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CAMPGROUNDS OF THE CIVIL WAR.

by George Levy and Paul Tynan



*New York State Fair in 1862, site of encampment. Moore's Rural Advertiser,
October 1862*



Col. Hoffman standing on stairs with assistants Lazelle and Freedley at Washington headquarters, 1864. Library of Congress.

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Rochester's Lost Campgrounds of the Civil War

In 1930, an aging Civil War veteran set out to visit the old Rochester campgrounds where thousands of recruits gathered before marching off to save the Union and free the slaves. It must have been a nostalgic journey indeed for Erwin C. Payne, 91. Sixty-eight years before, he, too, joined those ranks of blue, trained at one of those campgrounds, and also marched off to war, suffering a grievous leg wound at Antietam. He was accompanied in 1930 by Theodore C. Cazeau, past national commander of the Sons of Union Veterans, who organized the project, and by Rochester *Democrat and Chronicle* reporter Julia M. Traver.

“The primary reason for the search at this time,” Traver wrote, “is to get the locations indisputably fixed so that the state may be asked to place markers or tablets somewhere on the sites to identify forever their connection with the Civil War.”¹ It was a laudable goal, but only partly achieved. Not until 1961 was a marker erected at one of the sites.²



Erwin Payne's grave in 2001

So it behooves us to retrace the steps Payne and his companions took in 1930, to once again locate these campgrounds. They represent a fascinating chapter of Rochester's home front during the war. They provided not only the initial training grounds for raw recruits, but were the settings for emotional visits by parents and loved ones. They came to admire uniformed fathers, sons, husbands and boyfriends. Too often, it

was their last opportunity to see them alive.

Moreover, the presence of hundreds of young recruits on the edge of a large city meant good business for some merchants, angry confrontations with others. It meant inevitable friction with farmers whose geese, apples and beehives were stolen by the new enlistees. And when rowdy soldiers and deserters from these camps clashed with police on the streets of Rochester – indeed, when murder most foul was committed at one of the camps – thorny issues of civil versus military jurisdiction arose.

The First Influx of Volunteers

“DRILLING QUARTERS: The rapid multiplication of volunteers has necessitated the securing of various quarters appropriate to this purpose [drilling]. Military Hall, Exchange Street; Bennett’s Hall, Buffalo Street; Hamilton’s Hall, State Street; Irving Hall, Smith’s Arcade, and both wings of Center Market, are now severally used for this purpose,” the *Rochester Evening Express* reported on April 23, 1861.

Eager men flocked to recruiting offices in droves in response to President Lincoln’s call for volunteers on April 15, 1861. Calling for men was the easy part. What to do with them required more planning. New York Governor Edwin C. Morgan hastily selected Elmira, Albany, and New York City as the three rendezvous points for the state. Recruits from Rochester went through Elmira or New York City on the way to Washington. Elmira officials quickly requisitioned many buildings and began constructing four camps to create a permanent military depot. But this did not happen overnight, and in the meantime the companies that were forming for Rochester’s first volunteer regiment, the 13th New York Infantry, had to find quarters wherever they could.

Capt. Lebbeus Brown’s company, for example, was quartered at City Hall, Capt. Francis Schoeffel’s Frankfort boys stayed at the foot of Brown’s Race, and Capt. Robert Taylor’s volunteers, after an impressive mustering-in ceremony, took possession of their new barracks at School No. 6 at the corner of Lyell and Schuyler. “A fine parade ground is afforded them at Jones Square, and until marching orders are received, they will improve the opportunity of drilling at this place.”³

Those marching orders came soon enough. On May 3 the companies assembled from their various quarters, paraded along Rochester streets lined with cheering civilians, and boarded a train that took them first to Canandaigua, then on to Elmira. Many of the recruits were confident they would return victorious in a matter of weeks.

Little did they know. Two months later, the 13th New York experienced

its first combat along an obscure stream near Manassas, Va. The Union defeat there, at the battle called First Bull Run, sent shock waves throughout the north. Clearly, the war would not be a three-month adventure after all. It meant the 13th New York would not return to Rochester until the spring of 1863, ranks thinned by the ravages of battle and disease. It meant that larger, better-trained armies would be required to subdue the Confederacy. And that meant that communities such as Rochester would have to provide adequate training grounds, where entire regiments could assemble and prepare to move to the front.

