

## Minnesota in the Civil War

A Rochester, MN *Post Bulletin* collection of articles describing the role of the state of Minnesota during the Civil War.

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**Weddle, Kevin J. Ethnic Discrimination in Minnesota Volunteer Regiments During  
the Civil War**

*Civil War History*, Vol. XXXV, No. 3. 1989. Kent State University Press.

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[http://www.postbulletin.com/news/civilwar/minnesota-s-crucial-role/article\\_910396d7-0b16-52a8-9473-b63a8813b7a3.html](http://www.postbulletin.com/news/civilwar/minnesota-s-crucial-role/article_910396d7-0b16-52a8-9473-b63a8813b7a3.html)

## Minnesota's 'crucial role'

By **Jay Furst**

The Post-Bulletin, Rochester MN

Sep 20, 2011

The wind moans through the limestone ruins of the Wasioja seminary, as it has for decades — since it fell into ruins not long after the Civil War. There's a little recruiting station where Doc Mayo worked, a few monuments in the area and grave markers for men who fought, but that's just about it for the area's connection to the Civil War.

True?

False.

Minnesota played a major role in the Civil War, the defining moment in our nation's history, and in 1861, southeast Minnesota was among the most populous, most patriotic areas of the state. The men and women who lived here were passionately committed to the Union. They fought and died for it, and our history was shaped by the war.

In Olmsted County alone, which had a population of about 12,000 in 1861, about 1,250 men went to war, and many were killed and injured, while the others were forever changed. Other area counties sent as many or more men to fight.

But Rochester is a long way from Bull Run and Gettysburg, and awareness of our Civil War legacy

has been lost. A century and a half is a long time.

Or is it? Older residents can remember great-grandparents who lived through the war. Richard Moe, a Minnesota native who not long ago wrote a book about the First Minnesota Volunteers, remembers crossing paths with the last living Minnesota veteran of the war. The family connections for many are just as close.

There's evidence of the war all over the area. When you drive to the Minneapolis-St. Paul airport, you drive past Fort Snelling, where troops were mustered out — and where Dred Scott lived, for a time. As Richard Moe has written, the Capitol is virtually a Civil War memorial, with art and iconography all over in it.

There are statues in Cannon Falls and Red Wing, memorials elsewhere, and with some digging in library archives in Olmsted County and throughout the area, you'll find photos of men and women who were changed forever by the war. Last summer, a Civil War re-enactment at Wasioja, with hundreds of participants in blue and gray, drew 12,000 to 15,000 people over three days.

Mike Eckers, who portrayed a Minnesota general in the re-enactments and has written three books on the Civil War, says the fascination with the war isn't just about the 150th anniversary events, books and movies.

"A lot of people down South say the war isn't over," says Eckers, 56, a Navy veteran and retired postmaster who lives in Owatonna. "Today the South likes to say the war was about state's rights, and part of the success of that idea is what we still fight about today — how much government should be local and how much should be federal.

"We fought a war over state's rights ... (but) the main state's right was the right to own another human being in the form of slavery," he said.

Minnesota's central role in the war has long been a given for historians, but it's being rediscovered by Minnesotans themselves, Eckers says, and this area was the state's most populous in 1860.

William Christie, who farmed in Winona County near St. Charles, and his brother Thomas, who enlisted in Winona 150 years ago next month, signed up and within days were headed to Fort Snelling for training. They didn't inform their father in advance, and in a letter home, William said:

"Now you know, Father, that you would enlist if you were in my place. You have taught me to hate

Slavery, and to love my Country...I feel sure, even as I write, that you will not only give me your blessing — but be glad to have your son enrolled among the Defenders of the Union. But whether that be so or not, I must go."

Before the war's end, the Christies would do battle all across the South, with Thomas joining Gen. Sherman on his March to the Sea and ending up near Appomattox.

About 24,000 Minnesota men would fight for the Union and 2,600 would die, a quarter of them in battle and the rest in prison camps or of disease and other causes. The toll was high. Wisconsin had nearly four times as many men in uniform but a much smaller percentage of deaths.

No wonder the ruins and parkland at Wasioja remain a place for people to rediscover the war that killed so many, but gave America its new birth of freedom. Historians have long regarded Minnesota's role as "absolutely crucial," says Eckers.

It's long past time for that legacy to be rediscovered in southeastern Minnesota.

This is the first story of a 14-week series on Southeastern Minnesota in the Civil War.

# FIGHT FOR THE UNION

## SOUTHEAST MINNESOTA IN THE CIVIL WAR



Confederate Gen. Pete Longstreet leads his troops in a charge against Union soldiers during a re-enactment of the Civil War's battle of Chickamauga this summer in Wasioja. Photos by Jerry Olson / jolson@postbulletin.com

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# Minnesota's 'crucial role'

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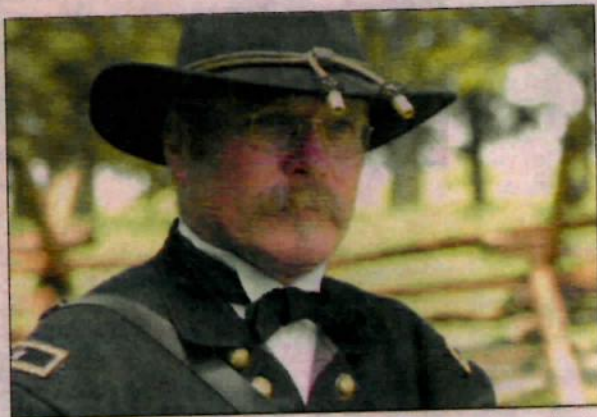
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Very much in character, Larry Werline, playing the part of Union Gen. William Rosecrans, went about directing his troops during a re-enactment of the Battle of Chickamauga. The Confederates won the battle, in part because of a strategic mistake made by Rosecrans.



Submitted photo

Mike Eckers of Owatonna played Gen. Henry H. Sibley during this summer's battle re-enactments in Wasioja.

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Snelling for training. They didn't inform their father in advance, and in a letter home, William said:

"Now you know, Father, that you would enlist if you were in my place. You have taught me to hate Slavery, and to love my Country...I feel sure, even as I write, that you will not only give me your blessing — but be glad to have your son enrolled among the Defenders of the Union. But whether that be so or not, I must go."

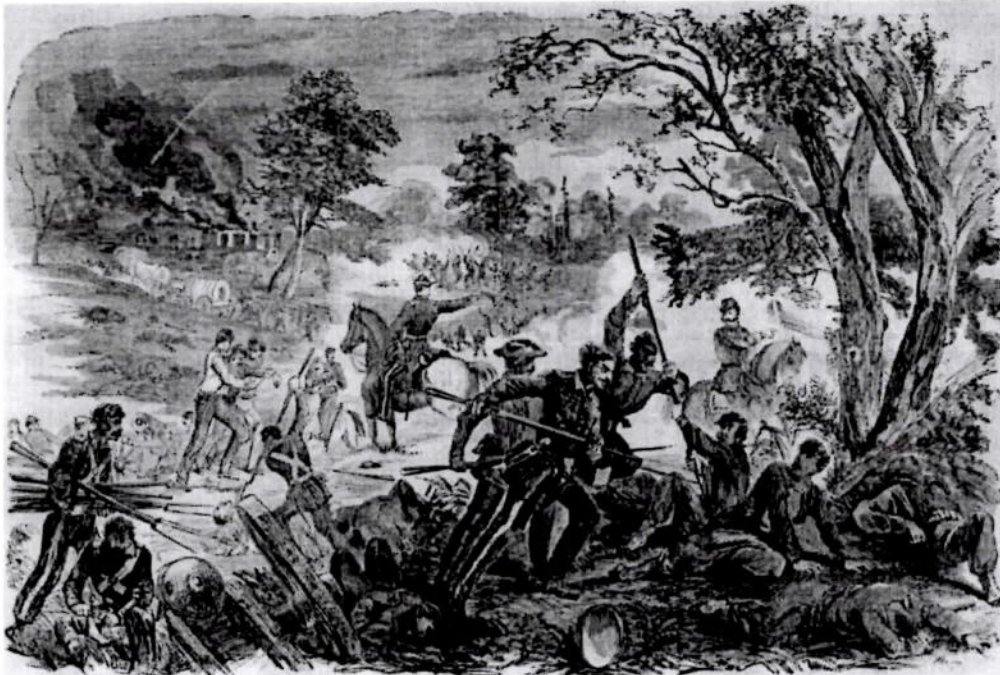
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**Bull Run is Testing Ground**  
By Jay Furst and Loren Else September 27, 2011

Rochester, MN *Post Bulletin*



This drawing was published in Harpers Weekly after the first Battle of Bull Run. The caption said, "The rebel bayoneting our wounded on the battle-field, at Bull Run."

After Fort Sumter fell and civil war was a reality in the summer of 1861, President Lincoln and the Union pushed and prayed for a quick end to it. Many believed it would be a relatively brief affair, with the industrial and more populous North overwhelming the more agrarian South. Northern newspapers pressed for fast action in Virginia, and the rallying cry of the press, politicians and citizens was "On to Richmond."

Richmond was, in fact, just 100 miles down the road from Washington. Most Northerners thought that taking the newly christened Confederate capital — with its government seated in the Virginia capitol building designed by Thomas Jefferson — would bring an immediate end to the war. Southerners believed a major victory early on might win recognition of their independence from European powers, which would help tip the scales toward victory.

## **Plans for battle**

Residents of both capitals felt at risk, and as that first summer wore on, with armies being raised and trained on both sides, there was anticipation of where and when the first major battle would come. It would come near the small crossroads town of Manassas, Va., just 30 miles from Washington, on July 21. A creek called Bull Run ran through the area, and the battle came to be named for the creek, though Southerners referred to it by the town's name.

The Confederates were in control of the railroad at Manassas Junction, an important transportation junction with access to the Shenandoah Valley and beyond, and General P.G.T. Beauregard, a West Point graduate from Louisiana and the leader of the Confederate siege of Fort Sumter in April, commanded a force of 22,000 men there. Not far away in Harper's Ferry, the federal armory had been seized by Confederate Gen. Joseph E. Johnston, with more than 9,000 men.

Lincoln ordered Brigadier Gen. Irvin McDowell from Ohio to develop a plan to attack Beauregard's army at Manassas and from there, plans would be made to move toward Richmond. Lincoln and his military advisers knew their troops were green and barely trained, but he believed that moving quickly, before the South could get organized, was worth the risk. McDowell's army was estimated at 28,500 men, though mostly untrained and untested.

McDowell's plan was to surprise Beauregard's army, make a diversionary attack on the rebel army's line and swing around and outflank their left for a victory. It was vital, though, to keep Johnston's army from getting to Manassas by train to reinforce Beauregard. In charge of that effort was Gen. Robert Patterson. The South knew that McDowell and the Union force was on its way and efforts were made to improve entrenchments, place artillery at strategic locations and reinforce Beauregard's position.

When the Union army moved slowly out of Washington on July 16 toward Manassas, Johnston was able to leave a small force at Harper's Ferry while moving the rest of his troops to Manassas by railroad. It was the first time troops had been moved directly into a battle situation using a railroad, and it was decisive in the battle's outcome.

### **Noise, smoke, confusion**

The armies met in an area of rolling hills with clumps of woods, ridges and farm houses, including one that became famously known as Henry House. On July 21, at 2:30 a.m. in the town of Centerville, the 1st Minnesota Regiment was awakened by the reveille bugle call. They were told to bring rations for three days, 40 cartridges and to begin the march of 10 miles to Manassas.

At 5:30 a.m., the first shot was fired and a day of death, struggle and confusion began. McDowell's army attacked and Confederate Capt. Nathan "Shanks" Evans believed the frontal attack was a diversion. With the left flank threatened, Beauregard sent forces to support a battle at Henry House Hill.

The 1st Minnesota under Brig. Gen. Willis Gorman was providing support for Capt. James Rickett's battery of six cannons. They were on the extreme right end of the Union line. Soon the objective became to capture Henry House Hill with Capt. William Colvill, who was among the earliest Goodhue County recruits, leading the advance with Companies A and F.

Amid the noise, smoke and confusion, it was hard to tell foe from friend. Unfortunately for the 1st Minnesota, a group of Virginians thought to be friends were not fired upon. The Confederate company had raised a Union flag deceiving the regiment and soon the Virginians and their cannons were firing upon the Minnesotans, who sustained many casualties.

Despite receiving horrific fire, the regiment held its ground, displaying courage and "coolness" for which they would become known as the "regiment that never runs." The regiment flag was shot to pieces and Lt. Nathan Messick of Company G ripped it from its staff and wrapped it around his body to prevent its capture. Messick survived the day. Sgt. John G. Merritt of Company K took brief possession of a rebel flag during the battle and later would be awarded the Medal of Honor.

