

News from the Stow Historical Society

*A newsletter for all friends of Stow history.
Please feel free to pass it along to others who might be interested!*

August 2012

Civil War Sesquicentennial Edition

Curiously, 2012 is turning out to be a year of round-number anniversaries – among them the War of 1812 bicentennial, the Fenway Park centennial, the 75th anniversary of the Tanglewood Festival (and, as importantly, of Erickson's Ice Cream), and the Queen's Diamond Jubilee.

And, during 2011-2015, we're in the midst of the American Civil War's sesquicentennial – its 150th anniversary. A sesquicentennial may not resound with quite the oomph that a centennial might have, but you go with the round numbers you have. Stow, after all, celebrated its 325th anniversary a few years ago as a tercentenquaternary (I had to look it up on the tee-shirt).

The Civil War and Stow

Even though Stow was far from the Civil War's battlefields, the conflict touched the town just as it had an impact on every region of the country. As the first “modern war,” it affected the nation’s entire population, drawing on its citizens for 2.1 million soldiers in the Union Army and one million in the Confederate forces. Casualties were enormous – some 750,000 soldiers killed on both sides, many, many more wounded. One estimate is that the North lost one in 10 males between ages 18 to 45 and the South one in three.



A Currier & Ives print of the Battle of Gettysburg.
Credit: Wikimedia Commons



Upcoming West School Events – *Free and Open to All Interested persons*

Sunday, August 5, 4-5:30 pm: Open House. No program planned but come and learn about Stow's historic school, with the new video of a typical 1840s school day.

Sunday, September 23, 3 pm: A visit by Mark Twain. Actor and Twain interpreter Bern Budd will present a one-man show based on the great American author's life growing up on the Mississippi.

In Stow, when President Abraham Lincoln called for troops after Fort Sumter was attacked in April of 1861, 28 Stow men promptly volunteered. At a Town Meeting, residents voted to appropriate \$1,000 to uniform and equip its soldiers and assist their families during their absence.

With a population of about 1,600 during the 1860s, Stow didn't send organized units to the war. Instead, they joined various Union Army organizations where they might. The Town Report for 1863 noted that during that year Stow's contingent of 87 soldiers were serving in at least 25 different regiments of the army.

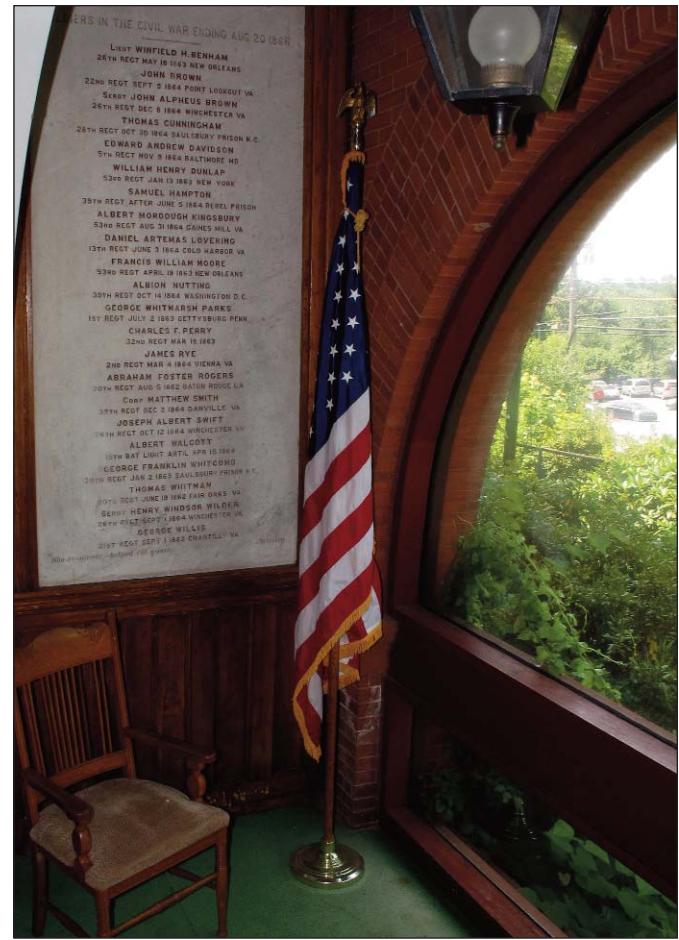
All told, Stow sent 112 men to the army over the course of the war, three of them Boston soldiers hired to fill the town's quota. They were paid \$1.25 per man per month.

Of those who went, 22 died in the conflict, some in major battles, some in camp from disease, some while prisoners of war in Southern hands.

Three Stow volunteers, Sgt. Henry Wilder, Sgt. Granville Wilder and John Brown, enlisted in the Davis Guards of



The Civil War tablet lists each Stow soldier's name, unit and, sometimes, where he died. Some were killed in battles like Gettysburg and Cold Harbor, some died in camp from disease, four perished in Confederate prisons.



At Stow's Bicentennial celebration in 1883, the town installed a marble tablet at Town Hall paying tribute to its Civil War dead. After Randall Library was opened in 1894, the tablet was relocated in its entrance (now the second floor).

Acton and were in the Sixth Massachusetts Regiment, one of the first units to pass through Baltimore on the way to Washington in April, 1861. It was attacked by mobs of Southern sympathizers. Four soldiers were killed and 39 wounded – the first serious bloodshed of the war. Stow's men survived the Baltimore fracas but Brown and Henry Wilder both later died in Virginia in 1864.