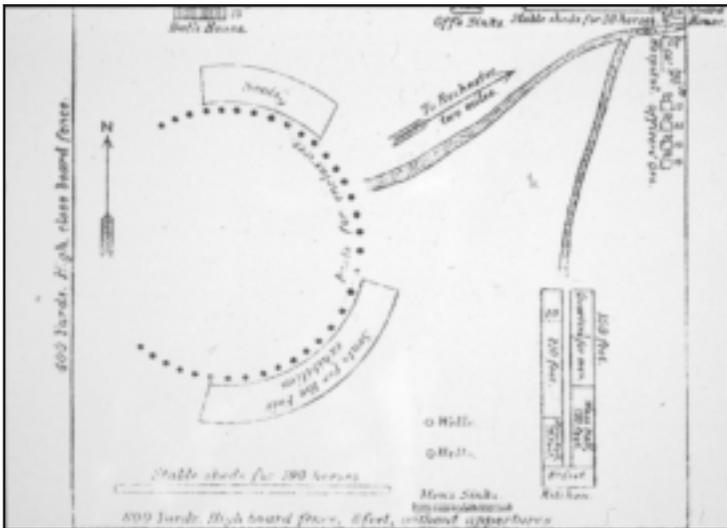
Most of Rochester's regiments assembled at either the Monroe County Fair Grounds (Camp Hillhouse) or on Cottage Street on the opposite side of the river (Camp Fitz-John Porter). The authors estimate as many as 5,000 recruits gathered at them. These were the vanished campgrounds Payne and his companions set out to find in 1930.



Thomas Hillhouse, 1875

Camp Hillhouse

“A ride to Camp Hillhouse, and a review of the attractions, upon any of these delightful days, is fully worth the requisite investment,” the *Rochester Evening Express* noted on Sept. 25, 1861. “There are four companies now quartered there ... Several other companies are expected to arrive during the present week and accommodations are rapidly being prepared for them.”



Lazelle's sketch of Camp on the State Fair Grounds, Camp Hillhouse

A traveler going south out of Rochester on Mt. Hope Avenue during the war years would pass by Mt. Hope Cemetery, and then, just past the fork in the road formed by the West and East Henrietta roads, would come to the entrance of a military camp. Inside, he might glimpse an artillery company hard at drill, while off-duty recruits played a game of baseball.

Camp Hillhouse, named after Thomas Hillhouse, the state's adjutant general, occupied the Monroe County fairgrounds one-quarter mile south of the cemetery and immediately south of the current site of Strong Memorial Hospital. What is now West Henrietta Road formed the eastern boundary of the camp, with an entrance at the present corner of that road and Raleigh Street. The eastern boundary extended south to Stanford Road, and the whole camp then ran west half a mile to just beyond Castleman Road.⁴

No doubt the large exhibition ring for livestock had influenced authorities in choosing this site. What an ideal place to train budding cavalymen to ride their horses! Ironically, at least two of the units that trained there, the 8th and 22nd New York Cavalry regiments, did not receive horses until *after* leaving Rochester! In addition to the cavalry, Rochester's Irish contingent of the 105th New York Infantry was organized here as well.

Though the U.S. government only rented the land, it made a substantial investment to support the recruiting effort, erecting "quarters for 1,000 men, mess hall, kitchen, guard house, stables, officers' quarters, sinks (latrines), etc." ⁵

The area around the camp consisted of farmland, except for a tavern at the junction of West and East Henrietta Roads on the north side of Raleigh. Another tavern lay just outside the gates of Mt. Hope Cemetery, serving mourners who required a few sips to ease their path to and from the graveside. In 1930, some old settlers still survived, and told Payne and his two companions that they remembered "the string of men who used to sit out in front of the camp site, running shell games – the old gambling game of 'Now you see it, and now you don't.' It consisted of a pea or other small object under a shell, so dexterously manipulated that it was difficult for even the wisest to guess right." ⁶

The 8th New York Cavalry was among the first to train at the camp. "We are out in the morning at 5:30," one recruit wrote in November 1861, "and then commences the duties of the day; breakfast at 7 a.m., and after that comes two hours' drill; then guard mounting, and things begin to assume a warlike appearance; dinner at 12 o'clock, and supper at 5. We are good feeders, and expect to handle our warlike weapons as well, if not better, than a knife and fork." ⁷

The *Rochester Daily Democrat and American* gives us this wonderfully detailed description of the camp in its Nov. 2, 1861 edition:

"The military occupation of the [county fairgrounds] makes a great transformation in its appearance. We found nearly eight hundred men in the camp under the jurisdiction of Samuel J. Crooks, Colonel commanding. The camp presented a lively and animated scene. Squads, detachments, and companies of the men were drilling at different points of the camp. Soldiers newly garbed in Uncle Sam's habiliments, were marching to and fro, some with the measured tread of the sentry and guard; others, soldiers of a month, were strolling about smoking their *Briars*, with all the taciturn dignity of the old soldier.