After fighting throughout the morning and early afternoon, Union forces felt the day was going to be theirs. But around 4 p.m., fresh troops from Johnson's army arrived on the field and the rebels gained the advantage. The Union lines collapsed at the onslaught of fresh troops and a general panic ensued. The retreat became known as the "Big Skedaddle," made more humbling by the fact that hundreds of onlookers from Washington, including political leaders, watched from nearby hillsides. The Confederates won a decisive victory. About 5,000 men on both sides were killed or wounded.

### **A long war ahead**

The 1st Minnesota, with many men from the farms and towns of Olmsted County and southeastern Minnesota, was one of the few units that withdrew in an orderly fashion. It sustained the highest number of casualties of any unit on the field, North or South, with 42 dead, 108 wounded and 30 missing.

With the outcome of the First Battle of Bull Run, it became clear that a long and devastating war lay ahead. Until that time, the war had been mostly talk. All the blood that was spilled at Bull Run, the South's resourcefulness and the North's inglorious retreat, pointed toward a long war, with no certain outcome.

Would the Union, which Minnesota had joined only two years earlier, survive? After Bull Run, no one could say.

**68 Left Wasioja, 1 Returned**  
by Loren Else, October 4, 2011

Rochester, MN *Post Bulletin*

The story of Wasioja is often told in Minnesota, because history remains rooted in this Dodge County town. The wind-swept stone ruins of the seminary survive. A local law office, which became the Civil War recruiting station, has endured over time. A country school stands tall and the Wildwood Cemetery is where many of the early pioneers of this town are laid to rest. People still come here to reflect on what life was like 150 years ago.

Only three years after Minnesota became a state, Wasioja had sprouted from wilderness. The first building in the community was constructed in 1855 and six years later, 1,000 people made their homes in Wasioja. At the same time, Rochester was developing with its population growing from 50 in 1856 to 1,500 in 1858.

With fertile land surrounding it and available water, Wasioja had businesses, hotels, mills, stone quarries, churches and boasted a seminary with student enrollment peaking at 300. Rooms were furnished for the many seminary students in homes throughout the town. A two-story limestone school was completed in 1860. The town was a main stop for a stagecoach run.

Like many towns across this young nation, Wasioja's citizens were upset with the secessionists. Small talk, opinions and sermons on secession, slavery and the preservation of the union were shared freely and often. Patriotic fever was running high and many saw a job at hand to save the Union and put a stop to the Southern rebellion. In May 1861, three Free Will Baptist Seminary students volunteered for military service and would serve with the 1st Minnesota Regiment. Soon, word was heard that President Lincoln had called for troops.

The book "Wasioja: Rooted – Yet Evergrowing" recounts how Seminary President Williams told students one morning, "This is a moment of high decision for each of you. Each must formulate his own decision."

About a dozen students left their classrooms and walked a few minutes down a dusty path to sign up for a war that would change all who survived. Each stepped inside Capt. James George's law office and signed their names to serve the Union. Soon they would march away from Wasioja as Company C of the 2nd Minnesota Regiment. In "The Boys of Wasioja," author Michael Eckers says Minnesota regiments earned great reputations throughout the war. "The Minnesota boys could shoot, were tough and they were used to the elements," he says.

Sixty-eight men from Dodge County would serve in Company C with the 2nd Minnesota. These men would see many battles, including a remarkable stand on Horseshoe Ridge in the Battle of Chickamauga. Wasioja Seminary professor Clinton A. Cilley was awarded a Medal of Honor for his valor on the Chickamauga battlefield. His citation reads he "seized the colors of a retreating regiment and led it into the thick of the battle."

Company C also saw battle at Mills Springs, Corinth, Missionary Ridge and they would march with Gen. Sherman. At the end of the war, only 12 of the original 68 Dodge County men would be present during the final discharge on July 20, 1865. Of the 68, 17 died of disease, seven were killed or mortally wounded in battle, and 21 were wounded. A few of the seminary boys lay close to home. Darwin Rossiter is buried in Riverside Cemetery in Dodge Center. Col. James George is buried at Oakwood Cemetery in Rochester. All but one of the men who survived the war did not return to Wasioja. The lone man who returned was Edmond Garrison. He lived until 1922 and is buried in Wildwood Cemetery in Wasioja.

Loren Else is a freelance writer who lives in Rochester. He is the writer of the Post-Bulletin's "Day in History."

## **Fight for the Union: Fort Snelling: Nothing's easy.**

Tom Weber. October 18, 2011

Rochester: MN *Post Bulletin*



Alexander Christie was not a coffee drinker, which meant that his daily rations at Fort Snelling near the end of the Civil War were all the less enticing. "As I do not drink the coffee, my bill of fare consists wholly of bread and meat," Christie wrote of the daily supper routine in a letter to his family back in Blue Earth County. "I have to eat very temperately, or I would soon be out of order."

Christie, like his two older brothers before him, had volunteered to serve in the Union Army. By the time he was undergoing training at Fort Snelling, nearly four years after the start of the war, about 25,000 other men and boys from Minnesota had tasted their first Army coffee at the fort. Given the subsequent popularity of coffee in the ranks of the Army, it's a good bet most of them developed a taste for that particularly wicked brew. As for Christie, as he wrote in another letter from Fort Snelling, "I now discover that I can obtain water, and will not have to drink



any of the coffee." Actually, most men trying to acclimate themselves to Army life at Fort Snelling faced much stiffer challenges than gulping down brown sludge. Homesickness, harsh discipline, illness and the cruelties of Minnesota's weather made for conditions far removed from the martial glory men expected to find when they entered the Army.

Physically, many of them simply weren't up to soldiering: A postwar investigation found that 25 percent of all recruits for the Union Army should have been rejected for health reasons.

### **Fort started in 1820**

When the war began, the state of Minnesota was equally unprepared. In fact, in 1861, Fort Snelling, which was to play such a large role in the state's Civil War effort, was in private hands, slated for redevelopment.

The fort, originally known as Fort Saint Anthony, had been built by the U.S. government as one of a string of outposts in the old Northwest. Minnesota was still largely American Indian country when Col. Josiah Snelling and the U.S. 5th Infantry Regiment began work on the fort in 1820. During the next four years, Snelling and his men designed and built a diamond-shaped fort with thick walls of native limestone, barracks and other buildings, all surrounding a central parade ground.

Naturally, such a big project served as a lightning rod. Some criticized Snelling for what he constructed, saying the fort too big and poorly sited. Others, including the nation's top soldier, Gen. Winfield Scott, praised Snelling's work. Scott, in fact, insisted that Fort Saint Anthony be renamed as Fort Snelling. Shortly after the fort was completed, Snelling resigned his command. He died in 1928.

For years, Fort Snelling was the most advanced locale in the state. It was at the fort that the first school and first hospital in the territory were established, and weather observations taken at the fort starting in the 1820s are still referenced by meteorologists. The fort also played a role in national politics when the slave Dred Scott, whose owner had taken him to Fort Snelling while on duty as an Army surgeon, sued for his freedom as a result of being held in a territory where slavery was prohibited.

But gradually, as the frontier moved west, Fort Snelling became obsolete. In 1858, the Army sold the fort to Franklin Steele, a land speculator, for \$90,000. But when war broke out in April 1861, Gov. Alexander Ramsey, who had quickly answered President Lincoln's call for volunteer troops to defend the Union, just as quickly commandeered Fort Snelling back into government service.

From that point on, virtually every Minnesota recruit during the Civil War was inducted into the Army at Fort Snelling. Most of them were later discharged from service at the fort as well.

### **Hard to like it**

At the start of the war, conditions and equipment were rudimentary. Initially, men were issued a blanket, red flannel shirt and a pair of socks while waiting to be outfitted with more complete uniforms.

Meanwhile, Army routine and training exercises were anything but exciting. Even those men from Olmsted and Winona counties, who later in 1861 volunteered for what they expected to be dashing cavalry duty, struggled through a daily routine consisting of three roll calls, three meals, a dress parade and hours of military drill. When it snowed or rained too hard, the men were stuck inside their barracks with little to do.

Since men usually shared bunks and blankets in the crowded barracks, disease and lice thrived. And in the deepest part of winter, neither blankets nor firewood were adequate to fend off the cold.

As for chow, while it was monotonous, at least the bread was baked fresh daily. It was certainly better than the hardtack the men would live on while campaigning.

All things considered, though, it's not difficult to imagine why the great majority of Minnesota's soldiers couldn't wait to leave Fort Snelling. They were anxious to parade out of the fort, headed for battlefields down South, where they could achieve glory by day, and sit by the campfire at night, drinking Army coffee.

**Gettysburg trips drive home meaning for students.  
Tom Weber. October 25, 2011.**

Rochester, MN *Post Bulletin*



Kasson-Mantorville eighth-graders get lessons on how Union soldiers loaded and fired cannons at the Gettysburg battlefield.

About the time the candles are lit to softly illuminate the dark and silent Gettysburg battlefield at night, students from southeastern Minnesota are ready to agree with historian James McPherson. "More than any other place in the United States, this battlefield is indeed hallowed ground," McPherson has written about Gettysburg. "Perhaps no word in the American language has greater historical resonance than Gettysburg."

At the spot where the 1st Minnesota Volunteer Regiment sacrificed itself to plug a gap in the Union line during the battle, the students, led by tour guide Dave Zimmer, of Legacy Tour and Travel, Decorah, Iowa, gather at night to pay their respects.

"It's so emotional, it was such a young person's fight and ordeal," said Zimmer, who takes school groups to Gettysburg each year. "It grabs them, these young people. It holds them forever."

"It's really an emotional experience for the kids," said Jeff Fague, a teacher at Kasson-Mantorville, who last year took a group of eighth-graders to Gettysburg with Zimmer. "For them, it's

'It wasn't us, it was another generation.' Then they see this, and they start to connect with individuals."

"Most of these soldiers were about the same age as these kids," said John Smith, of Lanesboro High School, who has accompanied 14 senior class trips to Gettysburg. "They really get a feel for what it was like back then. By the time we leave there, they do understand what these guys went through." Such is the power of Gettysburg, the hallowed ground in the Pennsylvania countryside visited by 1 million tourists annually. But viewing, and walking, the battlefield can be especially powerful for young people, said Zimmer, a retired Mabel-Canton history teacher.

### **In the nighttime stillness**

"When we're on the bus on the way there, we've got them sitting with a map of the battle on their laps," Zimmer said. "We go through what happened in the three days of the battle. By the time we get there, they're pointing out places from the windows of the bus."

That preparation is only the start for the tours Zimmer leads. After visiting the Gettysburg cyclorama to get another overview the battle, the students head to Gettysburg National Cemetery to view the graves of Minnesotans killed in the battle. There, in the cemetery where Lincoln gave his Gettysburg Address, one student is chosen to read the speech aloud. The students also learn how to load and fire a Civil War cannon, and walk along the wall where Pickett's charge nearly broke the Union lines on July 3, 1863.

Later, after darkness has settled over the battlefield, Zimmer marches the students out to the vicinity of Plum Run, where the 1st Minnesota made its stand. "We say that these 1st Minnesota guys are still there — they bled out into that ground," Zimmer said.

Candles are lit, Zimmer pulls out his harmonica to play "Amazing Grace" and the students begin to sing. The sound lingers in the nighttime stillness. "The tourists aren't there," Zimmer said. "We have the park to ourselves."

### **History comes alive**

Although the tours Zimmer leads also include stops at the monuments and sights of the Washington, D.C., area, Gettysburg exerts the strongest hold. "When the kids come back, they say the nighttime at Gettysburg was their favorite part of the trip," Smith said.

"Before we went, I wondered, 'Is this going to work with them?'" Fague said. "It not only worked, when I see them now they're still talking and asking questions about it. They're going to do so much better in their U.S. history class because they went there."

### **A spark for the imagination**

The common wisdom, though, is that young people aren't interested in history. "Don't you believe it," said Zimmer. It's all a matter of making history something young people can imagine and understand, he said.

"When I go to Byron, I tell them that Byron's about the same size as Gettysburg was," Zimmer said. "I get them to imagine that 200,000 men with guns are coming into town. Where do you go? What do you do? Or, he might remind them that when the war started, 'A bunch of guys walked away from Chatfield and never came back.'" As for himself, Zimmer said he looks forward to every one of the 10 to 12 tours he escorts to Gettysburg each year. "Some things in life you never get tired of," he said.

**Chatfield Guards Answered the Call**  
By Joseph Chase. November 1, 2011

Rochester MN *Post Bulletin*

On July 4, 1860, Chatfield woke to cannon fire. Capt. Finn's company had brought its artillery piece all the way from Winona to celebrate Independence Day in Chatfield. And Chatfield, a town with aspirations, was envious. What Winona could do, certainly Chatfield could do better.

