MHS Newsletter

Marlow Historical Society's Mission is to preserve and illuminate Marlow's History

Spring/Summer 2017

Francis Wetherbee -- Marlow's First and Youngest Civil War Casualty

At the start of the American Civil War on April 12, 1861 there were only approximately 16,000 enlisted troops in service. President Abraham Lincoln immediately issued a call to the States remaining loyal to the Union to raise 42,034 additional volunteers between the ages of 18 and 45 to serve for three years in support of the existing military. The population of Marlow had just reached its peak in 1860 with 813 residents, and over the next four years over 40 volunteers from Marlow and surrounding towns answered the call to preserve a nation that had come into existence just 85 years previously, suffering great hardships and sacrificing much to achieve that "perfect union".

One of those first volunteers was Francis Wetherbee, an only child and the son of Elijah, a carpenter, and Fanny (Monroe) Wetherbee of Marlow. On May 27, 1861 muster records show that he enlisted with the 2nd NH Volunteer Infantry under the name Franklin F. Wetherbee, an 18 year old Manchester resident. Federal Census Records indicate that Francis (Franklin), was a resident of Marlow living with his father and mother and still listed as a student in the 1860 Census Record. Francis was born in Marlow in 1845, and he was only about 16 at the time of his enlistment. His father's close friend in Marlow, Franklin Graves, may explain the origin of his a new first name, but the choice was certainly aided by the need to conceal his real age from Army recruiters.

Soldiers under the age of 18 in the early years of the Civil War were not uncommon. Recruiters were under tremendous pressure to meet quotas and almost any declaration of age by a volunteer was taken at face value. Recruits as young as 11 were sometimes accepted, with the intent of using them as band members, buglers or drummers. Despite published recruitment guidelines, Civil War records suggest that as many as 1,000,000 troops under the age of 18, and 100,000 under the age of 15, served as soldiers from 1861-1865.

Perhaps the most famous of these "young" volunteers was John Joseph Klem. Johnny initially tried to enlist in the 22nd Michigan Infantry when he was 11 but was rejected because of his size and age. Johnny, who was an orphan, tagged along with the 22nd when they left to begin basic training in 1862, was eventually "adopted" by the Regiment, and made a drummer boy. The officers paid his $13 a month wages out of their own pockets that first year. During the Battle of Chickamauga on September 19, 1863 Johnny reportedly put down his drum, picked up a rifle and shot a Confederate officer who was demanding his surrender. Klem later changed his name to John Lincoln Clem following those battlefield heroics, was wounded twice and became the youngest non-commissioned officer in US military history before his discharge as a Staff Sergeant in September 1864. Returning to Ohio, he graduated from high school in 1870 and applied to West Point but failed the entrance examination. Learning of his difficulties, President Ulysses S. Grant offered him a commission as a 2nd Lieutenant in the 24th US Infantry. Lt. Clem graduated from artillery school, rose steadily through the ranks, served as a Colonel in the Spanish American War and retired in 1915 as a Brigadier General in the Quarter Master Corp. He was the last veteran of the Civil War to serve in the US military, and in 1916, by an act of Congress, was promoted to the rank of Major General, one year after his retirement (continued on page three)

A stereopticon slide showing General Hospital #1, Richmond Virginia, where Francis Wetherbee died

From Our Archives…

On our shelves there is a loose leaf binder, its pages well preserved in plastic sleeves, chronicling the history of the Marlow Ground Observer Corps during World War II. There are a number of excellent photographs, and folded inside the binder we found one of the official armbands worn by the observers.

The first page reads:

"In the fall of 1941 a meeting of the townspeople was called by the selectmen with regard to the need of an observation post for spotting {enemy} airplanes. the response was good and those who were not enthusiastic went along with the majority.

George S. Morrell was appointed Chief Observer, and it was decided that observations would best be made from the highest accessible point of ground which was almost on the border of the Marlow-East Alstead line on Route 123.