"The grounds have a gentle slope to the south and west. At the entrance gate the eye can overlook the whole camp, and a sight meets the view such as has rarely before been seen near our quiet city. On the

extreme right are the tents of the Colonel, Lieutenant Colonel, and Regimental Officers; these are flanked by the stables for the horses. At the left of the entrance the Secretary's office is used as hospital, and is under the supervision of regimental Surgeon Dr. James Chapman. To the left of the hospital are the tents of several officers and men, numbering about a dozen. At the extremity of these tents in a line running at right angles, are the wooden barracks. The tents and barracks form a hollow square, the [center] of which is used as a drill and parade ground. One of the buildings used as a barrack, was the old Floral Hall. The others are temporary structures made warm and tight, of new pine lumber. In the rear of the two barracks are large and commodious dining rooms, the largest of which is one hundred and twenty feet in length, and is supplied with five plain pine tables running the entire length of the room, and provided with stationary seats. This room is capable of seating three hundred persons. The other dining room will seat one hundred. In the



Historic Marker near site of Camp Hillhouse

rear of the dining rooms are the cook rooms. Everything is cooked by steam. O. S. Hulburt [see Camp Porter below], proprietor of the city recess, has the contract for feeding this large family. We had an opportunity to inspect the *Cuisine*. ... We can pronounce the cooking unexceptionable, and the variety, plain, substantial and wholesome. We saw on the table beefsteak, corned beef, boiled cabbage, pork and beans, boiled and roast potatoes, good sweet bread and coffee, with sugar. We

notice an entire absence of both butter and milk, which in camp life are considered among the superfluities. The dining room presented a motley appearance. Several ladies were present, some of them relatives of officers, who were dining with them. Some were there to take leave of the members of Capt. Cothran's artillery company, which were to leave in the evening for Albany. Some of the men were shaving at the unoccupied windows, others were writing letters to their wives and sweethearts, whom they were leaving, perhaps, destined never to meet them again." 8

The barracks, according to the visitor, were in good condition, heated by coal fires, and the health of the regiment reflected that: Only four men were in the hospital.

An example of camp discipline was reported by the *Daily Democrat* on Oct. 29, 1861. Two recruits from Penfield and Webster had returned to Hillhouse "somewhat intoxicated. They were hard characters and had been detected in some petty pilfering ..." Their comrades decided to "rid themselves of their presence" and promptly seized the two men, shaving half their heads. "They were then blacked with shoe blacking and India ink, their uniform spits were taken off, and they were fiddled out of camp. ... If they had continued their evil practices they certainly would have been a disgrace to the regiment."

The "Irish Brigade"

The 8th left for Washington on Nov. 18, marching through Rochester's streets with "measured tread to the tap of the drum and the bugle's blast." Recruits of the "Irish Brigade" promptly took their place at the camp. This was one of the more interesting recruiting experiments in western New York. "In a body by themselves, with officers whose sympathies harmonize with their own, and a Chaplain of their choice instead of some obnoxious minister forced upon them, as is the case in some instances... this Brigade cannot fail to go forth with all the elements of good feeling, good order, discipline, courage and muscle," the Rochester *Daily Union and Advertiser* observed. 9

Recruitment ads in the Rochester newspapers played upon the antipathy of the Irish for England, which was sympathetic with the South. The ads called upon these Irishmen, "exiles through the oppression of England," to take up arms "for the defence of their adopted country..." and noted that the local contingent was quartered at "Camp Hillhouse near Rochester (the most comfortable Barracks in the State of New York.)"

Recruitment and training continued all that winter into the following

spring, when the “unexpected impressment of a ‘raw recruit’” created an overnight “sensation” at the camp. According to newspaper accounts, the wife of recruit Michael Coffee of Clyde had heard the men would soon be departing for the front. She resolved to visit the camp “to take final leave of her husband. The scene was distressingly violent and affecting, and the consequences are not to be wondered at:” Mrs. Coffee delivered a baby boy right on the premises! “Suitable quarters were provided as soon as practicable, and the new recruit was soon enjoying extra rations and all the first class luxuries of barrack life.”¹⁰

Alas, even after several months of recruiting, only about 300 men had been assembled, far short of the 1,000 needed to fill out an infantry regiment. The Irishmen were ordered to consolidate ranks with 700 men who had been training at LeRoy under command of a presiding elder of the Methodist Episcopal church. This apparently did not sit well with some of the Irishmen. “Yesterday morning a guard of men came down from Camp Hillhouse to arrest Pat Lochlin and Bill Burgess, two members of the Irish Brigade, who came down from camp and would not return,” according to one newspaper. Lochlin “became obstinate” and had to be clamped in irons. “The recent consolidation is said to have been the cause of their mutinous conduct.”¹¹

Rochester’s Irish contingent of the 105th, three companies strong, finally departed Camp Hillhouse on March 31, 1862, to rendezvous with



Erie Railroad Bridge near Cottage Street, crossed the Genesee River near Camp Fitz-John Porter in 1862. 2001

the LeRoy contingent at Avon. And shortly thereafter, Camp Hillhouse ceased to exist for a time as a military training depot. Instead, it almost became a parole camp for Union soldiers who had surrendered to the Confederates. Under terms of the Dix-Hill Cartel (agreement) on prisoner exchanges, which was then in effect, the warring sides immediately paroled prisoners of war to their respective sides. They would then be held until an exchange could be worked out according to a complicated formula. Captain Henry M. Lazelle of the 8th U. S. Infantry visited Rochester around June 22, 1862 on orders from his boss Col. William Hoffman, Commissary General of Prisoners, to search for permanent camps “to ascertain their capacity for quartering troops.” Col. Hoffman had no jurisdiction over recruiting depots, but parole camps did come under his authority. ¹²