Within the week, 60 Chatfield men formed an infantry company to add military pomp to the town's celebrations. The man unanimously elected captain was an engineer from New York, Judson Bishop. Thus was created the "Chatfield Guards" — Company A, 3rd Regiment, 1st Brigade, 1st Division, Minnesota Volunteer Militia.

The country was at peace that summer as the Guards drilled in the city park with 59 state-supplied muskets. But trouble was coming. The new Republican Party wanted to stop the spread of slavery. The Democratic Party tolerated the South's "peculiar institution" and if the party stayed united, it could put a Democrat in the White House. But pro-slavery and pro-secession Southern Democrats split the party that summer, and Democrats nominated two candidates for president. The result was the election on Nov. 6, 1860, of Republican Abraham Lincoln with only 39.8 percent of the popular vote.

The cotton states, led by South Carolina on Dec. 20, began to secede. In Chatfield, the question of what ought to be done about secession was vigorously debated. Bishop, in addition to leading the Chatfield Guards, published the Chatfield Democrat newspaper. He thought slavery was wrong, but like all Democrats — and most Americans — he never would have fought a war to end it. In his newspaper, he argued the futility of trying to keep the South in the Union by force.

But on April 12, 1861, everything changed. South Carolina attacked Fort Sumter, unifying the resolve of Northerners overnight. Northern Democrats like Bishop were outraged that rebels had fired on the Stars and Stripes. President Lincoln called for troops and Minnesota began raising a regiment.

It took four days for news about Fort Sumter to reach Chatfield. By the time a rider had galloped from Chatfield to the Winona telegraph office with the message that the Guards were volunteering for the 1st Minnesota, it was too late: The 1st Regiment was already filled.

When it appeared in following weeks that Minnesota would need a second regiment, Bishop left nothing to chance. He wrote to Sen. Henry Rice, asking for advance notice of any further call for troops. Rice delivered. A telegram from the senator tipped off Bishop, allowing him to reach St. Paul just before the call for a second regiment was received from Washington. On June 14, Bishop offered, in person, the Chatfield Guards and received, on the spot, orders for his men to report at Fort Snelling.

On June 22, 1861, the Guards marched out of Chatfield carrying a battle flag crafted and sewn by women in town. As Company A of the 2nd Minnesota, they would fight with stubborn heroism at Chickamauga. At Chattanooga, Col. Judson Bishop would lead them to improbable victory on the heights of Missionary Ridge.

But as they stopped that morning in June 1861 on the hilltop above Chatfield to say their goodbyes, some were looking at home for the last time.

Joe Chase and his wife of 32 years, Sara, live on a farm north of Chatfield.

# SOUTHEAST MINNESOTA IN THE CIVIL WAR

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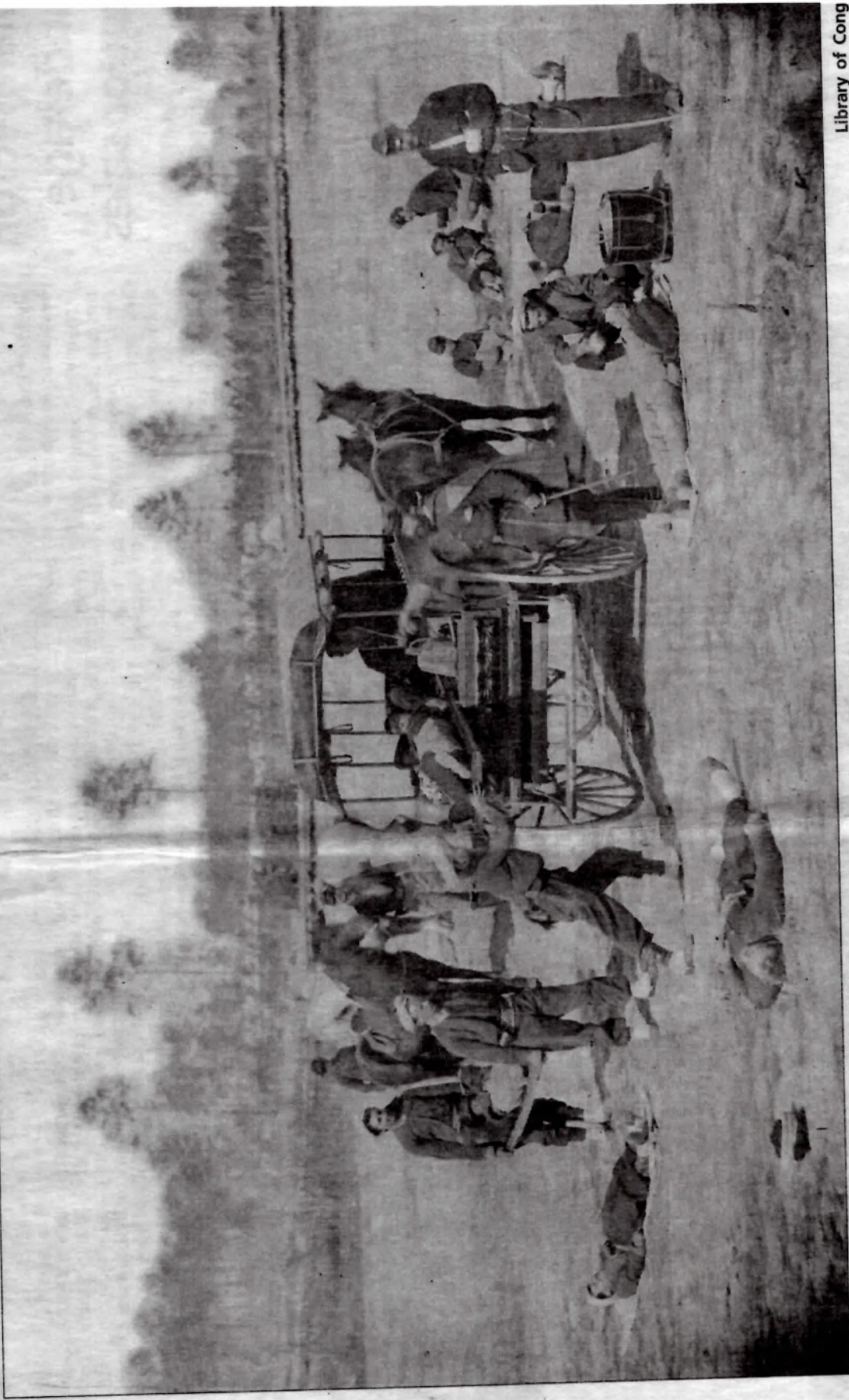
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Blakely, one of the  
of the Rochester City  
been promoted to  
the Olmsted County  
the Minnesota 3rd

Minnesota 3rd, under  
F. Smith, leaves Fort  
aboard three steam-  
ute to Louisville, Ky.  
W. Clay will lead Co.  
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Nov. 19, poet, lecturer  
former Julia Ward  
rites the lyrics to "The  
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songs in the North  
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federate forces meet  
elville, Ky., on Nov.  
adopt a secession  
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nents, one pro-Union  
pro-Secession.



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A Zouave ambulance crew demonstrates how wounded soldiers were taken from the field of battle during the Civil War.

# Area was hotbed for militias

the northern states in the years

Among war's early heroes

TR WORDS

## **Area was hotbed for militias during Civil War**

By Jay Furst. November 15, 2011

Rochester, MN *Post Bulletin*

Just east of Red Wing, which was a hotbed of Union volunteers when the Civil War began in 1861, is the hilltop city of Ellsworth, Wis., population 3,284.

The town has two claims to fame. One is that it's the Cheese Curd Capital of Wisconsin.

The other is its name. Originally named Perry (for unknown reasons) when it was first marked out in 1857, the town was platted in 1862 and renamed for a hero of the then-new Civil War with no connection to Wisconsin. His name was Col. Elmer E. Ellsworth, and he already was a legend as the first Union soldier killed in the war, just a month after the Southern attack on Fort Sumter.

Ellsworth was a friend and young campaign supporter of President Lincoln who a few years before Lincoln's election led a troop of volunteer soldiers from the Rockford, Ill., area called Zouaves, with flashy uniforms and drills adapted from a French colonial militia by the same name. Their exotic dress, acrobatic precision drilling and showmanship made Zouave groups popular around the northern states in the years immediately before the war.

According to an article published in Minnesota History magazine years ago, Ellsworth dramatized "through his Zouaves a mounting Northern interest in preparedness," an interest in Minnesota that was also reflected in creation of the Minnesota Pioneer Guard, another volunteer militia.

### **Zouaves were early recruits**

There were Zouaves among the earliest recruits in the Minnesota volunteer regiments, and at least a few Zouave aficionados in southeastern Minnesota. A company of Zouaves from St. Anthony, the early city that became Minneapolis, were among the 1st Minnesota Volunteers who enlisted immediately after the attack on Fort Sumter in April 1861.



The 1st Minnesota is considered the Union's first volunteer regiment after Lincoln called for volunteers, which made the Zouaves a key part of the Union Army from the start.

According to "1861: The Civil War Awakening," a new book on the powerful cultural and political trends at work in the year when the Civil War finally came, the Zouaves were not just a volunteer militia group. They were inspired by French military units in Algeria, which had become world-famous because of the rapid growth of popular newspapers, but Ellsworth's group was focused as much on moral improvement as physical readiness, writes historian Adam Goodheart in "1861."

Ellsworth, who was 20 years old when he became the leader of the "Rockford Grays" Zouaves unit in 1857, "approached military drills with the enthusiasm and relentless discipline of an athlete pushing himself toward the big leagues." Through the war, more than 70 Zouave units fought for the North, although their impact extended much further through the ranks, with recruits in regular units having Zouave and other "pioneer" militia origins.

In March 1857, about the time Ellsworth was taking charge of the Rockford, Ill., unit, a light infantry militia was organized in Red Wing, called the Red Wing Rifles, at least in part to respond to conflicts elsewhere in Minnesota with American Indians. Those volunteers likely were among those who quickly enlisted when war came, as did members of the Minnesota Pioneer Guard and Zouaves in more the populous cities of St. Anthony, St. Paul and Stillwater.

### **Among war's early heroes**

Ellsworth, the most famous of Zouaves, met his end almost within view of the White House, just a month after Fort Sumter. As Goodheart, who contributes to the "Disunion" blog at [NYTimes.com](http://NYTimes.com), vividly describes in his book, Ellsworth and his "Fire Zouaves" — the 5th New York Volunteers — crossed the Potomac River the night that the Virginia government voted to secede from the Union. That night in late May, 1861, Ellsworth dashed up the steps of an old hotel in Alexandria, Va., to haul down a Confederate flag that was flying from the rooftop. When he came back down, he was met by the rebel hotel owner and others, and in the skirmish, Ellsworth was killed.

His comrades "brought his corpse into a room at the hotel and covered it with the Confederate flag," Goodheart writes. "When reinforcements finally arrived, the body was wrapped tenderly in a red Zouave blanket." The body was taken back across the Potomac, where Lincoln, grief-stricken for his young friend, arranged for his remains to lie in state in the East Room at the White House.

"As for Lincoln, his young friend's death affected him like no other soldier's in the four years that followed," Goodheart writes. A senator went to see the president on the morning that news of Ellsworth's death was reported, and he "found Lincoln standing alone beside a window in the library, looking out toward the Potomac."

*He seemed unaware of the visitors' presence until they were standing close behind him. Lincoln turned away from the window and extended his hand. "Excuse me," he said. "I cannot talk." Then suddenly, to the men's astonishment, the president burst into tears. Burying his face in a handkerchief, he walked up and down the room for some moments before at last finding his voice...*

*On the morning of the funeral, the East Room was crowded with dignitaries...at the end of the service, all rose to file past the open casket. Then the line suddenly stopped. Lincoln and his wife stood at length, looking down on the face of their dead friend. Those standing nearest could hear the president lament: "My boy! My boy! Was it necessary this sacrifice should be made?"*

Ellsworth was 24. There would be many more tears shed — in the White House and across America to the pioneer towns of southeastern Minnesota — for men as young and heroic as the king of the Zouaves, whose grave was all but unmarked for many years after.

**In wartime, reason for thanks.**  
**By Loren Else and Jay Furst. November 22, 2011**

Rochester, MN *Post Bulletin*

As winter winds began to sweep across the nation in November 1861, the men fighting the Civil War had only begun their struggle to survive against disease, war, poor rations, inadequate uniforms, little drinking water and extreme elements. Throughout the land, most Americans still held the forlorn hope that the war would end soon, but the early evidence, from the first battle at Bull Run, wasn't promising. Both sides were committed to a long and bloody conflict. No one could know then how bloody it would be. Arguably, the war didn't begin in earnest until 1862, and by then there was no turning back.