This was in a field behind the barn of Milton Israel {Milton Israel was at one time a Marlow selectman; he lived in the house now owned by Barry and Barbara Corriveau.} There was no building or shelter available. Observers drove 4 miles from the village to the hilltop, and sat in a borrowed buffalo coat with the car heater going for warmth.

The fact that the rationing board would not allow any extra ration tickets for this 8 mile drive, or for gasoline used during the 4 hour watches for warmth, was resented quite generally.

In fact the whole setup was more or less unsatisfactory. Mrs. Israel insisted that their doors all be locked at night. The telephone over which reports would have to be made if there was an airplane spotted was inside the house. The Israel dog was most uncooperative and classed as vicious by many watchers.

One night a plane did fly over. Despite the loud knocking of the watcher who wanted to make the call as well as get inside to get warm, plus the alarms of the airedale, considerable time was lost before the door was opened. Mrs. Israel remained adamant that the door be kept locked; but Mr. Israel agreed to leave his upstairs window open so he could be readily aroused.

Due to these and other difficulties it was soon decided to abandon the spot and move the post into the center of the village."

{As we wrote in our Fall 2016 newsletter, the Ground Observer Corps was finally given proper "headquarters" right in the village: the little building that now serves as a swap shed at the town recycling center.}

We have a tiny leather autograph book (barely 4" x 3 1/2"), property of Waldo Perkins. In it are messages from friends and schoolmates at the Marlow Academy, from Marlow and other NH and Vermont towns. They were written between 1877 - 1879.

Some messages are in verse. Rossie Reed of Marlow wrote ***"To Waldo: May wisdom and truth guard your youth, and catnip and sage cheer up your old age.***" Ellen Rogers of Marlow wrote: ***"A secret to no friend betray. If you can't keep it, how can they!***"

And "from your true friend, Cora Spencer"

"As you tread along life's pathway,
live and act your part so well,
that when you come to leave things earthly,
you may in brighter mansions dwell."

There is one in Latin from DWM Kee ??? of South Acworth; and a cryptic one from Winnie Barrett of Stoddard, that reads ***"Revenge is sweet. May you enjoy it!"***

Waldo H. Perkins was born in Marlow in 1862, the second son of Dr. Marshall Perkins (practicing physician in Marlow for about 50 years) and Harriet (Fisk) Perkins.

In 1890 he married Marion Russell, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. George D. Russell of Marlow. With his brother James, he owned a general store in town, Perkins Bros., which he purchased from Hosea Towne. It was located where Al and Mary Blank now reside. In 1909 he was appointed Marlow Postmaster and he held the position at the time of his death in 1927. He was a trustee and generous supporter of the Marlow Methodist Church, and past noble grand of Forest Lodge I.O.O.F.

Waldo and Marion Perkins are buried in Marlow's Village Cemetery.

Upcoming Events!

NH Humanities to Go Programs:

Sunday July 9, 2 p.m. @ Murray Hall
"A Walk Back in Time: the Secret of Cellar Holes"
Adair Mulligan
There will be a potluck luncheon before beginning at 12:30

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Sunday September 24, 2 p.m. @ Murray Hall
"Wit and Wisdom: Humor in the 19th Century"
Jo Radner

Murray Hall Museum Clean Up Day

General in the Quarter Master Corp. He was the last veteran of the Civil War to serve in the US military, and in 1916, by an act of Congress, was promoted to the rank of Major General, one year after his retirement

After his enlistment on May 27, 1861, Private Francis Wetherbee left immediately for Portsmouth where the Regiment, numbering 1046, was under the command of Colonel Gilman Marston, a member of Congress. Another Marlow resident, 21 year old Albert W. Heaton, had also enlisted a few days earlier in the 2nd NH Volunteer Infantry, but he was part of Company A, known as the Cheshire Light Guards. When Francis arrived in Portsmouth he collected his musket, cartridge box and belt, bedroll, mess kit and regimental uniform, consisting of a gray cap, gray pants and blue jacket, and reported to Company C.

