

THE GRAND ARMY OF THE REPUBLIC

COL. ENT POST NO. 250 DEPARTMENT PENNSYLVANIA

"Memory Book"

George A. Turner

The Grand Army of the Republic was a Civil War veterans' organization similar to the modern day veterans' groups like the American Legion or the Veterans of Foreign Wars. Nationally, it achieved a prominent role in the late nineteenth century and reached a membership high point of 409,489 in 1890. The G.A.R. served as a social and mutual benefit organization, and, in addition, it assumed an advocacy role of speaking on behalf of the veterans and championing their issues, such as military service pensions and homes for old soldiers. As would be expected, the G.A.R. posts in Columbia County were instrumental in the effort to have a Civil War monument erected at Market Square in Bloomsburg.

It was the custom to name a G.A.R. post in honor of a local soldier. The name for the Bloomsburg post recognized Wellington H. Ent who served as Captain of Co. A, 35th Regiment of Pennsylvania Volunteers. Company A, also known as the "Iron Guards," had the distinction of being the first group of men, all volunteers, to leave from Columbia County to fight in the Civil War. Ent later rose to rank of colonel and commanded the regiment.

The Ent Post, the first of five G.A.R. posts in Columbia County, came into existence in August 1868 as post number 152 with Samuel Knorr as its commander. He had been a member of the "Iron Guards" serving as first sergeant and later promoted to second lieutenant. Due to illness he had to leave the service in October 1862. After regaining his health, he reentered the war as captain of Company A of the 19th United States Colored Troops and ultimately attained the rank of lieutenant colonel. Initially, the post had a very short existence, becoming inactive within four months.

Apparently, this stemmed from partisan politics. Knorr, an attorney, was actively involved in the Republican Party and served as one of Pennsylvania's presidential electors for candidate Ulysses Grant in 1868. Afterwards he received an appointment as the federal assessor of internal revenue for the thirteenth congressional district in Pennsylvania that included Columbia County.

Columbia County had a reputation as a Democratic stronghold, and it upheld this distinction in the 1868 election. The Democratic presidential candidate, Horatio Seymour, won Bloomsburg and received 65% of the county vote. At the same time, the *Columbian*, a Bloomsburg Democratic newspaper, spoke out against the G.A.R. It described the organization as "a secret, oath bound club, whose design it is to aid the Radicals [Republicans] in establishing military rule in the South, and Negro suffrage in the North. We would advise all true soldiers to stay out of it." Within the political context of the 1868 presidential election, the Democratic charge that the G.A.R. was pro-Republican, and Knorr's involvement in Republican politics created political dissension within the Ent Post. When it endorsed Knorr to be a federal tax collector, it caused discord and a split among the members. One of the G.A.R. members observed that political views were "running high at that time the Post received its death blow."

A second effort to start a G.A.R. post in Bloomsburg occurred in January 1880. With the help of the Goodrich G.A.R. Post No. 22 in Danville, steps were taken to reactivate the Ent Post. But it was short lived and ultimately surrendered its charter on July 26, 1881.

Still there was enough interest among Civil War veterans who believed that a G.A.R. post should be established in Bloomsburg. In a third effort they succeeded on June 10, 1882. A reorganized Ent Post secured a new charter and became post 250. Harrison J. Conner became the post commander. John Smith, a G.A.R. member, wrote in 1901 that the Ent Post "has been in a flourishing condition ever since notwithstanding the fact that in a financial crash they lost five hundred dollars of hard earned money." The post's home was on the floor of the Wells Building located on the south side of Main Street, two buildings east of Market Square. Membership in 1915 stood at sixty, while one hundred and twenty-two comrades had died since the post came into existence.

A group of thirteen prominent citizens from Bloomsburg presented a special gift to the Ent Post in 1894. It was a large attractive book, twelve and half inches wide and seventeen inches high, the title printed in gold lettering, *Personal War Sketches Presented To Col. Ent Post No. 250 Department of Pennsylvania*, each page illustrated at the top with the G.A.R. symbol and inscribed with the words *Headquarters, Col. Ent Post No. 250, Department of Pennsylvania, Grand Army of the Republic, Personal War Sketch of*. In essence it was a "memory book" in which G.A.R. members could record different aspects of their wartime experience. The sketches appeared to have been told to someone who then recorded them in the book. These accounts adhered to a format giving the soldier's place and date of birth, where he enlisted and his military unit, battles fought, memorable event or occurrence during his service, brief history of the post, and comrades that were close to him. There are ninety-one sketches in the book as well a number of resolutions adopted by the post when members died, and a list of post commanders up to 1914.