Although Thanksgiving wasn't a formally recognized holiday at that time, governors from across the nation issued elaborately worded "Thanksgiving Proclamations" in November 1861, to give thanks and ask for God's blessings at a time when many families had loved ones who were far from home, at a time when the country seemed to be coming apart at the seams.

Minnesota's second governor, Alexander Ramsey, issued a proclamation on Nov. 8, 1861, saying "Finally, with the incense of thanks-offering, let the prayer go up from every altar, that God may throw the shield of His mercy around the brave soldiers who have gone from our midst to do battle for the right, that He may grant us a successful issue out of all our trials, and that this wicked rebellion may terminate in the triumph of the authority of the laws, and in the re-establishment of civil order and peace, throughout a reunited and prosperous country, to the glory and honor of His name."

It was Ramsey who happened to be in Washington at the time of the attack on Fort Sumter just six months earlier and who immediately promised President Lincoln that he would raise a volunteer regiment of 1,000 soldiers to join the fight to preserve the Union.

By November, the 1st Minnesota Volunteer Regiment was settled in at Camp Stone, Md., after the Union's defeat at Ball's Bluff on Oct. 21, along the Potomac. The 2nd Minnesota, including many men from southeast Minnesota, had been redirected to Kentucky on its way east and was

now in camp at Lebanon, Ky. Within a few months, the 2nd would test their mettle in the Battle of Mill Springs. The 3rd Minnesota had arrived in La Crosse, Wis., on Nov. 18 and boarded trains headed east. By Dec. 6, they were in camp in Shepherdsville, Ky. Most of the 3rd Minnesota would be captured at Murfreesboro, Tenn., in July 1862. They would be formally exchanged and come back to Minnesota. There, the regiment would join Colonel Henry Sibley's campaign in the Dakota War of 1862.

The 4th Minnesota Regiment was forming and companies were dispatched for training to the three frontier forts in the state: Fort Ripley, Fort Ridgely and Fort Abercrombie, the last on the border of Dakota Territory, and a brutal place for winter camp. For many of the new soldiers, it would be their first time away from home — especially far from home — during the holidays.

Both the soldier and his family needed reassurance that all might turn out well, in the end, as this letter from a young Winona County soldier in the 3rd Minnesota, Thomas Christie, shows: "Above all, my dear Sister, keep up your spirits, and do not yield to gloomy fancies or apprehensions on our account, for I assure you they are needless, as we are enjoying ourselves thoroughly, and 'eating our bread' (hard crackers and sweet potatoes) 'in joy and thankfulness.' Begging you to dismiss from your mind all anxiety on our account..."

In another letter home written in 1863, Edward Bassett, a Union soldier from Morristown, eloquently reflected "Stars still twinkled in the clear sky when the men were aroused at 4 AM on Thursday, the 26th – Thanksgiving Day. They were ordered to get breakfast and be ready to move with all their belongings in an hour." Although the official proclamation establishing Thanksgiving as a national holiday wasn't issued until 1863, the year of Gettysburg, by Lincoln, the president did order Washington offices closed for Nov. 28, 1861, as a day of thanksgiving, and the importance and value of the holiday was soon to become clear.

On Thanksgiving Day in 1863, a preacher in Boston said "The Union must be preserved, not alone because it was essential to our own welfare, but because through its preservation would the divine doctrine of popular government live among men. If America is lost, the world is lost."

As we bow our heads this Thanksgiving, 150 years after the war's grim beginning, let us remember the courageous men who were far from home, cold and hungry, uneasy about what lay just ahead, headed soon to battles that would kill or injure most of them.

Loren Else and his wife live in Rochester. He researches and writes the Day in History column for the Post-Bulletin.

**Finding Civil War veterans graves**  
By John Weiss. November 29, 2011

Rochester, MN *Post Bulletin*

Tom Mauer knew his great-great-grandfather fought in the Civil War, but he didn't know much more, including where he was buried. With some sleuthing and hard work, the retired postal worker from Plainview found the grave of Ezekiel Rose, its writing now nearly illegible, in Hersey, Wis. Rose served as a musician in the 5th Minnesota, Co. B — first in southern Minnesota, where Rose was wounded in the Sioux Uprising of 1862, and later in the South.

That got Mauer wondering how many Civil War graves might be "lost" to families and history. He found the answer to be in the thousands. His hobby, his avocation, is to find as many as he can in the Upper Midwest. "I found a lot of Civil War veterans and I thought it would be fun to track them," he said.

He spends vacations at cemeteries, walking up and down the rows of graves, getting a sore back and sore feet, but always seeking the markers of Civil War veterans. He has found about 9,000 so far in about 750 cemeteries. He posts the information and sometimes the pictures on a web site aptly called Find A Grave.

Mauer has learned that the veterans' graves tend to have a certain shape, a certain look, and often have a star placed by the local chapter of the Grand Army of the Republic (a Civil War veterans group) or other service organizations.

Reading what's on the gravestones that are more than 100 years old can be a challenge. The weather has all but erased the writing on some. Yet others include only a first initial and last name, Mauer said. Some of the markers are cenotaphs, stones honoring a veteran who is buried somewhere else, often at a battlefield cemetery.

The Internet has been a valuable tool for Mauer and others who do similar work. He's found large amounts of data on some veterans and he has posted the details about thousands of veterans graves.

For Mauer, who served in photo interpreter in Vietnam, the work is an honor. He's fascinated by the Civil War and this is another way to learn about it, he said.

In many cemeteries, there is nothing to honor the veterans. He'd like to see more of cemeteries follow the example of one in St. Charles which has an obelisk with the names of veterans inscribed.

"I think about these poor guys who left home here and never came back," he said. "You have to honor them somehow."

## Colvill Still Stands Tall in Civil War History

By Tom Weber, December 6, 2011

Rochester, MN **Post Bulletin**



The statue of Civil War Colonel William Colvill is pictured Friday, December 2, 2011 at the Cannon Falls Cemetery.

Three years after the Battle of Gettysburg had ravaged her hometown, 18-year-old Tillie Pierce was standing in front of her home when a carriage slowed and came to a stop virtually at the front door.

"A gentleman alighted, came up to me, shook hands and kissed me without saying a word," she later recalled. "I knew it was the colonel by his tall, manly form."

"The Colonel" was Col. William Colvill, who had commanded the 1st Minnesota Regiment during its historic charge July 2, 1863, at Gettysburg. The charge, which decimated the regiment, has been credited by more than a few historians with saving the Union during the pivotal battle of the war. Colvill was severely wounded in that charge and after the battle, recuperated for weeks in a second-floor room of the Pierce home.

He would never make a complete recovery, and his war wounds caused Colvill, who stood 6 feet 5 inches, to limp the rest of his life. But, from a distance of 150 years, Colvill still stands tall,



literally and figuratively, in the story of Minnesota's participation in the Civil War. Colvill was born on April 5, 1830, in Forestville, N.Y. As a young man, he studied law in the offices of Millard Fillmore in Buffalo, N.Y., before moving west and settling in 1854 in Red Wing. There, Colvill was a lawyer, land speculator and fiery editor of the Red Wing Sentinel.

### **In the face of danger**

When war broke out and President Lincoln called for volunteers to put down the rebellion, Colvill was the first Goodhue County man to sign up. His fellow volunteers elected him captain of what became Co. F of the 1st Minnesota. They recognized that Colvill had no formal military training, but they all admired his quiet courage. "He certainly could face danger with the greatest show of indifference of any man I ever knew," one soldier said.

That trait would manifest itself on the battlefield, often in the most dire situations. At the Battle of White Oak Swamp, in 1862, Colvill was shot in his upper chest. "To those men around him, he said, 'Say nothing about it,' and picking up his sword, walked away," remembered one member of the regiment. Colvill was resting at a nearby field hospital when a retreat threatened to leave him behind to be captured by the Confederates. Colvill pulled himself up and started walking. Fifteen miles later he reached the James River, where a boat picked up the wounded and took them to a hospital in Baltimore. Colvill recovered and two months later rejoined Co. F.

### **Courage at Gettysburg**

By next summer, when Gen. Robert E. Lee's rebel army marched toward Pennsylvania, Colvill was a colonel in command of the entire 1st Minnesota. But he almost didn't make it to Gettysburg. On June 24, 1863, near Haymarket, Va., Colvill's horse, which had been given to him by friends in Cannon Falls, was struck by a cannonball. Colvill was thrown from the horse, but was uninjured. He ordered the injured horse shot, took his saddle and bridle, and marched on foot until another horse could be found for him later that day.

Colvill's Gettysburg fame was threatened by another incident. On June 29, he was temporarily relieved of command of the First when some of the soldiers reacted in a nonmilitary manner to an

order from a senior officer. Upon arrival at Cemetery Ridge on July 2, though, Colvill requested that he be reinstated, and the request was granted.

Late that afternoon, the Minnesotans charged to plug a hole in the Union line. "I saw a number of our men lying as they had fallen," Colvill recalled. "Then came a shock like a sledge hammer on my backbone between my shoulders. It turned me partly around and made me 'see stars.'" Within seconds, he was also shot in the foot. He was eventually taken to a field hospital, where he was placed on the ground without protection from that night's heavy rains.

A few weeks later, Colvill was moved to the Pierce home to recuperate. Eventually, Colvill returned to the Army, this time to the 1st Minnesota Heavy Artillery near Chattanooga.

### **Post-war years**

After the war, he went home to Red Wing, served in the state Legislature and as Minnesota attorney general (1866-1867), and resumed his law career. He married Elizabeth Morgan in April 1867. Colvill also served for a time as registrar of the Duluth Land Office. He died in his sleep on June 13, 1905, while in St. Paul to attend a flag ceremony.

Colvill is buried in the Cannon Falls Community Cemetery, under a monument dedicated in 1928 by President Coolidge. His true memorial, though, might be the Minnesota monument at Gettysburg. Colvill certainly never forgot that place.

"We earnestly desired him to stay," Tillie Pierce said of the day Colvill stopped to visit in Gettysburg. "He however said his time was limited and friends were waiting in the carriage to go over to the battlefield."

## **Civil War Firearms Pack A Punch**

By John Weiss December 13, 2011

Rochester, MN *Post Bulletin*

Powder, minie ball and wad, tap the three down into the rifle barrel, slip percussion cap onto the firing nipple, cock the hammer, aim, fire. Ralph Hettig just shot a piece of history.

The owner of Wild Goose Sports in Rochester and an expert on firearms, was shooting a Civil War-era rifle, possibly the first time it was fired since the .58-caliber Springfield was made in 1861 at the Trenton Locomotive Works. The New Jersey company was converted to making arms during the war.

The Springfield rifle was the main weapon used during the Civil War, said Hettig, who has taken part in war re-enactments. It weighed about 8 pounds and was nearly as tall as the average soldier.

The three basic kinds of 19th-century firearms were all used in the war — smooth-bore flintlock or percussion muskets, percussion rifles, and ones with an all-in-one cartridge. That technology was new then and it's still used today.

Smooth-bored weapons used a round ball and the barrel was smooth inside, Hettig said. It was only accurate to maybe 50 yards. But when 5,000 soldiers stood shoulder-to-shoulder and fired, the muskets were powerful weapons, he said.

Rifles had a slight twist inside the barrel so the slug would spin a bit and be more accurate. The Minie ball, which he shot, has a conical head, cylindrical body and a hollow base. When it's fired, the base expands to tighten the seal and not let much energy escape around it. In the hands of a marksman, it was accurate sometimes up to 500 yards, he said.

A skilled shooter could load and fire the weapon three times a minute, though the shooter wouldn't have a chance to clean out powder residue each time and that would eventually foul the barrel, Hettig said.

Soldiers had to be well trained because it would be easy to make a mistake in the noise and chaos of battle. They had to ram powder, shot and paper wad all the way down the barrel so the ball was seated correctly. If they failed? "If you want to blow it up, that's the way to do it," Hettig said.

In battle, soldiers would carry boxes with cartridges (powder, ball and paper) on their left side. The box with the percussion caps would be on their right side. Once the barrel was loaded, the soldier would put a cap on top of a nipple leading into the barrel. Pull the trigger and the hammer would fall onto the cap that would go off and shoot a spark to the powder.

If the soldiers charged or needed to repel a charge, they attached bayonets to the end of the barrel. Today, loading and firing that rifle, and ones like it, gives Hettig a chance to imagine what it was like to be a Civil War soldier.

Battle re-enactments add to that. The re-enactors shoot black powder, creating heavy clouds of smoke, and run to rush the enemy. Of course, you don't hear bullets zipping past you, don't feel the pain of being hit, don't see friends fall, Hettig said. Still, it's emotional. "You saw a little bit, just a little bit of what those guys actually went through," he said.