The Home Front

In the fall of 1861, an appeal was made to the women of the Northern states to furnish hospital stores for sick and wounded soldiers. Ladies Aid Societies were formed in many towns. Stow's women purchased cloth to make nearly 100 garments and collected a large quantity of articles for sanitary stores. The 1863 report noted that "ladies chosen from each district" collected supplies to send to its soldiers, including bandages, books and magazines, 30 quilts, 71 pairs



Brookside Cemetery, opened in 1864, holds the graves of many Stow veterans – each marked even today with an American flag and a medallion acknowledging membership in the Grand Army of the Republic, the Civil War veterans' organization.

Suggested Reading

Obviously, there are significant resources available for learning about the war. Online, the Civil War Trust maintains a website that discusses sesquicentennial milestones at www.civilwar.org/150th-anniversary. The site American Civil War offers timelines, accounts of battles, photographs and lives of soldiers and slaves alike at <http://americanCivilWar.com/>.

An extremely interesting feature is the long-running “Disunion” series published in the *New York Times*, which calls on a broad range of historians for a real-time accounting of the events of 150 years ago – in 2011, it followed, stop-by-stop, Lincoln’s 1861 train ride east to take office and the day-by-day events in the defense and surrender of Fort Sumter. In 2012, it’s seen battles like Shiloh and, currently, the long-running Peninsula Campaign in eastern Virginia.

But **Disunion** also pays attention to more subtle issues, as diverse as the creation of the song “John Brown’s Body” by Massachusetts soldiers, private soldiers’ experiences in battle and camp and the lives, diaries and fortunes of soldiers, slaves, politicians and civilians alike. The *Times* allows you to read 10 articles a month online without a subscription, but “Disunion” is available on Facebook at Civil War | The New York Times.

Search for Civil War books on Amazon.com and you find something like 50,000 possibilities. There are broad books and narrow ones – James M. McPherson’s excellent 1988 *Battle Cry of Freedom*, which covers the

of socks and 12 bottles of blackberry wine. In December 1864, a fair held to raise funds for needy soldiers raised \$617. The total amount of money expended by the town on account of the war was \$15,992, not counting another \$8,000 spent and reimbursed by the state.

The War’s End

When news reached Stow on April 3, 1865 that Richmond had been captured and Jefferson Davis and other Confederate leaders were in flight, townspeople reacted by ringing the church bell and breaking out American flags. That evening, the First Parish manse was brightly illuminated. A week later, the news that General Lee and his army had surrendered led to even greater celebrations. The church bell was rung for an hour and almost all business was suspended. The next evening, houses throughout the town were lit up and extemporaneous bands of musicians paraded through the streets, ending at Town Hall for a celebration of patriotic music.

An Economic Benefit

If Stow and its citizens suffered on a human level, there was one other effect: The demand for blankets and garments for the army caused the burgeoning of textile mills throughout New England. Stow’s woolen mills at Rock Bottom (now Gleasondale) and Assabet Village (now Maynard) prospered during the war years and continued to be strong in the following decades.



Making wool for Union Army uniforms, Rock Bottom's Gleasondale Mill prospered during the Civil War.

entire war, versus, say, James L. Nelson's more recent *Reign of Iron*, which describes the construction, battle between and loss of both the *Monitor* and the *Merrimack*.

Some Recommended New Books:

- Adam Goodheart's *1861: The Civil War Awakening*, is an illuminating book about the events and causes that led to the war and its first year. An unlikely hero is the incompetent general Benjamin Butler (an influential Massachusetts pol who secured a political appointment as a general) who created the term "contrabands" to refuse to return runaway slaves when guidelines were still unclear.
- A terrific work is *A World on Fire, Britain's Crucial Role in the American Civil War*, by Amanda Foreman. It approaches the war from the British point of view – the diplomatic and espionage maneuvering that went on in London and Washington as the South tried to secure British recognition (and British ships and munitions) and the North sought to prevent British support. Foreman gives full coverage to the war itself by focusing on the Britons who came to North America to fight (or to cover it as newspaper correspondents) on both sides. Some identified with the Southern aristocracy, some found that the slavery issue compelled them to fight for the North.

- Just published is *The Long Road to Antietam* by Richard Slotkin, which describes both the horrific (and important) battle and the struggle between Lincoln and McClellan to define the war's goals.

Some Older Books That Have Proven Rewarding:

- Doris Kearns Goodwin's *Team of Rivals* provides terrific insights into both Lincoln's approach to political life and the course of his administration. Gideon Welles is a hero, Salmon P. Chase not so much.
- Jay Winik's *April 1865: The Month That Saved America* focuses on the ending of the war – the fall of Richmond, the pursuit of Lee's army, the surrender at Appomattox, Lee's refusal to countenance guerilla warfare and Grant's surrender terms that fostered reconciliation. And, Lincoln's assassination.
- Bruce Catton's Army of the Potomac trilogy – *Mr. Lincoln's Army*, *Glory Road* and *A Stillness at Appomattox* – written in the 1950s and his two-volume biography of U.S. Grant – *Grant Moves South* and *Grant Takes Command*, written in the '60s. Catton still stands out for his ability to make history a story of people, to get inside them and present their beliefs, personalities and idiosyncrasies while giving a very good historical perspective.

One minor throwaway line that struck a chord – Catton says as tensions rose between Northerners and Southerners and views became increasingly entrenched, the years before and during the war were a time of melodramatic posturing, with flamboyant uniforms in vogue and the words "treason" and "liberty" thrown around a lot. Sound familiar?