Lazelle was impressed with Camp Hillhouse, telling Hoffman it enjoyed “pure limestone water from never-failing wells on the ground,” plus a substantial hospital. The two main barracks were capable of holding 1,000 men. “In each the bunks are placed end to end and are arranged in 5 rows of double bunks, the outer rows of 3 tiers and the 3 inner ones of 4 tiers each.” The camp, he added “is surrounded by a high, close, board fence of about 8 feet.” However, the camp had reverted to control of the state fair authority, which planned a state fair at the site that fall. Col. Hoffman had the authority and the means to retake the camp, but politics dictated against it. Lincoln desperately needed troops, and Governor Morgan became his powerful ally in organizing the war effort in New York State. A clash between Col. Hoffman and New York fair officials did not appear likely. ¹³

The agricultural fair at Hillhouse enjoyed great success. It opened October 1, 1862. “In the upper part of the Grounds is a group of large buildings which were constructed last fall for the use of soldiers and for an eating house,” the *Union and Advertiser* told readers. “One portion of these buildings will be used for the exhibition of dairy products, vegetables, grain, etc. The other will be used as a Dining Hall and attached is the great cooking house of Mr. Hulbert, with everything complete for feeding thousands.” Authorities also planned for an overflow with “refreshment booths upon the ground beside this Dining Hall, so the multitude will not want for food.” This proved wise, as 20,000 people a day roamed the grounds. ¹⁴

As we shall see a bit later, soldiers would soon return to Camp Hillhouse.



*Rochester's war-fevered recruits were shocked
Frank Leslie's illustrated Famous Lea*



*ed by the reality of war at First Bull Run in 1861.
ders and Battle Scenes of the Civil War.*



*First Bull Run brought the realities of war to recruits and the need for new battle tactics to commanders as Rochester's men fired volleys in double rounds exposed to enemy fire.
Illustrated London News.*

Camp Fitz-John Porter

“Before many days, we predict, Camp Fitz John Porter will become a frequent resort of our citizens – particularly in the early part of the evening, at dress parade,” the *Daily Democrat* reported on Aug. 1, 1862. “The distance from the city is not so great as to render a walk thither a very serious matter, while it is just enough for a pleasant drive. We understand that a band of music is to be engaged for evening parades. – Perkins’ Band will be on the ground Sunday evening next.”

Though Camp Hillhouse was temporarily out of commission, Adj. Gen. Hillhouse had authorized military officials at Rochester on July 15, 1862, to open another training camp. It was named after Fitz-John Porter, the Union general who commanded the V Corps in which Rochester’s 13th New York served, but who would soon be dismissed after running afoul of Union General John Pope during the battle of Second Bull Run.

Even in 1930, Erwin Payne had no difficulty locating the former campsite; it was where he trained with the 108th New York Infantry. In addition, the 140th New York Infantry and Mack’s 18th Independent “Black Horse” Artillery Battery assembled there. The camp was along the river, “almost opposite” what, by 1930, was the new campus of the University of Rochester. The camp had an entrance at No. 3 Cottage

Street, where Cottage intersected Magnolia Street, and then extended southwest along Cottage to Utica Place, where there was a second entrance to the camp. Officers laid out parade grounds near Utica and Cottage. The river ran behind the camp, and the old Erie Railroad Bridge crossed nearby. ¹⁵

“The ground is high and rolling, and the place must necessarily be healthy,” the *Daily Democrat* reported. “Wells have been sunk, and springs opened, so that excellent water for drinking and cooking is at all times procurable, while the river affords ample conveniences for bathing.”



Maplewood Rose Garden in 2001. Site of Camp Genesee

The newspaper’s prediction that Camp Porter would be a “frequent resort” for visitors was soon borne out. For example, on Aug. 10, 1862, people enjoyed a festive day there with the 108th New York. Nearly 500 men paraded “in neat uniforms,” according to a reporter. “The parade was witnessed by some thousands of spectators, including all ages and sexes-Though only one-half of the regiment were on parade.” The remainder had short furloughs to bring in the harvest. One cloud appeared with the bayoneting by a sentry of an 18-year-old man named Richard Slater. “The precise details of the affair we have not learned and do not care to,” said the reporter haughtily, a far different attitude from the media today. ¹⁶