After one re-enactment, there was a ceremony with buglers a half-mile away playing "Taps." Another echoed it. "There was not a dry eye in the house," he said.

## **1861 was bad, but 1862 would be worse**

by Jay Furst. December 20, 2011

Rochester, MN *Post Bulletin*

A century and a half ago in camps all along the border of North and South, it was relatively quiet. Cold and rain, with snow high in the Blue Ridge and Great Smokies and other mountain ranges, had settled in and done what compromise could not accomplish — shut down the American Civil War for a time.

The Minnesota 1st Volunteer Infantry Regiment, which in July was among the Union forces that saw battle at Bull Run and also was involved in the Battle of Ball's Bluff in Virginia, remained in that area through early winter. The 2nd Infantry was near Lebanon, Ky.. The 3rd had left Fort Snelling in November and was headed for garrison duty in Kentucky and Tennessee. The 4th was mustered by Dec. 23 at Fort Snelling and would remain there for a few months yet.

It was a grim Christmas, far from home, for these several hundred men from the just three-year-old State of Minnesota, and looking beyond the New Year, it would only get worse — infinitely worse. After what happened at Bull Run in July, disarray in the Union's military leadership, and with the Confederacy becoming more real by the day, it was clear that the war wouldn't be a quick affair.

Here's where Minnesota soldiers would fight in the year ahead, 1862:

The 1st Infantry Regiment would move to Harpers Ferry, in the western, marginally pro-Union area of western Virginia, in February. Harpers Ferry, where the Potomac and Shenandoah rivers meet, was the site of abolitionist John Brown's raid in October 1859, which lit the very short fuse that exploded 18 months later into civil war. By February 1862, Harpers Ferry was controlled by the Union Army and was a major strategic point between North and South.

The next month, the 1st boarded trains and then ships along the Virginia coast to join what became known as the Peninsula Campaign. They were at the Siege of Yorktown in early May and the battles of Savage Station and White Oak Swamp in late May and early June. From July 2 to Aug. 4, they were camped at Harrison's Landing, Gen. George McClellan's headquarters for the campaign, along the James River, and President Lincoln visited during that time.

For a few days in late August, the 1st returned to Alexandria, just across the river from Washington, then went back to Manassas, where they had fought in the First Battle of Bull Run a year earlier. This second go-round ended much like the first one did, and the 1st was involved in covering the Union Army's retreat.

Then came Antietam, on Sept. 17. The Maryland battle would be the bloodiest one-day engagement of the war, with 23,000 men killed, wounded or missing after 12 hours of fighting. The Union Army held and the Confederate army retreated to Virginia. The 1st went into battle with about 435 men, and 15 were killed, 79 wounded and 21 missing. According to one source, "Color Sgt. Samuel Bloomer was left behind, wounded in the knee. He had saved away the 1st's state colors in his shirt from the Confederates while they protected him from incoming shell bursts. He later returned with the colors and to have his leg amputated."

The regiment was involved in burying the dead for five days after, then moved on. In mid-December, they ended a horrific year with the Battle of Fredericksburg, then went into winter quarters near Falmouth, Va.

The 2nd Regiment, which was formed later in 1861 and hadn't yet seen major action, saw it only a few weeks after New Year's, at Mill Springs, Ky. From there, they marched throughout the South, through Tennessee in the spring, to the Siege of Corinth in Mississippi in May. They were in Tennessee and Alabama, in skirmishes and on more routine duty, and they ended the year in Gallatin, Tenn.

The 2nd wouldn't have its Antietam-type experience until Chickamauga, in September 1863.

The 3rd Regiment was mostly on garrison duty in early 1862 in Kentucky and Tennessee, but at the Battle of Murfreesboro in July, most of the regiment was captured and then held at Benton Barracks in St. Louis. After negotiations, most of the men returned home, where they were involved in what became an even greater emergency for most Minnesotans: The Dakota War, the conflict between Dakota Indians and white settlers across much of southern and western Minnesota.

The Dakota War, which began in August 1862, would become Minnesota's own civil war, one that cost hundreds of lives, led to the forced exile of thousands of Dakota people and for a time distracted Minnesotans from the war that was tearing apart the Union.

Put yourself in that moment. In August 1862, Minnesota was vast and unsettled, a state for only four years. Most of the white newcomers were pioneers and just figuring out how to live here. The Native American people were apprehensive and quickly losing their land, culture and way of life. The United States was coming apart at the seams, and hundreds of young men were rushing off to war, with many already dead. And then came the conflict with Dakota Indians, which seemed to put the whole Minnesota experiment at risk.

Although the greatest carnage of the Civil War was still ahead — in 1863 at Gettysburg, where the 1st Minnesota would be decimated but immortalized — 1862 was a catastrophic year, and it remains the worst year in Minnesota history.

Soon, 1861 would look like a cakewalk.

## **Antietam Was Bloody Turning Point**

By Jay Furst. September 25, 2012

Rochester, MN *Post Bulletin*

A year after the Civil War had begun, Minnesota soldiers had seen plenty of fighting, at places with names such as Bull Run, Ball's Bluff and Mill Springs, Savage Station and White Oak Swamp.

But nothing prepared them for what happened on Sept. 17, 1862, at a place that virtually none had ever heard of before: Antietam.

Antietam Creek is a 42-mile-long creek that flows into the Potomac River near Sharpsburg, Md. It was along that creek not far north of Harper's Ferry that a huge army led by Union Gen. George McClellan met the smaller Army of Northern Virginia led by Gen. Robert E. Lee, in what almost inadvertently became the bloodiest single day of war in American history.

Nearly 3,700 men were killed that day, with another 19,000 wounded or missing. The 1st Minnesota Infantry, which was later to become Minnesota's most famous fighting force because of its heroism at Gettysburg, was in the thick of it that day as well.

The battle of Antietam, called the battle of Sharpsburg in the South, was the first major fight on the Union side of the line, with Lee leading his army into the heart of a border state that was profoundly divided about the war. The city of Baltimore was all but pro-Confederacy; only a year earlier, President-elect Lincoln had to move secretly through the city en route to his inauguration in Washington.

A Confederate victory on Union soil could have turned fragile public opinion against the war -- it was an election year, after all, with Lincoln and Republican leadership of the war on the line. It could have drawn in European powers who were closely watching events and ready to support the Southern cause if the moment was right.



If Maryland were to be lost, Washington itself would be impossible to hold, surrounded by states in rebellion.

"No other campaign and battle in the war had such momentous, multiple consequences as Antietam," historian James McPherson has written.

Lee's army of about 55,000 men marched into Maryland on Sept. 3 after their resounding victory a few days earlier at Bull Run, near Manassas, Va. It was the second battle at Bull Run, and Lee convincingly routed the Union forces the second time around, then continued north, just as Confederate armies were crossing into Kentucky, another Union state that Lincoln desperately needed to hold.

McClellan moved his army of about 75,000 men into position near Antietam on Sept. 15, and the battle on the 17th began at dawn. McClellan held back thousands of soldiers, which reduced his advantage, and Lee let slip a copy of his orders, which affected his own advantage.

The day ended with the Union army reduced by about a quarter, and Lee's army by a third. Not even at Gettysburg was the bloodbath so intense from dawn to dusk in one day.

About 120 men in the 1st Minnesota Infantry alone were killed or wounded that day, of a total of 435 men who fought. The regiment was part of an assault on the West Woods that failed, but the Minnesotans fought with distinction, according to historians. All the casualties from the 1st Minnesota are listed online at [Firstminnesota.net](http://Firstminnesota.net).

Among the casualties was a Norwegian immigrant, Halvor Quie, a sharpshooter attached to the 1st Minnesota. Quie was critically injured and battlefield surgeons wanted to amputate his leg. He refused, kept his leg and survived.

His grandson, Al Quie, became governor of Minnesota about 120 years later. Quie was involved in a ceremonial sendoff for a re-enactment group that headed to the Antietam battlefield earlier this month. The re-enactment group also was to place memorial flags on the graves of some of those Minnesota men who fell at Antietam.

The leaders of the 1st Minnesota at Antietam included Col. Alfred Sully, who a year later was back in Minnesota and led one of the "punitive expeditions" in Dakota Territory against the Indians who fled Minnesota after the uprising the previous fall.

Skirmishes continued at Antietam on Sept. 18, but Lee's army began an orderly retreat across the Potomac, back into Virginia. McClellan failed to aggressively pursue him, which Lincoln believed -- and generations of historians have agreed -- was a colossal error. But the Union victory was enough to give Lincoln the right moment to do what he'd wanted to do for months -- free the slaves in the Confederacy. On Sept. 22, he issued the Emancipation Proclamation, effective on Jan. 1, 1863.

That turned the war from an effort to preserve the Union as it existed prior to the war into a nation conceived in liberty but receiving a new birth of freedom for all citizens.

For those who carried the battle, though, that historical moment was lost in the ghastly experience of Antietam. As a Minnesota soldier, Charley Goddard, wrote soon after, "If the horrors of war cannot be seen on this battlefield, they cannot be seen anywhere.

"The rebels fought well -- I will give them credit for that."

## **Area Soldiers Head West, Not South**

By Joe Chase. October 2, 2012

Rochester, MN *Post Bulletin*

In November 1861, W. B. Gere, of Chatfield, and J. F. Marsh, of Preston, began recruiting for a new company of soldiers for the 5th Minnesota Regiment. The seven-month-old Civil War was on everyone's mind, but so was the threat of war with Great Britain.

The recruiting advertisements in the Chatfield Democrat newspaper proclaimed, "WAR WITH ENGLAND! Let it come — We fear not the tyrants. Three cheers — Fifth Regiment accepted from Minnesota."

A U.S. Navy warship had stopped a British steamer bound for England because two Confederate emissaries were known to be aboard. They were arrested, and the Queen's government was outraged. Britain ordered 11,000 troops to be sent to Canada, and war seemed imminent, until President Lincoln, wisely deciding that he could afford only "one war at a time," released the prisoners and issued an apology.

The danger of war with the redcoats had passed by January 1862, when 55 men from Chatfield, 23 from Preston and three picked up en route in Marion, made the three-day trip through Rochester and Cannon Falls to Fort Snelling. There they were mustered in as Company B of Minnesota's 5th Regiment.

Company B included three sets of fathers and sons, among them Lt. Norman Culver and his son Charley, the company's drummer boy. Charley was 12, but he and his dad told the army he was 13. At the medical exam, Dr. William W. Mayo rejected Charley because he was too short. Norman explained to Dr. Mayo that the boy was his son. When examined again, Charley, on his tip toes, just made the required five feet.

The captain would be John Marsh, a Preston lawyer who had hurried to La Crosse to enlist in the 2nd Wisconsin when the war began. Marsh had fought as a musket-carrying private at Bull Run. Now, promised an officer's commission in the 5th Minnesota, he was on his way home from the East

Nineteen-year-old Tom Gere left his studies at the Chatfield Academy to enlist. He was the skinny son of a pioneer Chatfield family who got his parents' permission to join up — “they seem to think I am likely to be sick and need someone to take care of me” — only because his big brother, Beecher, had recruited most of Company B and was also joining the regiment. Tom was elected first sergeant.

The company expected to be sent south, but Uncle Sam had other plans. Fort Ridgely, a modestly fortified installation along the Minnesota River near the Lower Sioux and Upper Sioux reservations, had been manned by regular army troops until the Civil War began. When the regulars went east, Minnesota soldiers from new regiments took their place at the fort.

When the 5th Regiment's turn came, Company B drew the assignment.

On March 22, instead of embarking for Dixie, the men and boys of Company B wrapped themselves in buffalo robes and set out in sleighs, through deep snow, on the 110-mile trip from Fort Snelling to Fort Ridgely. There, Company B would replace two companies of the 4th Minnesota. And Company B would still be at Fort Ridgely on Aug. 18, 1862, when the Dakota War began.

Joe Chase, who lives in Chatfield, is a writer and an Olmsted County district judge.

## **Downstream, Pivotal Battles Were Fought**

By Tom Ostrom. October 9, 2012

Rochester, MN *Post Bulletin*

The Lower Mississippi River, from Cairo, Ill., to New Orleans, was of strategic importance to both North and South during the Civil War, and Minnesotans were involved in the battles that were pivotal to the war's outcome.

Minnesota, which had only gained statehood three years before the war, is home to the headwaters of the Mississippi River, of course, and its only U.S. military installation was at the junction of the Mississippi and the Minnesota River. Fort Snelling played a major role in preparing the state's volunteers for the fighting to come down south.