Over the next four years over 40 area residents of all ages and backgrounds would enlist to defend the Union. One such was Francis' uncle, Ora Monroe also of Marlow. Ora enlisted on October 6, 1862. He was a farmer, 41 years old, married and the father of two young daughters at the time. His decision, much like Francis', demonstrates the depth of emotions area volunteers felt about the need for a positive outcome to this conflict.

Training for Francis began on June 1st, and after little more than a month of preparation, the 2nd NH Infantry was moved south by train to Camp Sullivan in Meridian Hill, just outside Washington DC. On July 2nd they were assigned to the Second Brigade, Second Division of the Army of Northeastern Virginia under the command of Colonel A.E. Burnside. On July 16th his Division was ordered across the Potomac River at Long Bridge. That day they proceeded over 21 miles by rapid march along the Columbia and Little River Turnpikes to the Fairfax Courthouse in Fairfax County Virginia. Over the next two days they continued to move toward Centreville Virginia and the Bull Run River, a tributary of the Potomac, and after several days of marching, at 5:30 am on Sunday July 21, 1861, the 2nd NH Infantry was ordered to advance toward what had become the first major battle of the American Civil War, The First Battle of Bull Run, near Manassas Virginia. Union forces began the engagement with an attack on the left flank of entrenched Confederate forces commanded by General Thomas (Stonewall) Jackson. Their final objective was to capture the Confederate capital at Richmond Virginia, but the crossing at Manassas first had to be secured. The battle was only about 15 miles from Washington DC, and hundreds of civilians, some with picnic lunches, traveled south to watch what was believed to be a certain Union victory. It was not.

The 900 soldiers of the 2nd NH Infantry advancing as a part of the 18,000 Union soldiers that day suffered 7 killed, 56 wounded and 46 missing (captured) before being forced to retreat back across the Bull Run River with other units of the Union Army. The first major victory of the war thus went to the Confederacy. One of those 46 wounded and captured by Confederate forces on July 21, 1861 was Pvt. Francis Wetherbee.

Francis suffered multiple wounds during the battle, and was unable to follow the Union retreat. We have no written record of his thoughts on that day, but the words of 15 year old, Elisha Stockwell, from Wisconsin, written to his Mother during the Battle of Shiloh in 1862, may give us some insight: "I want to say, as we lay there and the shells were flying over us, my thoughts went back to my home, and I thought what a foolish boy I was to run away and get in such a mess as I was in. I would have been glad to have seen my father coming after me." On July 27, 1861, six days after the First Battle of Bull Run (known as the Battle of Manassas in the South) the Richmond Dispatch published the following story under the headline: Ten Wounded Soldiers Taken to Alms House Hospital. "Yesterday The Central Train brought down forty wounded soldiers yesterday evening, 30 of the number belonging to us, and 10 being abolitionists. The first were distributed about in houses of citizens, the latter were carried to the general hospital, corner of Second Street." It is most likely that Francis was a part of that group of wounded Union prisoners.

The "general hospital" referenced in the above article was known as the City House Hospital, Alms House Hospital or General Hospital #1 in Richmond Virginia. General Hospital #1 had been built just prior to the start of the Civil War by the City of Richmond to serve the poor and homeless. In June of 1861, Confederate authorities rented the building as a military hospital. Both sides believed the war would be short lived, and very little planning was done on either side in anticipation of feeding, housing and caring for what would become tens of thousands of prisoners, many of whom were sick or wounded. The planned capacity of the hospital/prison was to have been for about 500 patients, although an article in the May 5, 1859 edition of the Richmond Dispatch describes the building as inadequate to house the 130 "inmates" then housed there! General Hospital #1 was located between 2nd and 4th streets opposite Shockoe Cemetery, where many Union soldiers were later buried in mass graves.