More than 20,000 visitors flocked to the camp seven days later –

despite efforts to limit attendance only to “near relatives” – as the ten companies of the 108th prepared to leave for Washington. So heavy was the traffic that a “cloud of dust hung high over all the avenues leading [to] the camps, and over the camp itself, which was visible a long distance off.” Many of the visitors were relatives of the recruits, “and many affecting scenes transpired in the tents . . . The crowd was at one time much amused by the hearty exclamations of a stout German woman, who was running hither and thither, and who carried a huge bundle in her apron, streaming with perspiration, ‘Where is my man, Shon? I can no find my man Shon!’ . . . Some one who understood German soon directed her, and she found her ‘man Shon.’”¹⁷

The Reverend Mr. Cheney of Trinity Church gave a sermon and lecture, “but the audience comprised only a small portion of all in camp,” the reporter wrote.¹⁸

Many neighboring residents were glad to see the 108th depart, and would have preferred to see Camp Porter closed altogether. It appears that officers failed to control many of their high-spirited recruits. When Payne, Traver and Cazeau visited the site in 1930, one Cottage Street resident described an ancestor’s less than pleasant encounters with them. Mrs. Lulu Schoenfelder was the granddaughter of the wartime owner of No. 3 Cottage. According to the granddaughter, “the place was a large farm, with many cattle, horses, chickens, and fat geese,” Traver wrote. “These geese were particularly attractive to the soldiers, who just dipped out the entire lot because roast goose became so popular in the camp.”¹⁹

At least one farm benefited from Camp Porter’s recruits. In October, Capt. Albert Mack and about 75 of his men “went to Henrietta to help Mrs. Stone husk about six acres of corn . . . the men went to work with a will, and in less than an hour the whole six acres . . . was husked in fine style, and the golden ears piled in heaps ready for housing.” Mrs. Stone’s two sons, by the way, were among Mack’s recruits, which may have had something to do with this fine gesture! The company then marched to the village, conducted a drill “to the gratification of all present,” and enjoyed a “sumptuous repast” at White’s Hotel.²⁰

More typical, however, was one wartime letter to the editor from a Mr. L. Simon who stated that, “people living in the neighborhood of the Camp Ground are getting tired of the soldiers company,” and reported how a woman pleaded for the return of her stolen geese. The soldiers not only threw her out of camp, but also “threatened to do worse the next time.” The *Union and Advertiser* seemed puzzled by these “marauders,” noting “It cannot be that soldiers are driven by hunger to perpetrate the acts complained of.” After all, the troops enjoyed cooked food supplied

by Mr. Hulbert who also had the food concession at the agricultural fair. "He boils 25 bushels of potatoes per day, and nice potatoes they are," the *Union and Advertiser* reported. "His meats are excellent, coffee good, bread Wadsworth's best. In a pasture, a short distance from camp, Mr. H. has forty hogs growing finely upon what falls from the camp tables. And what is thrown to the swine would be eagerly seized by many a poor family, and regarded as choice food. No rich man's table in Rochester overflows as much good food as the tables of Camp Porter," the paper boasted. ²¹

Shopkeepers in the city also suffered. Five cavalrymen from Camp Porter went into a restaurant October 10, 1862, and demanded free liquor. The owner refused, whereupon the troopers beat him badly, giving him a gash on the forehead and two black eyes. Fortunately, authorities identified the thugs, and expected to arrest them. Another soldier, writing under the name "Genesee," protested to the *Union and Advertiser* "that the great majority of the men in camp are not unmindful of their duties as soldiers and gentlemen." Perhaps so, but residents could see that officers had not tightened security or given them protection, despite the crimes. ²²

Relief from these problems seemed far distant as Camp Porter began to look like a permanent depot. Col. Smith, commanding, took a personal role in superintending construction of barracks. Enough buildings soon stood to house 500 men with room for many more barracks. The number of troops under roof grew to 700 by Sept. 5, 1862, but Col. Smith required shelter for over 1,300 men. ²³

Camp Genesee

In her article, Traver briefly mentioned two other campsites that Payne did not include on his itinerary that day: 1) "Falls Field on the east side of the river near Driving Park Avenue bridge" and 2) the site of what is now the Maplewood Rose Garden.

There was indeed a Falls Field, but it was at the present site of the Genesee Brewing Company and the Terrace Park at the Upper Falls near downtown Rochester. That is nowhere near the Driving Park bridge. Moreover, Traver does not mention which units used this mystery site. It is quite possible, however, that the Falls Field site at the Upper Falls might have been used as a drilling or assembly ground. Cannons were fired in salute from this field when Abraham Lincoln stopped at Rochester en route to his inauguration in 1861. ²⁴

Traver's reference to the rose garden is more specific. She mentions that the 14th New York Heavy Artillery trained there. The *Union and Advertiser* described the regiment's camp in July 1863. It was "on

Lake Avenue, near the Lower Falls, in a beautiful maple grove.” That sounds very much like a grove that existed immediately adjacent to the current rose garden site.²⁵

On Aug. 22, the *Daily Democrat* reported that “the camp of the 14th Heavy Artillery, called Camp Genesee, at this time presents quite a military appearance, and everything about it is conducted according to all the rules of war. There are now about 300 men in camp. A guard of sixty men, affording three reliefs, is constantly kept, and none of them are allowed to leave without passes, properly signed and countersigned.