Among the Union goals from the beginning of the war in 1861 was to gain control of the river and split the Confederacy in two. That was easier said than done, but it began in earnest in February 1862 and culminated with the Union victory at Vicksburg on July 4, 1863. Along with the Union's bloody triumph at Gettysburg just a day earlier, the virtual lock on the Mississippi River was a crushing blow to the rebellion.

The U.S. Army and U.S. Navy teamed up in transportation and amphibious combat missions on the river, though the Army took the lead. The military vessels included wooden hull ships, powered by steam and sail; ironclad warships shielded by armor plates and chain; and small "mortar boat" rafts that were towed to battle sites, carrying raised cannons designed to shoot ordnance over Confederate fort barricades.

Southern ironclads such as the C.S.S. Merrimac, had reinforced bows to ram and sink Union ships. "Monitors" were armored steamers with rotating gun turrets. Confederate ironclads defended forts, rivers and harbors, while Union ironclads performed offensive missions.

The Mississippi River strategy was in keeping with the North's overall maritime mission, to squeeze the Confederacy and cut off supplies from Atlantic and Gulf coast ports as well as from navigable interior rivers. Union control of the Mississippi Basin would divide the South into two or more zones and impede Confederate trade and shipbuilding. The capture of New Orleans itself would demoralize the South and choke off any Confederate hopes upstream.

Minnesotans were involved in the river campaign virtually from the beginning. The 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 5th Minnesota volunteer regiments were involved, along with Bracketts Minnesota Cavalry Battalion, the 1st Minnesota Light Artillery Battery, the 2nd Minnesota Light Artillery Battery, and the 1st U.S. Sharpshooters Company, assigned to the 1st Minnesota Volunteer Infantry.

The battle to gain control of New Orleans began in January 1862, when Flag Officer David Farragut, who was a midshipman in the War of 1812, led his West Gulf Blockading Squadron upriver from the Gulf Coast, where a blockade had been established. In mid-April, Farragut's forces bombarded and took control of two forts below New Orleans and pushed north to the city. Confederate forces decided it was impossible to hold the city and pulled back, and Farragut received the official surrender on April 25.

On May 1, Union Gen. Benjamin ("The Beast") Butler led an army of about 5,000 soldiers into the city and declared martial law. Farragut, meanwhile, steamed north to capture Natchez, Tenn., and Baton Rouge, La., and made a first attempt to capture Vicksburg in June. Though it would take a year, and leadership from Gen. Ulysses S. Grant at Vicksburg, to get the job done, control of the Lower Mississippi was within the Union's reach.

Salisbury Prison Was Final Stop For Many  
By Thomas Pike. October 16, 2012

Rochester, MN *Post Bulletin*



So many prisoners died in Southern prisoner-of-war camps such as the one in Salisbury, N.C., that they were buried in trenches. This photo is believed to be from the prison at Andersonville, S.C.  
National Park Service

In September, I visited the site of the Salisbury, N.C., Confederate prison camp where my great-grandfather was a prisoner during the last months of the Civil War. George Holly Nichols kept a diary during his years with the 118th New York Volunteers, from 1862 through 1865, much of which documented his experiences from October 1864 to February 1865 in prisoner of war camps in Libby, Va., and Salisbury.

The 118th was a volunteer regiment from upstate New York and was called the "Adirondack Regiment." The regiment was in action primarily around the siege of

Richmond/Petersburg, Va. After receiving a head wound in the Battle of Drury's Bluff, George Nichols and 50 of his regiment were captured by the Confederate Army at the 2nd Battle of Fair Oaks, Va., on Oct. 27, 1864. Initially confined at Libby prison, where the Union soldiers were stripped of all their valuables, the prisoners were loaded -- overloaded -- into train cars and shipped to Salisbury.

Corporal Nichols entered the prison on Nov. 6, 1864. The Salisbury prison was opened in 1861 to hold captured Union soldiers from the Battle of Bull Run. At first the prisoners received adequate food and shelter. An early lithograph shows the prisoners playing baseball. But with the breakdown of the prisoner exchange program in 1863 and the large number of captured Union soldiers starting in October 1864, the prison designed to hold 2,000 people soon had to accommodate 9,000.

By 1864, the Union blockade of Southern ports and the Confederacy's collapsing economy had led to shortages of food, clothing, medicine, and shelter, for Confederate soldiers as well as Union prisoners of war. Due to a shortage of tents for the prisoners, George Nichols relates in his diary that in order to turn over at night, everyone had to turn over together. At least a third had to dig dugouts in the ground to escape the rain and cold. The food ration was inadequate to sustain a prisoner even if he was healthy, well-clothed and sheltered, which most were not. If there were any rations handed out that day, it might consist of half a loaf of bread and a pint of rice soup with a layer of bugs swimming on top. One prisoner claimed he lost 95 pounds in less than three months, ending up at 87 pounds.

The number of deaths reported at Salisbury climbed to nearly one in three prisoners by February 1865. Diarrhea was a major cause of death, along with smallpox, typhus, and pneumonia. Because of the lack of medical care and the cold, some prisoners developed gangrene, which led to their hands and feet rotting off. Each morning, the dead were stripped of their clothing (to be reused



by surviving prisoners) and brought to the "dead house" where they would be loaded like cord wood to be buried.

Earlier in the war, the dead were placed in coffins and buried individually, but after October 1864 the death rate was so high that the "dead wagon" carried the bodies for trench burial outside the prison compound. Today, the 18 burial trenches are within the Salisbury National Military Cemetery, just outside the prison site. Prisoners who died from a contagious disease like typhoid or smallpox were buried at the nearby Old Lutheran Cemetery and were later re-interred at the national cemetery. A government monument next to the trench area says that 10,700 Union soldiers are buried in the trenches, but later estimates have reduced that number to about 5,000.

Because of the desperate conditions, many men tried to escape. In Nov. 25, 1864, an attempt by many prisoners to break out resulted in about 250 deaths, many by cannon fire. About 300 Union prisoners managed to escape during the war, often helped toward Northern lines by slaves.

In the waning months of the war, the Confederate government paroled the remaining prisoners at Salisbury in February 1865. In his diary, Nichols recounts leaving the prison by train on Feb. 22, 1865, for Willmington, N.C., and then traveling by steam ship to Camp Parole, Md.

Some of the prisoners were so ill that they didn't survive the journey home to freedom. Shortly after the prison was abandoned, Union Gen. George Stoneman and his army burned it to the ground. Only one of the buildings, used by the Confederate guards, remains standing today.

During his time in prison, Nichols met John C. Hitchcock, who was from Rushford and served in the 7th Minnesota Regiment. After the war, Nichols relocated from New York and ended up in Eyota, where he died in 1924 and is buried in the Eyota Oak Grove Cemetery.

## Goodhue County Rushed to Save the Union

By Loren Else. October 23, 2012

Rochester, MN *Post Bulletin*



Though Minnesota had only been a state for two years in 1860, Red Wing's population was already 1,250 in that year and it was a hotbed of volunteers who fought for the Union in the Civil War. Ten years later, Red Wing had tripled in size. This photo, made in 1860, looks west from the junction of Main Street and Broad Street, near the current Family YMCA.

Photo courtesy of Goodhue County Historical Society

Farms worked by Swedish, Norwegian and German immigrant families dotted the rolling Goodhue County landscape in the years just after statehood in 1858. An impressive county courthouse had been built in 1859 in the growing vibrant river city of Red Wing.

"The city was very young," said Diane Buganski, outreach coordinator at the Goodhue County Historical Society. "Red Wing was really starting to come into its own with the commerce, the river traffic and the immigrants coming."

The county had 8,977 people in 1860, according to the census. The future looked bright.

But that quickly changed. The April 19, 1861, edition of the Goodhue County Republican, reported this on its front page:

*"To Arms! To Arms!! A public meeting of the citizens of Goodhue County will be held at the Court House this evening at seven o' clock."*

People turned out en masse and heard speeches about the outbreak of war, after the attack on Fort Sumter. Music was heard in the streets and banners were carried. It was said that the U.S. flag had been insulted and the Union must be saved. A patriotic fever was sweeping the country, nowhere more than in Goodhue County.

A resolution was immediately adopted that said, "We will make any sacrifices which may be required of us to maintain the honor of the stars and stripes."

Why would men who were newcomers to America choose to fight for her, almost without question? Buganski said that patriotism was an overriding virtue of these immigrants, many of whom had left difficult conditions in their native lands.

This was the first time many of them had owned land, and they felt hopeful about the future. They were willing to defend that. They wanted to preserve the America that they'd just discovered and were in the process of building.

The Goodhue County Republican published an excerpt from a Swedish paper called the *Hemlandet* in September 1861 that said, "It is high time for us as a people, to rise with sword in hand, and as it becomes the sons of the free Northmen, fight for our adopted country and for Liberty."

"Some of the men were so eager to volunteer for the Union Army in the very early days of the call for troops that they walked all the way to Fort Snelling," Buganski said.

Goodhue County volunteers answered the call throughout the war. "There seems to be no end to the numbers of soldiers in Goodhue County," the Republican newspaper reported in April 1863, just a few months before Gettysburg.

Company F of the 1st Minnesota was the first company of the steady stream of Goodhue County volunteers. There were county volunteers in all of the state's 11 infantry regiments except the 9th.

About 1,500 men, or one-sixth of the county's population, volunteered to fight. Goodhue County was a "Banner County" because of its overwhelming response to President Lincoln's call for troops. Buganski said they were remarkably brave men, who knew they were making history but once they reached the battlefield were just trying to survive in the most brutal conditions imaginable.

Goodhue County produced many heroes of the war, none more legendary than Col. William Colvill, who led the glorious 1st Minnesota on the suicidal charge at Cemetery Hill at Gettysburg. Lt. A.E. Welch of the 1st Minnesota, who was wounded and captured at the First Battle of Bull Run, later joined the 3rd Minnesota and was wounded in the Battle of Wood Lake, the final episode of the Dakota War. Benjamin Densmore joined the 3rd Minnesota as a private and by the end of the war was captain of the 4th Regiment, United States Colored Heavy Artillery.

When the war ended, all 1,500 men who served were changed. Many were wounded and broken, while others would be haunted with memories of the war for the rest of their lives. As the years rolled on, these proud men from Goodhue County would remember the friends they left behind on the fields of Gettysburg and Antietam. Some would remember the fall of Atlanta and, as the great victory was won, the killing of their president.

They would reflect on many events, but perhaps most of all, they would always remember the day they returned home to Goodhue County.

**Two Young Men, Gone to Soldier**  
By Thomas P. Ostrom. October 30, 2012

Rochester, MN *Post Bulletin*

When the Civil War erupted in April 1861, Gov. Alexander Ramsey was in Washington, D.C., and immediately offered War Secretary Simon Cameron a thousand men for service, making Minnesota the first state to offer troops for the Union army. Among them were Jasper Searles, a 20-year-old from Hastings, and Edward Bassett, a year younger and from the Faribault area, and thousands of other young southern Minnesota men who went to war to preserve the Union.

The 1st Minnesota Infantry volunteers trained at Fort Snelling under Col. Willis A. Gorman, and they trekked across the nation by steamboat and railroad and on foot, arriving in Washington on June 26. A month later, on July 21, Minnesota troops suffered 180 casualties at Bull Run in Virginia, more than any other Union regiment.

From the Minnesota Historical Society's collections and the writing of Edward G. Longacre, we can read the letters home of Capt. Jasper N. Searles, who enlisted at age 20. In June 1861, he wrote a letter from Washington, D.C., about his journey there. "Taking it all together, we got along very well, considering the distance and time -- over 2,000 miles in five days...this morning it was rumored that we were to pass in review before the president and probably would be his body guard, the post of honor."

From Arlington, Va., a month later, he wrote of being "occupied this morning in several minor surgical operations...such as extracting teeth, operating for corns." But on July 25, 1861, he wrote of the carnage at Bull Run. "Then the 1st Minnesota came onto the field...we advanced rapidly, (the Confederates) turning their batteries on us but did nothing until we had reached the bottom of a hill (and) a new battery opened on us in the distance."

Later that day, he wrote, "both surgeons and the assistant (steward) are gone...probably taken prisoner...the (1st Minnesota) suffered more than any other...now all ideas of having a short and easy conflict is past." But he summed up: "I am in good spirits...and anxious to follow the Minnesota 1st through this war."

Advancing from an enlisted surgical assistant to commissioned rank, Searles told stories of bravery and bloodshed through his three years on the battlefield. He returned to Minnesota in 1864 and went on to have a prosperous career not in medicine, but in law. He also served a term in the Minnesota House and was a district court judge at the end of his long career. Searles died in Stillwater in 1927, at age 86.