Fortunately, this interesting book still exists and is part of the Society's library collection. Reprinted here are four of these sketches with some changes in capitalization and punctuation to make them easier to read. The original composition in its basic form is retained to reflect the writer's style and grammar. The accounts of Edward Searles, George W. Mears, Theobald M. Dawson, and Harriet Reifsnnyder Sharpless provide a number of insights into their experiences in defending the Union.

EDWARD SEARLES

Comrade Edward A. Searles was born the fourteenth day of January A.D. 1847, in Shamokin Dam, State of Pennsylvania.

He first enlisted in Bloomsburg, Columbia Co. and was mustered into service of the United States at Troy, Bradford Co., Penna on the 19th of February 1864, as a private in Co. H 2nd Penna. Heavy Artillery (112th Pa Infantry). Was acting sergeant after the battle of Weldon R. R. on the 22nd day of June 1864. He was discharged as private Co. H, 2nd Pa. Hy. Artillery at City Point, Va., on the 29th day of January 1866, by reason of close of war, was paid off at Camp Cadwallader.

The first battle in which he was engaged was at Mine Run, Va., Spottsylvania C. H. May 5th, 1864; Cold Harbor June 1st, 1864, & skirmishing all the way to the front of Petersburg. On June 16 was in ravine in front of Petersburg and on the 17th skirmished on the front lines and drove the enemy back to their main works and on July 30th. Was

in advance line in charge on Fort. On 17th of June was struck in left side by a grape shot – cutting skirt off of his blouse & tore haversack from his body bruising his side a good deal but he did not leave his Co. Was never in hospital nor taken prisoner.

His most intimate friends in the service were Sam Harp, Isaiah Kline, Harvey Bates, Miles Brown, Kersey Hower (killed in charge on the 17th).

He deems the most import event of his service was going for two weeks during Wilderness Campaign barefooted and forded the North Anna River with his feet torn & bleeding from stones and briars and brush and at Chapins Farm and the charge on Fort Gilmor and owing to the fact that the support ordered failed to come up and we were obliged to fall back with orders to each one to look out for himself. Were in a very dangerous position for some time as the Rebels swarmed from the Fort and it was run or be captured.

April 22, 1904

GEORGE W. MEARS

Comrade George W. Mears was born the third day of January A.D. 1843, in Bloomsburg, County of Columbia, State of Pennsylvania.

Entered the service in Harrisburg, Pa., on the Fourth of day of July 1861 as a private in Co. A 6th Regiment Penna. Reserves. And 1st May 1863, was promoted to Sergt. and was discharged as Sergt. on the 11th day of June 1864 by reason of expiration & loss of left arm.

The first battle in which he was engaged was at Dranesville Va., Dec 20, 61, 2nd Bull Run Aug. 30th, 1862, under fire at Chantilly Sept. 1st, 62, while acting as Rear guard for wagon train. South Mountain 14th, 62, Antietam Sept. 16 & 17, 1862, Fredericksburg Va., Dec. 13, 1862, Gettysburg July 2-3-4, 1863, Bristoe Station Va., Sept 14th, 1863, Wilderness May 5-7, 1864, Spottsylvania May 8 to 21st, 1864, Cold Harbor June 1st, 1864 also known as Bethesda Church, Groveton Aug 28, North Anna Va., May 23 to 27, 64, besides numerous skirmishes.

He had a miraculous escape from death at Fredericksburg when he was hit by a minie ball on the buckle of his belt stunning him but not seriously injuring him. During the Battle of Gettysburg he had charge of a square of volunteers to capture or destroy a body of rebel sharpshooters concealed in the house in front of his regiment and succeeded in capturing seventeen men including a commissioned officer for which act of Bravery he was awarded a Medal by Congress in February 1897. Whilst in charge of the skirmish line at Mine Run he was struck by a piece of shell which fractured his shoulder joint so badly amputation became necessary & the surgeons gave no hope at all. A part of his arm is now in the medical museum at Washington, D.C. He was at one time in the hands of the Rebels but managed to escape.