“The camp is prettily laid out by companies, and it is situated in a healthy place, in a beautiful grove, on the banks of the river. It is kept scrupulously clean and neat, and the white tents glistening in the morning sun, present a very pretty appearance.”

Unfortunately, despite the guards, and despite the pass system, recruits from this camp, too, raided neighboring properties and farms.

On Sept. 6, for example, half a dozen soldiers of the 14th reportedly were “helping themselves to apples in a lot on Lake avenue, and were ordered out by a lady on the premises.” When they failed to comply, she called on two police officers to assist. During the ensuing fight, one soldier suffered a broken arm, and another was “seriously injured about the head.”²⁶

On Sept. 30, the *Daily Democrat* reported that “for some time past farmers and others residing in the vicinity of Camp Genesee, north of the city, have been annoyed by the pilfering habits of the soldiers, who would steal not only fruits of all kinds, but also melons, honey, and even butter.” Two soldiers were arrested when empty honey boxes were found in their tent, which “clearly established their guilt”!

The recruits would often take the Lake Avenue street cars downtown and were, for the most part, “civil in their deportment. . .” However, a Lt. Charles A. Vedder of the 14th was arrested in October for “drunkenness and disorderly conduct in the street cars, as well as using obscene language in the presence of ladies.”²⁷

It was some time before the process of recruiting the regiment was complete. Heavy artillery regiments were larger than the normal 1,000-man infantry regiments. Designed to defend the fortifications around Washington, D.C., and in Baltimore and New York harbors, they needed 1,800 men to fill their ranks. By 1863 volunteers had dried up, and even the victory at Gettysburg failed to rekindle enthusiasm for the war. Glory no longer beckoned, and officers had to cast a wide net to assemble the regiment, recruit-by-recruit, company-by-company, and month-by-month. Not until January 17, 1864 was the regiment complete, and by then it included recruits from about two dozen New York counties.

Moreover, as the war dragged on, many recruits enlisted less out of patriotic fervor, more out of a desire to receive the increasingly lucrative bounties that were offered. Many were “hard cases” who deserted at the first opportunity or, if they remained in the ranks, were chronic shirkers and discipline problems. Perhaps that helps explain the increasing problems Rochester seems to have experienced with rowdy recruits during the last two years of the war.

At least the Lake Avenue farmers didn’t have to wait until January for relief. With the coming of fall, the weather had become “too cool for the men of Col. [Elisha] Marshall’s Regiment to remain much longer in the tents at Camp Genesee, and they are about to leave that pleasant summer location for comfortable winter quarters. Col. M. has leased the building at West End known as Halstead Hall in later years, but in other days as Bull’s Head Tavern.” By that time 900 men of the first companies had already been sent to the fortifications at New York City.²⁸

By early November, the buildings and lumber of Camp Genesee had been auctioned off and were being removed.²⁹

By the time the last of the 14th Heavy Artillery packed up and left the following January, tensions were escalating between the civil authorities and another batch of recruits – this time back at Camp Hillhouse.

“A homicide took place ...”

In the early morning hours of Jan. 17, 1864 – between 1 and 2 a.m. according to newspaper accounts – two police officers “heard a great outcry on Mill street.” One of the officers traced the disturbance to Duffy’s beer shop where he reportedly found a patrol guard of eight or ten men from Camp Hillhouse “helping themselves in a promiscuous manner to whatever the house afforded.” When Officer Green threatened to take the inebriated men to the station house if they did not become quiet, Sgt. Brady “insulted officer Green ... and ordered his men to charge bayonets. In a twinkling the policeman was surrounded, with a cordon of steel in unpleasant proximity to his body. Officer Green drew his revolver and threatened to shoot some of the rabble, before he was liberated.”³⁰

But the incident was far from over. The policeman returned with seven or eight other officers, heading off the camp guard on St. Paul Street “where a desperate encounter ensued. Brady ordered his men to charge bayonets on the police, and they obeyed the order, literally. The police were plucky, and fought with a will. The guns were wrested from the soldiers, clubs were freely used, and eight of the guard were taken prisoners.”³¹

The soldiers belonged to the 22nd New York Cavalry, organized by Samuel Crooks (for whom the camp was now named), the same Rochester attorney who had organized the 8th New York Cavalry before it. "We understand that Col. Crooks takes the position that the men are not answerable at a State court, but only to a court martial," the *Union and Advertiser* noted in its story about the altercation. "Such has been repeatedly declared to be the law when soldiers were arrested for disorderly proceedings. We hope the matter will be tested now and settled so that the law may be understood." 32