Edward H. Bassett, from the Morristown area, near Faribault, was mustered into the 1st Minnesota in April 1861. During his three-year enlistment, he fought in 61 battles and skirmishes, including Bull Run, Antietam, Gettysburg, and Fredericksburg. His 218 letters to family members are the heart of a book by Rochester author Richard G. Krom, his great-great-grandson, in his book, "The First Minnesota: Second to None," published in 2010.

Krom's objective in writing the book was to pay tribute to the brave men of the 1st Minnesota who participated in "61 engagements, including 34 battles and numerous skirmishes that decimated the battle lines of this proud regiment and left only a large handful to be mustered out on April 29, 1864."

The book isn't a "treatise on military tactics, rather it is the story of the struggles in the everyday lives of these American heroes. Based on the personal letters of Edward H. Bassett, its purpose is to relate their story of valor, glory, deprivation, hardship and unquestioning devotion to duty."

In his letters, Bassett describes the long journey east: "We came on the boat from (Fort) Ridgely to La Crosse and then took (railroad) cars to Chicago (and

Fort Wayne, Pittsburgh, Harrisburg), camped one night and started for Washington," he wrote on June 28, 1861. He described marching through the capital "with loaded gun," and a week later, "we marched through the Navy yard, got on board a steamboat and landed in Alexandria."

In a letter dated July 23, 1861, he wrote from Washington that "we had a chance to try our skill in the field fighting...but we lost our captain. He was shot through the heart and fell dead instantly...among the killed was one flag bearer...Asa Miller from Cannon City, I believe. He was hit by three balls before he fell, and after that he loaded and fired some three or four times."

The letter continues: "We were decoyed upon one of their masked (hidden) batteries...They hoisted the Union flag as we advanced (to) show every appearance of being friendly until we got in range of them when they opened up on us...Bullets were flying about as thick as rain drops...By this time, the enemy had come up in sight and the boys fired into them and killed them off pretty fast."

Throughout the letters, Bassett describes fatigue, fear, hunger and the horrors of artillery barrages. He added to his own accounts by citing newspapers, which were delivered to the battlefields by vendors on horsedrawn carts. As Krom wrote, Bassett portrayed a story of "valor, glory, deprivation, hardship and devotion to duty."

Bassett returned to Minnesota in 1865 and the difficult life of farming on the Minnesota frontier. He died in April 1897 at age 56 and was buried in Worthington. He, like Searles and thousands of other young Minnesotans, met and survived the challenge of war as best they could. They witnessed the horrors of the war and left a written record that continues to inspire new generations of Americans.

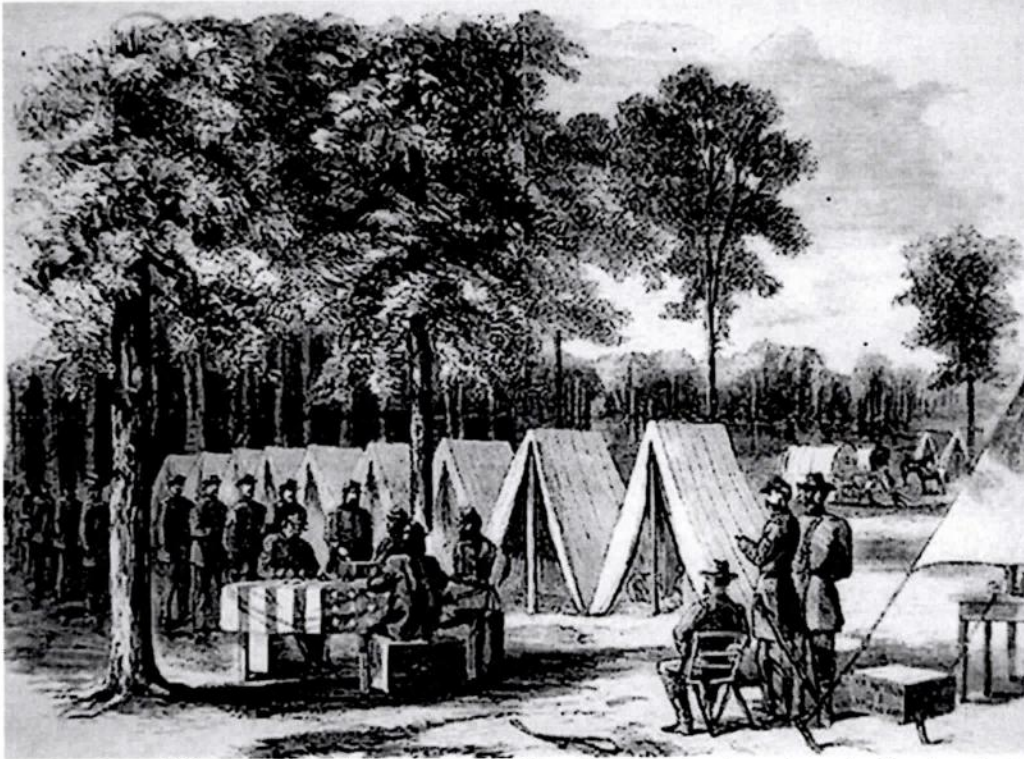
Thomas P. Ostrom, of Rochester, has written histories of the U.S. Coast Guard and other books.



## Some Elections Are Truly Transformational

By Jay Furst November 6, 2012

Rochester, MN *Post Bulletin*



"Pennsylvania soldiers voting at the Army of the James headquarters in September 1864, from Harpers Weekly, 29th October 1864." Oil on canvas.

Today is Election Day, and it's without a doubt the most important election of our time. That's what just about all the candidates and pundits say.

They say that every Election Day, of course. The future of the republic is at stake. It's always the history-changing, game-changer election, the pivotal election that will either save our country or doom us to a path that leads to Greece.

Some elections have worked out that way, of course. One of them was 150 years ago, when voters -- all male, all white and with a few other restrictions -- went to the polls Nov. 4 for congressional elections that were a referendum on President Abraham Lincoln's leadership during the Civil War.

In Minnesota, it was a chaotic autumn. Thousands of men had left for the battlefields to the south, jeopardizing the rapid pace of settlement. Rochester had grown from a few log houses along the Zumbro River to a city of nearly 1,500 people by 1860, and it would double in population by 1870. But the war had drained the men, resources and optimism of Minnesota's earliest years.

Then, in August 1862, Dakota Indians began an uprising that killed hundreds and terrorized settlers along the Minnesota River. By November, the uprising had been put down, and hundreds of Dakota men had been sentenced to death, but the fate of the Dakota people in Minnesota hadn't yet been resolved. When voters went to the primitive town halls or courthouses on Nov. 4, the Indian uprising was as much on their minds as the Civil War.

### **A referendum on Lincoln**

The war was controversial. That's easy to lose sight of 150 years later, but in no way was it a given that the war would come to a military end, as people went to vote in 1862. On battlefields all over the South, the war was going poorly from the Union point of view. Many said it was going disastrously. Union armies had lost more battles than they'd won, including some embarrassing routs not far from the national capital. The Confederacy remained an established fact, as did slavery, and the South had more dazzling military leaders, headed by Robert E. Lee. The Union had no one with the accomplishments and aura of Lee -- not George B. McClellan nor anyone else.

There was strong disagreement about Lincoln's management of the war, including within the ranks of enlisted men and commissioned officers. Most Americans thought the war would be over within weeks of the attack on Fort Sumter in April 1861, with all the North's advantages, but it wasn't turning out that way. Lincoln, whose election in 1860 was the precipitating event of the rebellion, was held personally responsible, as commander in chief and as the head of the anti-slavery Republican party.

In mid-September, the bloodiest battle of the war was fought not in the South but in a Union state, Maryland. The battle at Antietam ended in a draw, despite tens of thousands of casualties, but Lee's army retreated to Virginia, which allowed Lincoln and his government to claim a mitigated victory -- and he almost immediately announced that on Jan. 1, he would free slaves in the Confederate states, a decisive step with huge political implications.

Lincoln was elected with a large Republican majority in the House and a more slender majority in the Senate, but no one could say the State of the Union was good. Would Americans stick with him? The midterm elections 150 years ago this week would reflect that, and they were vital to the Union cause.

If there had been cable news pundits and political bloggers in those days, they would have declared it pivotal, a game-changing election. Conservative columnist Charles Krauthammer would have called it "the most important election since 1828."

### **New state went for Lincoln**

Minnesotans, voting in their first presidential election since statehood, went for Lincoln in 1860 by a big majority, about 60 percent, as did all northern states, plus Oregon and California. Southeastern Minnesota counties went for Lincoln, also by 60 percent or more -- not as overwhelming as the counties now called the Twin Cities metro area -- but consistently for Lincoln.

In 1862, the electorate was different. There were more people -- immigrants continued to flood into the area -- but many voting-age men were at war, and there was no provision for allowing them to vote. As fall approached, Republican Gov. Alexander Ramsey and party leaders in the Legislature were planning a special session to take up the issue of "soldier suffrage," making it possible for men in the military to vote.

Minnesota Democrats believed it was pure politics -- a way to get more Republican votes, though one might guess that men at war also might vote for a change in leadership that would hasten the end of the war. There was also concern about the legitimacy of the voting process, allowing for corruption of the balloting.

The political jockeying has an eerie echo this year in the battle over the voter ID amendment. Many of the same issues were raised, including allegations of fraud, concerns about cost and most of all, the importance of allowing everyone who was eligible to cast a ballot.

Whether a special session would be held before the November 1862 elections was in doubt -- until the Dakota uprising started on Aug. 18, at the Lower Sioux Agency near present-day Morton. More than 200 settlers were killed in the initial attacks and thousands fled for their lives. Dakota warriors attacked Fort Ridgely, New Ulm was besieged and burned, and the entire state was in fear of a more general uprising involving the Ojibwe and Winnebagos as well.

Suddenly, a special legislative session was considered essential to deal with the outbreak, and the Republican governor and leadership took that opportunity also to take up soldier suffrage.

The 1st Congressional District had a much different shape in 1862 than it does today, but a district convention was held in late August in Owatonna. There, on Aug. 21, the delegates approved a resolution calling for a special session, with the only agenda item to deal with suffrage.

Three days later, Gov. Ramsey called for legislators to return to St. Paul to address the soldier vote issue, but it quickly became a session to deal with the uprising also.

The Legislature convened on Sept. 9 and met in a joint session to hear Gov. Ramsey address the two issues. By Sept. 27, a bill to enable soldiers to vote, with \$1,200 appropriated to cover costs, was on his desk and he signed it. The legislation also delayed election day in Minnesota from Oct. 7 to Nov. 4, according to an excellent article on the topic by Lynwood Downs, published in Minnesota History magazine.

The statute allowed for soldiers and sailors age 21 and older who had been Minnesota residents for at least four months to vote for the duration of the war. "The ballots were to be collected by commissioners sent to the troops in the field for that purpose, and then returned personally or by mail to the election district, where they were placed unopened with the other ballots and canvassed, 'in no way distinguishing the same from the other votes cast,'" Downs writes.

The governor was given authority to appoint the commissioners, with advice and consent of the Senate and selected equally from the two major parties. In other states, the military voting judges were regimental officers.

The 1st Minnesota Volunteer Infantry regiment, which included many recruits from southeastern Minnesota, cast their ballots while at Bolivar Heights, Md., on Oct. 21-22. Soldiers with the 4th and 5th regiments were received from Louisville, Ky., and the 2nd Minnesota, whose Company B consisted of young men from the Chatfield and Preston areas, voted on Oct. 24.

### **Democrats make gains**

The final score, when all the ballots were gathered and counted: Republicans lost about 20 percent of their majority in the U.S. House, down from 108 seats to 86. The Democrats gained 28 seats, to a total of 72. The Constitutional Union party had the rest, down from 30 seats to 25.

Republicans actually gained slightly in the Senate, from a majority 30 seats to 31.

In Minnesota, voters elected two Republican House members, each with a majority of over 2,000 votes, and most counties in the state went Republican, helped in a major way by about 3,200 ballots cast by soldiers, according to Downs' research.

At the state level nationwide, Republicans lost seats in legislatures but kept control in all the major states but New York. In Lincoln's home district of Springfield, Ill., one of his former law partners, a Democrat, beat the Republican incumbent, in large part because of opposition to black emancipation.