His most intimate friends were C. S. Fornwald, H. J. Conner, John Clark, C. S. Furman, B. F. Sharpless, Wm. E. Coffman & I. H. Seesholtz

July 14, 1902

THEOBALD M. DAWSON

Comrade Theobald M. Dawson was born the twenty-fourth day of April A.D. 1842, in Scott Township, County of Columbia, State of Pennsylvania.

He first enlisted in October 1861 as a private in Co. D 84th Regt. Pa. Vol. Infantry in Bloomsburg, Pa. Was promoted to Corporal April 1863 and to Sergeant in April 1864, promoted to 1st Sergeant Company H, 57th Regt, Pa., Infantry Jan'y 1864.

He was first discharged at Brandy Station, Va., by reason of reenlistment for 3 years or during the war as a veteran volunteer. And was finally discharged on the 29th day of June 1865 at Harrisburg, Pa., by reason of close of war. The first battle in which he was engaged was at Winchester, Virginia, March 23rd 1862, Port Republic June 8th and 9th, 1862, Bull Run Aug 30th, 1862, Fredericksburg, Va., Dec 13th, 1862, Chancellorsville May 2nd and 3rd, 1863, Wilderness May 5 – 7th, 1864, Spottsylvania May 8th, Petersburg Va, Appomattox Va.

His cap was shot off and had a slight scalp wound at Chancellorsville May 2 1863. Was taken prisoner at Chancellorsville May 3, 83 by 8th Georgia Infantry marched to Richmond and confined in Libby Prison until some time in August 1863. Was taken from Libby with a number of other prisoners and sent to Belle Isle. Left Belle Isle in October 1863 by reason of Exchange of prisoners. Marched to City Point, Va., and was sent to Annapolis, Md. Ragged and half starved.

His most intimate friends were William Prosser, John Prosser, John L. Crawford, George Jacoby, Guy Holcomb and John Snyder.

The most important event in his service was the marvelous escape from death at Chancellorsville by a piece of shell passing through his camp cutting the hair close to the scalp without drawing a drop of blood. And at Winchester Mar 23, 1862 a Rife ball passed into his haversack and lodged in a small tin cup of sugar and he found the ball in his coffee after the Battle.

December 20, 1901

HARRIET REIFSNYDER SHARPLESS

Harriet Reifsnyder Sharpless went to the front in 1861 as a Volunteer Nurse with the Army of the Potomac and visited among the sick and wounded in the Field Hospitals and moving among the soldiers. Her whole aim seemed to be to alleviate suffering among the enlisted soldiers. Having a brother in the same Co. with the writer, she was frequently in their Camp while at Camp Pierpont in Virginia, and while campaigning in the various "On to Richmond." She was to be seen at frequent intervals until sometime early in the fall of 1862. She was called home by the illness of her mother. Miss Sharpless again returned to the front and in order to become superintendent of the Hospital Boat *Connecticut* she was mustered into the service of the United Northern States. The writer has had numerous inquires from people in all ranks from Maine to California as to whether she still lived and wanting to be kindly remembered for kindness shown and tender nursing given during the time that tried men's souls. She was born and lived practically all her life in Columbia County and died at the House of her Brother Lloyd T. Sharpless in Bloomsburg. And the writer who knew her intimately for over 40 years never knew her to speak the first disparaging word about anyone and old and young alike. All spoke of her in the highest regard terms of Praise. Her

sunshiny disposition and her genial character gained for her the Pet name of "Aunt Happy" especially among her nieces and nephews. She was so devoted to the cause she loved so well and the soldiers so devoted to her that she had been elected honorary membership in the society of survivors of the 6th Regt. Penna. Res. Vol. Association and of the Col. Co. Veteran Association and of Ent Post 250 G.A.R. Dept. of Pennsylvania G.A.R. She was buried with full military honors by Ent Post 250 and a firing squad from Brockway Camp S. of V. 270. The bugle sounded taps and all that was mortal of our warm friend and advocate was hidden from sight.

C. S. Fornwald, Historian, 1-4-07