Both the *Daily Democrat* and *Union and Advertiser* had become openly critical of the conduct of the camp under Crooks, who had earlier resigned as colonel of the 8th after proving less than worthy as a field commander. Even the *Evening Express*, which defended Crooks' conduct of the camp, lamented that "The disorderly proceedings of the soldiers in our streets, have been augmented by their opinion that they were not accountable to civil authority. This has stimulated them in their vicious acts of entering dwellings, driving off horses attached to vehicles, etc. etc." 33

The issue apparently still had not been resolved when, a month later, a far more serious crime occurred, this time not on the streets but in the camp itself. "A homicide took place at the Monroe County Fair Grounds last night, where the 22d N.Y. Cavalry have barracks. A young man named James Caldwell, a member of Capt. Edwards' Company, was killed," the *Union and Advertiser* reported on Feb. 18, 1864. Subsequent investigation revealed that a boxing match was being conducted in one of the barracks when Caldwell approached "and remarked in a playful manner that they ought to see some Heenan practice." One of the other soldiers, named Headley, sprang at Caldwell, was resisted, then tore a large strip of board from one of the bunks and rushed at Caldwell again. Caldwell ran off, "dodging around a number of tables," but was unable to fend off at least two blows, the last one to the temple, knocking him down. He died within an hour. 34

When coroner Pullis went to the camp the following day to make inquires, he "was told by Colonel Crooks that it was a question with which the civil authorities had nothing to do. He could not even obtain a statement of the case," the *Union and Advertiser* reported. "Sheriff Warren called upon Col. Crooks to enquire into the matter and was met with a like answer." 35

In the meantime, when soldiers tried to remove the body for shipment to Canada, Pullis had it seized and placed in the Dead House.

The stalemate was soon resolved when Crooks' superior, Maj. Gen. John A. Dix, commander of the Military Department of the East,

ordered that civil authorities would be allowed to conduct an inquest, but military authorities would ultimately try the suspect. ³⁶

And then, the following month, the 22nd, too, left for the front. At least “There was less of drunkenness than has been exhibited in the departure of previous regiments,” the *Evening Express* noted. ³⁷

Afterward

By war’s end, Monroe County sent about 10,000 men into the Union army. The Irishmen who had trained at a bucolic county fairground were tested in a bloody cornfield at Antietam; 8th cavalymen from the camp made an exciting midnight escape from under the very noses of the Confederates who encircled them at Harpers Ferry, and went on to become one of the finest mounted units in the Union army. From Camp Porter went soldiers of the 108th to a bloody baptism of fire at Antietam’s infamous Sunken Road, and to an even sterner test in front of a stonewall on Marye’s Heights at Fredericksburg. Soldiers of the 140th from that same camp helped save the day at Little Round Top on Gettysburg’s second day, while Mack’s artillerymen trained their guns on besieged Confederates at Port Hudson, La., and helped batter them into submission.

You would never know, wandering today in the Maplewood Rose Garden, that the 14th New York Heavy Artillery once camped there or very close by, that men drilled all day, smoked their pipes at night, and enjoyed their meals where flowers now peacefully grow. Or that these same men would be thrust into a smouldering crater at Petersburg in one of the worst debacles of the war.

Indeed, of Monroe County’s 10,000 soldiers, nearly 1,400 never made it home. ³⁸

Erwin Payne did, but was embroiled in a bitter dispute with the federal government over the amount of pension he believed he was owed for his leg injury from Antietam. Yet he did not allow his anger at Uncle Sam to stop him from leading the way back to the spots where so many of Rochester’s raw recruits had their first initiation into military service.

The authors of this article are indebted to the old veteran, and to the reporter and the Sons of Union Veterans commander who accompanied him. Because of them, the authors were able to take the same journey into Rochester’s past. As they stood along Mt. Hope Avenue with maps and cameras, they were greeted by a tavern owner who was fascinated to learn that his business stood near a lost campground of the Civil War. Indeed, his building rested at the same location where one of the two original taverns operated near the fairgrounds during the war.

However, residents at the site of Camp Fitz-John Porter on Cottage Street seemed less hospitable than those who greeted Payne and his companions in 1930. Perhaps the sight of two strangers examining everything intently looked like politicians planning some urban upheaval. Or tax assessors, or, even worse, building inspectors? Troops who camped here during the war might have recognized the distrustful looks the authors felt coming from all sides.

The residents have grounds for uneasiness. Some houses in the area are boarded up and others suffer much decay. However, many homes along Cottage and surrounding streets look like well-worn, comfortable shoes. They provide a more fitting successor to Camp Fitz-John Porter than the shopping malls that cover so many campgrounds and battlefields of the Civil War.

With the passing of Erwin Payne and the other remaining veterans of the war, the memories of that bloody, yet all-defining conflict became even more distant. Yet, the compelling saga of the Civil War has never weakened. How fitting that the old veteran made it possible for others to find Rochester's lost campgrounds of the Civil War.

