavery would be abolished with the ratification of the 13th Amendment to the Constitution in the same year. Effects of the conflict would color the political, social, and economic landscape for the remainder of the 19th century, all of the 20th century and even today.

Two hundred sixty-five Perinton residents served in the conflict; forty died on battlefields, in hospitals, and in prisons. The *Complete Record, as Required by Chapter 690 of the Law of 1865, Relating to Officers, Soldiers, and Seamen* detailed the war experience of approximately 150 Perinton veterans. Notes include such entries as "discharge on account of poor health," "health permanently impaired, wounded twice," "wounded 3 times," "eight months in Andersonville Prison," "prison 11 months at Libby Prison," "wounded and discharged," "gunshot wound in shoulder," "wounded in knee," "discharged on account of deafness."

Perinton and Fairport commemorated those who had served in the Civil War in several ways. In 1879, the veterans themselves formed the Fairport chapter of the Grand Army of the Republic, E.A. Slocum Post #211. Named after Edmund Slocum, who was killed at Gettysburg, the post worked for veterans' benefits, assisted indigent veterans and their families, and cared for veterans' graves. The GAR was also instrumental in establishing Decoration Day ceremonies in Perinton. In 1865 at the dedication of the Mt. Pleasant Cemetery, the Reverend Mr. Butler called for a monument to be erected in memory of those who had died in the Civil War: "ó a fierce and deeper struggle has been passed. Now let us honor these men who have bared their bosoms in this storm for us, and died to save our country. Let their names be fresh in our memory. We appeal to all who have an interest in the future of Perrinton [sic] and in the names and deeds of our departed heroes, to do all in their power in this noble cause." Within the space of about a

year, \$2,000 had been raised for a monument, which was dedicated on Thanksgiving Day 1866 with an inscription that recognized those "Who so nobly responded to their country's call in its hour of peril and sacrificed their lives in an effort to suppress treason and armed rebellion in the Civil War of 1861."

Among Perinton and Fairport's 265 veterans, Fairporters Jerome Brownell, John Dryer, John Smith, and John Fassett, who served in New York's 108th Regiment of Volunteers, recorded their reminiscences in 1890.

Jerome Brownell was born in Perinton in 1813 on a farm. After attending school and working in a flour and feed mill and for a Mr. Ely in Rochester, he enlisted as a private in Company E, 108th Regiment New York State Volunteers under Captain A.K. Cutler in August of 1862. He was present at Antietam, Chancellorsville, and Gettysburg, where he was wounded twice. The second wound sent him to the hospital and necessitated surgery to remove a minnie ball and several pieces of loose bone from his shoulder. He returned to active duty only to be sent to the hospital again with inflammation in his lungs. He was discharged in July, 1865, and returned to the Fairport area where he married and went to work in his father's mill. He spent the next several decades working in various mills in New York. At one point he moved to Cedar Key, Florida, to take charge of the Fenimore Mills, but was forced to return north after a bout of malaria. In 1886, he was working as foreman of Patterson's Mills at Salamanca, New York.

John Dryer was born in Switzerland in 1829 and emigrated to western New York in 1850. After spending a year in Brighton, he moved to Fairport and worked as a gardener. He, too, enlisted as a private in the 108th Regiment and was part of Captain E.P. Fuller's Company H. He saw action at Antietam where he was wounded in the ankle, which eventually resulted in his discharge in May of 1863. Returning to Fairport, Dryer resumed his former occupation.

John Smith was born in Germany in 1838 and came to a Penfield farm where he worked until August of 1862 when he enlisted in Company C of the 108th Regiment under Captain William H. Andrews. He was with his Regiment at Antietam, where he was wounded in the foot, Harper's Ferry, Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville, where he was wounded again, and Gettysburg, where he was seriously wounded. Subsequently transferred to the 96th Battalion of the Second Invalid Corps at Baltimore, Smith was finally discharged in 1865 and returned to the Fairport area. Subsequently, he did "such work as my health and wounds would permit."

John Fassett was born in 1840 in Fairport and "worked at my trade" until 1862 when he and his father Alonzo enlisted in Captain William H. Andrews Company C of the 108th Regiment. Alonzo was taken ill and died at Harper's Ferry later than same year. John was also ill and was away from his regiment for nearly a year. He returned in time to take part in "the hot fight" at Morton's Ford in 1864 and saw action in every battle from the Wilderness in May, 1864, to Reams Station in August, 1864 where he was taken prisoner. He was held at Belle Island and Salisbury, North Carolina, for six months. Returned to Union lines in 1865, Fassett was mustered out in June 1865 and gratefully returned to Fairport and his former occupation.

It is evident from these stories, that surviving veterans, while striving to live a normal life, shared an experience that forever changed them as the war itself changed the nation.



*Seven of Fairport's Civil War veterans, only two of which can be identified.
back row on the left: Joseph Kelsey who was at one time a rural mail carrier,
front row on the right: Alanson W. Pepper who enlisted in the 13th New York
Infantry, Company C and served for the duration of the war.*