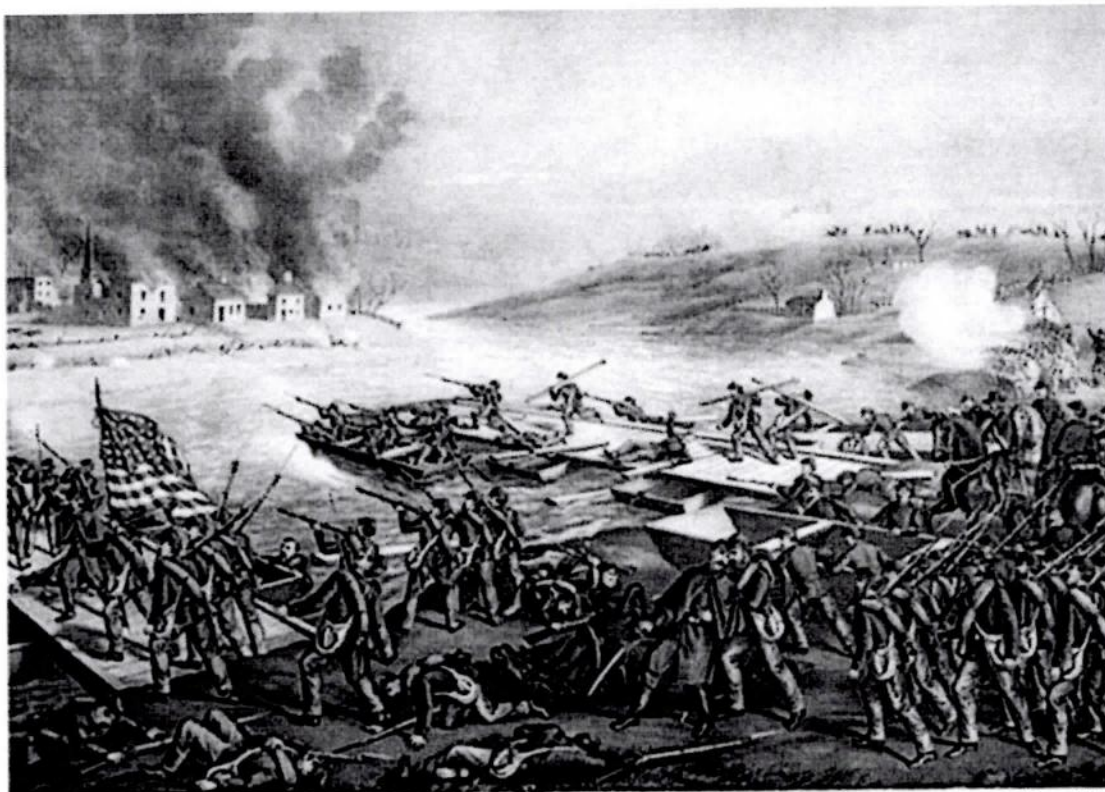
Still, the administration had survived an important political test. On Jan. 1, 1863, the Emancipation Proclamation would take effect and transform the war from one of national survival to one of redemption. A day after election day in Minnesota (and after elections in other states), he would replace McClellan and find new generals to lead the war through its decisive months in 1863. Also after the election, he became personally involved in reducing the number of Dakota warriors to be executed in Minnesota after the uprising, which outraged many white voters and Republican leaders in the state.

So yes, elections are important and have consequences. As it turned out, the election 150 years ago this week was more important than most.

## The Dead at Fredericksburg Were Piled Three Deep

By Loren Else and Jay Furst. November 13, 2012

Rochester, MN *Post Bulletin*



The Union army's ill-fated attack on Fredericksburg, Va., began with a barrage of artillery fire.

Late in the autumn of 1862, as winter approached, a distance of less than 30 miles separated Gen. George McClellan's Army of the Potomac and Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee's proud Army of Northern Virginia. One hard day's ride could bring the massive armies together.

Changes were in store for the Union forces. President Lincoln was frustrated that McClellan failed to pursue Lee's army after the bloody confrontation at Antietam in mid-September. He issued an order relieving him of command on Nov. 5, and there was pressure in Washington for a Union victory on the battlefield, and soon.

A personal friend of McClellan's, Gen. Ambrose Burnside took the job under protest. Burnside, who had a burnished record of military service, immediately reorganized the Army of the Potomac, which numbered about 121,000 soldiers, into three divisions, under leadership of Gens. Edwin Sumner, Joseph Hooker and William Franklin. Burnside then developed a plan that he submitted to President Lincoln, Secretary of War Edwin Stanton and Commander in Chief Henry Halleck.

The plan was to move down the Rappahannock River and cross it into Fredericksburg, Va., where the army would surprise and force an engagement with Lee's smaller army. The goal would be push the Confederates out and advance toward the Southern capital of Richmond before the rebels could respond.

On Nov. 15, Sumner's division marched toward Fredericksburg, followed by Franklin and Hooker's troops. The divisions arrived together, but the plan started to unravel almost immediately when they were prevented from crossing because the pontoon boats and bridge building material had not arrived from Harpers Ferry, Va. The delay would be 10 days. This clearly took away the element of surprise and gave Lee time to prepare. Even after the pontoon bridges arrived, Burnside needed two more weeks to prepare for the assault.

Lee's force of over 78,000 men waited on the opposite side of the Rappahannock, divided into two corps, the first commanded by Lt. Gen. James Longstreet and the second by General T.J. (Stonewall) Jackson. The Southern forces were arrayed in a semicircle for several miles around the town of Fredericksburg, with the east wing of forces near the Rappahannock River.



Lee was hoping Burnside would come directly at his forces outside of Fredericksburg. Lee had his men dug in and had 275 pieces of artillery on high ground, called Marye's Heights, about a mile from the edge of town. He would get his wish.

### **Delays in bridge building**

Union engineers began the construction of five pontoon bridges under cold and icy conditions on Dec. 11. The bridge builders were severely harassed by a group of Mississippi sharpshooters. Because of the musket fire coming from Confederate troops, Burnside ordered artillery to fire upon the city of Fredericksburg. The barrage from 147 cannons tore into the town and set buildings on fire. Most civilians had fled earlier, many with nowhere to go but into the cold woods to escape. After the artillery bombardment, the fire from the Mississippi sharpshooters did not cease.

The 7th Michigan and 19th Massachusetts crossed the river in pontoon boats and finally succeeded in driving the enemy from that edge of town. Earlier that same day, the troops were awakened at 2 a.m. and told to make breakfast and fill canteens with hot coffee. Several inches of snow had fallen and it was below freezing. Once the men assembled at the crossing site, the troops still had to wait in the cold for the bridges to be completed. It was not until sundown that the 1st Minnesota and Gen. Alfred Sully's 1st Brigade moved across the river on the completed pontoon bridges and into the streets and smoldering buildings of Fredericksburg.

Once in the city, there was deadly street fighting, a type of urban, building-to-building fighting that rarely occurred during in the Civil War. Mathew Marvin, of the 1st Minnesota's Company K, described the fighting. "We lay under fire of the rebs...the missiles of death were whistling their song close to our ears...if ever I dug a hole with my nose, it was that day."

The Mantorville Express newspaper, on Dec. 19, reported that Fredericksburg was occupied by Union forces and ended its report with the lines, "Everything is quiet tonight. The indication is that a battle will be fought tomorrow." As people read the Mantorville Express that day, the great battle had in fact already been fought and many sons, husbands and brothers were already dead.

On Dec. 13, Burnside called for two attacks: an assault against Jackson's corps by Franklin's Left Grand Division, to be followed by an advance against Marye's Heights by Sumner's Right Grand Division.

The frontal attacks by Union forces on both fortified and entrenched locations are remembered as one of the most disastrous of the Civil War. It was described that the Union ranks were swept from the field like chaff before the wind. The 1st Minnesota was fortunate that day, as they were assigned to an elevated ridge in support of an artillery unit. Destiny and death would come another day to the 1st Minnesota at a place called Gettysburg.

After several charges were repulsed, Confederate Gen. James Longstreet wrote, "The dead were piled three deep, and when morning broke, the spectacle that we saw upon the battlefield was one of the most distressing I ever witnessed."

That morning, the bodies of the slain had frozen to the ground.

### **Another Union disaster**

The following day, while Union forces were taking an artillery pounding, three regiments on the right of the 1st Minnesota broke rank and withdrew in disorder. The Minnesota boys stood firm. In his book, "The 1st Minnesota: Second to None," author Richard Krom notes that Gen. Oliver Howard observed with alarm as the three regiments broke and ran. Howard turned to Sully and said, "Sully, your 1st Minnesota doesn't run!" Sully calmly replied, "General, the 1st Minnesota never runs."

The night of Dec. 15, Union troops withdrew, crossed the bridge that had been assembled at great trouble, and returned to their camp north of the river. The battle was over, and it took a horrific toll. Union losses were 12,153 killed, wounded and missing, while the Confederates lost 5,377. When President Lincoln heard the news, he wrote, "If there is a place worse than hell, I'm in it."

There was public outrage over Burnside's strategy and defeat. In an interview with the Post-Bulletin, Krom said, "Had Washington gotten the pontoon boats there for the bridges from Harpers Ferry in the time appointed, (Burnside) very well may have succeeded."

Instead, his name is associated with one of the great fiascoes of the war.

Under continued pressure for a victory, Burnside planned a winter offensive that became known as the "Mud March." This plan failed miserably. "Almost 2,000 soldiers died of exposure on the march," Krom said.

In January 1863, Lincoln replaced Burnside with Major Gen. Joseph Hooker at the head of the north's greatest army.

As 1862 came to a close, people across the divided nation would catch up with the dispatches as Christmas approached and read about the Union disaster at Fredericksburg. The war was nearing the end of its second year, and no one could imagine how or when it might end.

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RESOURCES  
or more on the Civil War, specially as it involved Southeast eastera, check out these books,

# Newsletters were lifeline in wa

BY JAV FURST  
furst@postbulletin.com

The Post-Bulletin has taken some grief lately from a few readers who think the paper shouldn't endorse political candidates — especially those candidates that readers don't like.

But take a look at newspapers published in the Rochester area 150 years ago and you'll find that today's papers are rigorously "fair and balanced" compared with papers during the Civil War.

Those papers often went by the names "Republican" and "Democrat."

For the first 150 years of American history, newspapers were tools of political opinion or, at the very least, clearly were identified with parties and public causes. They were often one-man shows and published in out-of-the-way places such as Mantorville or Winona in the early days of statehood, and they were pure reflections of editorial viewpoint and commercial necessity.

Then as now, good editors needed to sell papers. They just had a different way of going about it in those days. Newspapers in Southeast Minnesota in 1862 were about making money for the owner, first and foremost, which meant being a lifeline for the community,



Newsletters weren't only popular back home in Minnesota for families to get news of loved ones on the battlefields — papers also were sold along the periphery of the battlefields.

sent copies of the Pioneer throughout the county, and filled its columns with descriptions of Minnesota natural beauty, abundant resources, fertile soil and healthy climate — he was capable of spinning ever to Minnesota's best advantage including its winters. He produced "vigorous min He even explored Minne by horseback, steamboat canoe to gain a deeper p tive for promoting Minn as a wonderful place to

A year after he was at Traverse des Sioux, he stabbed on the territorial Capitol steps, by the br a judge who Goodhue rized in print. He recov to do battle in print and day. He died a year late 42, and in 1863, the ter legislature named Goo County for him.

## Telegraph lines and photography

Ten years later, the most important news American history was the country apart, ne in the North played a in promoting the Uni and keeping families of what was going on Cheap and widely available newspapers with national and world in

Library of Congress

**Newspapers Were Lifeline During Civil War**  
By Jay Furst. November 20, 2012

Rochester, MN *Post Bulletin*



James Goodhue, who published the first newspaper in Minnesota.

The Post-Bulletin has taken some grief lately from a few readers who think the paper shouldn't endorse political candidates -- especially candidates those readers don't like.

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booster for the community, making connections and, incidentally, reporting the latest news.

Those news reports, however, whether completely accurate or not, were as precious as gold during the Civil War. The hastily written wire dispatches in weekly newspapers were the only news most Minnesotans had of the war, which was being fought a thousand miles away. People at home might get a letter now and then -- yes, back in those days, people wrote letters. But most men at the great battlefields weren't letter writers. They had other things to do. They were uneducated or had no one to write to back home.

Only newspapers had the latest news from the war zone, thanks to the telegraph, and even if the news wasn't entirely reliable or accurate, it was better than nothing.

### **The rise of new media, circa 1857**

Rochester and most other towns in the area were barely a half-dozen years old when the Civil War began, but most had at least one newspaper already. Red Wing had several that came and went during those years, as did another up-and-coming river town, Winona.

According to the newspaper archive index at the Library of Congress, the first in Rochester was the Olmsted Journal, which put out at least one copy in 1857, a year before statehood. Next was the Rochester Free Press in 1858, and the Rochester City Post put out its first number in 1859, according to the index.

A year later, when Lincoln was elected as the first Republican president, the city of about 1,400 people got another newspaper -- the Rochester Republican. The publisher didn't choose that name by coincidence. It meant something. People bought it in part because it was a Republican paper, just as cable news viewers today choose Fox or MSNBC, depending on their point of view.