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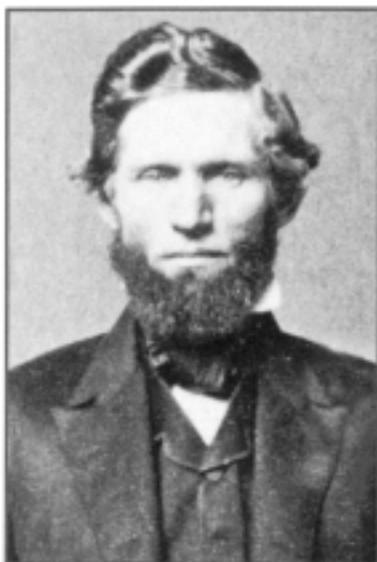
The authors thank Bob Marcotte for assisting with research and editing. Marcotte is the author of Where They Fell: Stories of Rochester Area Soldiers in the Civil War.

Endnotes

1. *Democrat and Chronicle*, Nov. 5, 1930
2. *Rochester Evening Express*, April 30, 1861; *Union and Advertiser*, April 25, 1861; *Rochester Daily Democrat*, April 27, 1861; *Evening Express*, April 26, 1861
3. *Democrat and Chronicle*, Nov. 5, 1930
4. *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies. Vol. 4, Series 2*, p. 74.
5. *Democrat and Chronicle*, Nov. 5, 1930
6. *Daily Democrat*, Nov. 14, 1861
7. *Daily Democrat*, Nov. 2, 1861; Capt. George Cothran's artillery unit was Battery M of the 1st N. Y. Light Artillery Regiment. Cothran's battery was mustered into service at Rochester on Oct. 14, 1861.

8. *Union and Advertiser*, Nov. 7, 1861
9. *Evening Express*, March 28, 1862
10. *Ibid.*, March 27, 1862
11. *War of the Rebellion: Vol. 4, series 2*, p. 74. The *Union and Advertiser* misconstrued his visit here as a search for a site to hold Confederate prisoners. However, Hoffman already had several camps for that purpose. See UA June 23, 1862.
12. *War of the Rebellion Vol. 4, series 2*, p. 76. One consequence was that thousands of New York soldiers captured that fall at Harper's Ferry, included members of the 126th New York from Seneca, Wayne and Ontario counties, ended up being held for parole at the infamous Camp Douglas in Chicago, where they were housed in squalid conditions little better than the accommodations for the Confederate POWs also held there. See Levy, George, *To Die in Chicago – Confederate Prisoners at Camp Douglas, 1862-65* (Baton Rouge: Pelikan Press, 1999), pp. 109, 113; also Mahood, Wayne, *Written in Blood: A History of the 126th New York Infantry in the Civil War* (Hightstown, N.J.: Longstreet House, 1997), pp. 52-63.
13. *Union and Advertiser*, Sept. 26, Oct. 1, Oct. 3, 1862
14. *Democrat and Chronicle*, Nov. 5, 1930
15. *Union and Advertiser*, Aug. 11, 1862
16. *Evening Express*, Aug. 18, 1862
17. *Union and Advertiser*, Aug. 18, 1862
18. *Democrat and Chronicle*, Nov. 5, 1930
19. *Daily Democrat*, Oct. 20, 1862
20. *Union and Advertiser*, Sept. 5 and Oct. 9, 1862
21. *Ibid*, Oct. 11 and Nov . 7, 1862
22. *Ibid*, Sept. 5, 1862
23. *Ibid*, Feb. 18, 1861
24. *Ibid*, July 6, 1863
25. *Evening Express*, Sept. 7, 1863
26. *Union and Advertiser*, Oct. 7, 1863; *Ev. Exp.* Oct. 7, 1863
27. *Ibid*, Oct. 26, 1863
28. *Ibid*, Nov. 9, 1863
29. *Daily Democrat*, Jan. 18, 1864
30. For the regiment's version of this incident, see the *Evening Express*, Jan. 19, 1864.
31. *Union and Advertiser*, Jan. 18, 1864
32. *Evening Express*, Jan. 18, 1864; see the same paper, Jan. 12 for its defense of the camp.
33. *Daily Democrat*, Feb. 22, 1864

34. *Union and Advertiser*, Feb. 19, 1864
35. *Ibid*, Feb. 19, 1864
36. *Ibid*, Feb. 22, 1864
37. *Evening Express*, March 7, 1864
38. At the 1892 dedication of the Soldiers' and Sailors' Monument in Washington Square Park, Rochester Mayor Richard Curran provided this breakdown: Out of a total population of 100,648, Monroe County sent 10,372 soldiers into the Union ranks, of whom 369 died in battle, 196 died of wounds, 772 of disease and 37 of unknown causes. See *Democrat and Chronicle*, May 31, 1892.



*University Professor Isaac F. Quinby commanded Rochester's first Civil War regiment.
U.S. Army military History Institute, Hunt Collection.*