At a mass meeting called by Richmond Mayor Joseph Mayo in 1861 the residents of the city donated $8,000 for the care of the 1336 Confederate soldiers wounded during the battle at Manassas. It was customary for citizens to take their own soldiers into their homes and care for them, but no such consideration was shown Union prisoners. The population of Richmond prior to the start of the War in 1861 was about 38,000 but it quickly swelled to over 120,000 by 1863. Shortages of everything began almost immediately with the advent of hostilities. Food shortages were especially apparent. In addition to the growing population, over 100,000 Confederate troops were located within a day's ride of Richmond, and their priorities took precedence over those of non-combatants. Because most of the early fighting was in Virginia, fewer acres were under cultivation, and the rail system between Virginia and the Deep South proved completely inadequate to provide food as well as to support the need to move troops, supplies and munitions. These immediate shortages ultimately lead to quickly rising food prices. By 1863 in Richmond prices for all goods were 10 times higher than just two years previously, and things like meat, sugar, corn and coffee were 20-40 times more expensive, if they were available at all. (continued on page four)

Marlow Historical Society
2026-2017

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All these factors certainly would have directly impacted the care and comfort of wounded prisoners such as Francis in 1861. Records indicate that more POW's died from diseases such as dysentery and typhus than from all other war related injuries combined. Even in the earliest stages of the war, vegetables and fruits were rarely available to prisoners, and as supplies of meat, flour and beans disappeared Union POW's routinely received only corn bread and sweet potatoes, leading to extreme diarrhea and dehydration.

On November 15, 1861, as noted on page 179 of the US Register of Deaths of Volunteers, Francis Wetherbee died from complications related to his battlefield wounds. He was approximately 17 years old. His family in Marlow probably received formal notification of his death from the War Department in December of that same year.

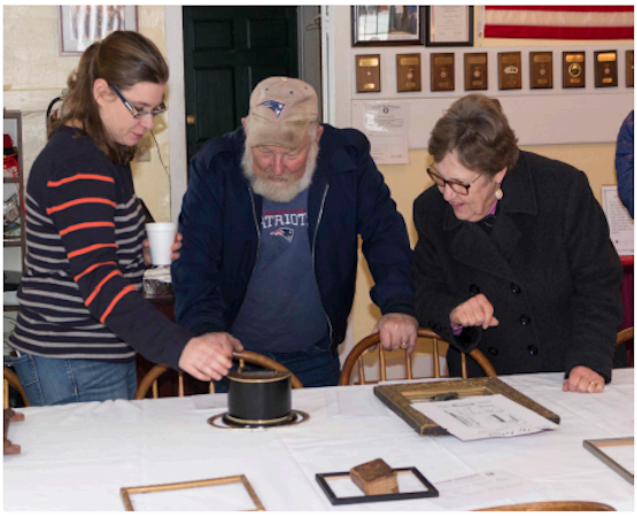
Francis Wetherbee is buried today, along with 87 fellow soldiers, in the Richmond National Cemetery. A plaque commemorates the location and lists the names of 88 deceased POWs. His remains and those of over 300 of his fellow soldiers were moved from their original mass grave location in Shockoe Cemetery. Fortunately Francis' remains were one of the few that were identified of hundreds interred. A tribute to his service to our country can be found on a family memorial located in the southwest corner of the Marlow cemetery. Francis was the first, but regretfully not the only casualty of those 42 men listed on the Marlow monument. Seven area soldiers lost their lives in a war that ultimately cost the lives of approximately 620,000 Americans, almost as many as died in all other US wars combined.

(We are grateful for this wonderfully researched article by member Chuck Mosher, a long time Sand Pond resident!)

Pop Up Museum a Hit

At MHS's first ever Pop Up Museum on February 5, we all had a chance to bring our "Oddest" items from home to stump our fellow museum goers. It was lots of fun, and we are grateful to the Historical Society of Cheshire County for arranging this program with us.

Below: Bucky and Barbara White, with Jennifer Carroll



Chuck has kindly given the Society a list of his references for this article, which are available upon request.